Creating a College-Going Culture Among Latino First-Generation Students in Rural Arizona

by

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ABSTRACT

For decades, there has been a concerted effort to support the transition of first-generation students from high school into higher education, yet there is a continued troubling gap in the number of first-generation students attending college who attain success once enrolled. This disparity is particularly pronounced among low-income students of color. This study illustrates how action research can be used to analyze a program that aims to assist students and their parents in navigating the American higher education system. Participants included (*N*=20) twelfth grade, first-generation, Latino, students and their parents (*N*=20) in rural Yuma County, Arizona, a geographically isolated area which is a three-hour drive from the nearest metropolitan city. Mixed methods were utilized to examine the impact of the American Dream Academy on self-efficacy in cultivating a college-going culture among first-generation, Latino students. Since parents play a significant role in the academic success of students, this program also sought to bolster the self-efficacy of the parents of the twelfth-grade student participants. A concerted effort was made to bring the American Dream Academy to the San Luis High School, Arizona Western College, and Arizona State University. The Academy's curriculum included eight sessions that covered college-going topics that were collectively facilitated by university, college and high school faculty. Outcomes of this study indicate the need to support first-generation Latino students and their parents to foster college readiness and increase college access. Additionally, this study highlights how increasing the self-efficacy of students and parents can positively shift self-perceptions and sense of belonging among first-generation college students.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, daughters, parents, and God. Daniel, I couldn't have taken this incredible journey without your support and dedication. Even after long, exhausting work days, you were always willing to brainstorm, discuss, proofread, and edit. Your endless love and encouragement have lifted me to fulfill my dream. You are my rock, best friend, biggest cheerleader, and the true love of my life. Together, we can do anything, baby. Thank you for believing in me, standing with me, and loving me.

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CHAPTER 1

CONTEXT AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

"We cannot seek achievement for ourselves and forget about progress and prosperity for our community...Our ambitions must be broad enough to include the aspirations and needs of others, for their sakes and for our own."
-Cesar Chavez (n.d.)-

Research shows that college enrollment rates for Latino youth are below the national average. According Fry (2011), Latino students had the lowest college enrollment (roughly 32%) compared to counterparts from other ethnicities. This may be due to barriers, including lack of financial resources, not fully understanding the American school system, and unfamiliarity with college planning (Pstross et al., 2016). A perceived lack of resources is another barrier to baccalaureate attainment. A 2018 National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) study found that fully 27% of first-generation families came from households making $20,000 or less. The same report indicated that such economic conditions put students at a greater risk of dropping out.

Yuma, Arizona is known as the lettuce capital of the U.S., producing 90% of the nation's leafy greens in winter months. Nearly 90,000 acres of land in this area are still maintained by manual laborers known as *lechugueros* (Washington, 2018). This part of the state has close ties to the agricultural seasons and has been the major source of the economy and shaped the educational landscape in the area for years. Lechugueros cross the San Luis, Rio Colorado, Mexico border on a daily basis but many have family in Yuma, Arizona. Many families in this area continue to live in San Luis Rio Colorado, Mexico, while their children cross the border on a daily basis to attend school at San Luis High School. Some of the farm workers follow the crops to California and Colorado

during the summer months leaving their families behind in an effort to maintain some stability for their children (Washington, 2018). Other families decide to remain in Yuma and find other forms of income during the summer months.

The Gonzalez's' story is one example of many families that illustrate the need for creating a college-going culture among Latino first-generation students in rural Arizona. Roberto and Mercedes Gonzalez live in Yuma, Arizona, with their four children, ages 10, 13, 14, and 17. The immigrant family's primary language spoken at home is Spanish. The family lives under the poverty line, as do most families of Yuma County. Since neither parent in the Gonzalez household holds a college degree, their children are considered first-generation students. The family is currently living with extended family, Mrs. Gonzalez's sister, her family (two children and husband) and Mrs. Gonzalez's parents, with whom they share a rented four-bedroom, two-bath home. Both Roberto and Mercedes are very proud of their hard work and their accomplishments as migrant agricultural workers. Mrs. Gonzalez sells prepared food on the weekends with her sister to make ends meet. The Gonzalez's 17-year-old son, Diego, now works in the fields alongside his parents in the early part of the morning to help contribute to the family income. He continues to attend high school, is earning good grades, and is on track for graduation. His aspiration is to go to college to become a lawyer, but his family's financial situation keeps him from seeking college information or attending college-going events. He has expressed the desire to start at the local community college, Arizona Western College (AWC), as a part-time student.

Diego also finds the college enrollment process to be confusing and overwhelming. He often walks past the college and university recruitment tables that

frequent his high school cafeteria, but has never summoned the courage to stop and seek information for fear of sounding foolish with his questions. Given that very few of his friends are even considering college, Diego feels isolated and helpless. The same scenario has played out in respect to securing information about financial aid. He has received flyers about FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) Night at the high school, but the prospect of collecting his parents' tax returns and other financial documents is daunting to him. As a result, he has made no progress in determining how he might finance his college education.

Mr. and Mrs. Gonzalez want to see their children graduate from high school. However, both indicated that they do not see their children going to college, mainly because they cannot afford tuition. There is also the sense among family members that college isn't part of the family tradition; in other words, the family doesn't see themselves as "college material." Therefore, they do not discuss college-going aspirations with their children at home. However, the family's background in agriculture has helped them instill a strong work ethic and soft skills in their children that many high school students have not yet developed. Their strong family values and deep sense of community have cultivated and nurtured a strong family bond. These values, morals, life experiences, and skills are carried over into the classroom, making them stronger students and better prepared for adversity. Acknowledging and understanding these unique experiences and strengths are critical for student achievement and a successful academic career. The Gonzalez family have shared that they want to see their children succeed but do not have a strong understanding of or connection to the American school system that would allow them to offer support to their children. Families like this one have dreams and aspirations

for their children but oftentimes do not know how to access the resources and information they need to guide and advocate for their children. Although they have unconditional love and want the best for their children, limitations and barriers may prevent parents from supporting the higher education aspirations of their children. Soria and Stebleton (2012) concluded that insufficient parental support often resulted in the first-generation students' decision to drop out of school. In the case of Diego, the lack of parental involvement may prevent him from ever enrolling in higher education.

As researchers and educators, we have the responsibility to shed some light on the symptoms that have created social complexities and inequities for families like Diego's. That means examining some of the issues that plague the most vulnerable populations while at the same time empowering marginalized groups by providing them with tools to take responsibility for their own success.

Parental Influence

Latino families typically have the same aspirations for their children as any other families. They want their children to succeed in school and life. They seek to instill a strong work ethic, positive family values, and teach solid ethical standards to help develop a sense of responsibility in their children (Hill & Torres, 2010; Patrón, 2020). Although there is no lack of sincere, unconditional love for their children, Spanish-speaking, immigrant Latino families often struggle to find resources to better support them through school and on to higher education. These resources are by no means limited to financial resources; rather, they include elements such as information about the college enrollment process and choosing a major (Rivera, 2009). This is a concern that is shared by many marginalized populations. However, the language barrier faced by immigrant

Latino families is a unique challenge that often prevents families from accessing these important resources. Peterson et al. (2018) found that Latino parents from a low socioeconomic background greatly value student readiness but lacked the knowledge to support their child and underutilized community resources.

Parents play an active role in preparing their child for higher education. Parental involvement is perhaps the most consistent indicator of student academic achievement. Extensive research has demonstrated parental involvement as a critical factor that influences academic success. Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) found that parental involvement was the single greatest factor in facilitating the academic preparedness and strong self-image among high school students.

Parents with college degrees often prepare their students for college life with reminders and checklists of things to do. They reminisce about their own college experiences and share both the challenges and successes. Many researchers have found that parental involvement is a critical factor influencing academic success. For instance, researchers have discovered that active parental involvement in 10th grade improved academic success and emotional functioning and have concluded that parental involvement had a tremendous impact on student academic success and mental health and strongly contributed to college degree attainment (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). However, the experiences of first-generation college students are starkly different from those of continuing generation students (McCulloh, 2020).

First-generation students are defined as the first individuals in the nuclear family to attend college (Hsiao, 1992; Ward et al., 2012). First-generation students are more likely to identify as minority and low socioeconomic status (Dumais & Ward, 2010).

First-generation students are less likely to have access to information about the college experience than continuing generation students; further, they are less likely to receive support from their families for attending college (McCulloh, 2020). First-generation students start off college at a disadvantage because of the lack of parental guidance and support needed to be well prepared to further their education (D'Amico & Dika, 2013). It is not that the Latino parents are unwilling to provide emotional support for their first-generation students. Most often, they lack the knowledge about America's higher education system to do so.

First-generation students lack social capital because they do not acquire it from their parents (Gofen, 2009). The experiences of first-generation students, from school experiences to parental involvement, are in deep contrast to their continuing generation counterparts. First-generation college students experience challenges that continuing generation students may not experience (Schelbe et al., 2019). These challenges and barriers are more prominent among those who are Latino.

Purpose of this Study

In Yuma, Arizona, 14% of the population holds a bachelor's degree. This is important since roughly 71% of the population is reported as Latino. Creating a college-going culture is imperative in places like Yuma. Higher levels of education can help reduce rates of poverty and create stronger communities, which in turn can provide equitable access to the American dream.

Latino first-generation students share strong family values and a deep work ethic. However, oftentimes, these strengths are not enough to translate into an earned college degree. This study examined Latino, first-generation 12th grade students' academic self-

efficacy and the role that family support plays in their decision to attend college. First-generation students have often reported their families lacked an understanding of the expectations and rigors of secondary education and college. The need to provide the tools necessary to support first-generation parents and their students in rural Arizona, where baccalaureate attainment lags urban areas, is critical. The American Dream Academy (ADA) is one such tool. Developed as a means to support students and their parents, ADA has been successful in urban areas and in more affluent areas of Yuma. This study investigated the effects of participation in ADA in the more rural Latino serving area of Yuma.

This study was conducted with the goal of answering the five research questions that emerged from the problem of practice. Each question explores the participants' perception of three domains: beliefs, knowledge, and self-efficacy. The first question sought to identify improvement in academic self-efficacy after completing the American Dream Academy. The second looked at the increase in self-efficacy among parents. The third and fourth questions examined changes in proportions between paired data. The research questions were:

1. To what extent does completing the American Dream Academy improve self-efficacy among twelfth-grade students?
2. To what extent does completing the American Dream Academy increase self-efficacy of higher education among parents of twelfth-grade students?
3. To what extent does completion of the American Dream Academy result in the completion of the college application process and Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)?

4. How did participation in the American Dream Academy impact student and parent perceptions of higher education?

For the purpose of this study, it was important to provide a discussion of the meaning of self-efficacy as it pertains to students and parents. Crisp et al. (2015) found that higher levels of self-efficacy are directly related to student success in higher education. For parents, their ability to support their college-going child is enhanced by higher levels of self-efficacy.

Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as the individual's belief in their capacity to execute behaviors necessary to reach specific goals. It reflects confidence in their ability to control motivation and behavior based on experiences and encouragement in social environments. In this context, students' self-efficacy refers to the belief in their ability to overcome challenges and obstacles through persistence and determination to engage in a particular action and gain a more positive perception of higher education. According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy is related to whether or not a person engages in a specific behavior or activity.

In this study, parental self-efficacy is defined as the parents' belief in their capacity to support their child in the college-going process by deepening their understanding of their role and envisioning their child as a college student.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL BACKGROUND

The challenges faced by the Gonzalez family are not unique to Yuma, Arizona. Their story is only one of many similar stories shared by other families living in this part of the state. This chapter presents a review of the relevant literature related to the experiences, challenges, and barriers faced by first-generation students and their families as they attempt to navigate the American system of higher education. The sections in this chapter present the three theoretical frameworks that guided this study: Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory, Tinto's (1975) model of student persistence, and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995) model of parental involvement. Together, this trifecta of frameworks formed the foundation for this study, offering a comprehensive examination of the intertwined complexities of educational, cultural, financial, and social factors that influence student achievement, particularly in Latino families. The three theoretical frameworks explored in this study have guided the curriculum and approach of the American Dream Academy. Each theory is introduced separately, followed by a deeper discussion of how each theory provides a conceptual understanding of the challenges faced by many Latino families and their children. Finally, the last section of this chapter provides a synthesis of the literature that is directly related to the different strands of the intervention conducted as part of my examination of first-generation Latino students in rural Arizona.

The Benefits of a College Degree

Every year, millions of people immigrate to the United States in search of the American dream. For many, part of that dream is earning a college degree or seeing their

children earn a college degree. A college degree opens the door to endless possibilities and opportunities for a better life, such as higher pay, better access to healthcare, increased civic engagement, and better jobs. Studies have also shown that a college degree is correlated to increased happiness and personal stability (Newell, 2014).

In a recent report, Carnevale et al. (2021) found that a college degree is critical for better social and economic mobility. For instance, according to the Postsecondary Value Commission (2021), high school graduates earn an average of $30,000 annually, while college graduates with a bachelor's degree or higher earn an average of $70,000 annually. Earning a college degree increases the opportunity for a better quality of life. It is documented that postsecondary degrees may offer more opportunities for economic prosperity. According to the Brookings Institute (2020), an individual with a bachelor's degree earns a median of $2.8 million over their lifetime, 75% more than those without a college degree. The benefits of a college degree extend to home ownership too. Research has indicated that those with college degrees have an increased opportunity of owning their own homes (Sum et al., 2009). The same study concluded that home ownership is the single greatest mechanism for creating generational wealth. Education impacted earnings up to five times over a lifetime, more than any other factor, but most importantly, this was the case regardless of ethnic and racial background (Sum et al., 2009).

Individuals with an earned college degree have higher levels of civic engagement, volunteerism, and involvement in their children's education. In other words, communities with high levels of baccalaureate attainment tend to be thriving, safe, and prosperous (Borjian, 2018).

Milton Friedman (1955), the creator of economic theories, argued that:

> A stable and democratic society is impossible without widespread acceptance of some common set of values and without a minimum degree of literacy and knowledge on the part of most citizens. Education contributes to both. As a consequence, the benefit from the education of a child accrues not only to the child or to his parents but to other members of the larger society; the education of my child contributes to other people's welfare by promoting a stable and democratic society. (p. 2)

Research has revealed that bachelor's degree holders showed higher rates of civic engagement than those holding only a high school degree (Campbell, 2009; Benson et al., 2007; Borjian, 2018). In another study, it was concluded that the higher an individual's education level, the higher the civic engagement (Newell, 2014). Researchers have long argued that educational achievement is positively related to political and civic engagement (Benson et al., 2007; Borjian, 2018). College-educated individuals are more involved in issues that affect their communities; for example, they are more likely to attend school board meetings and make educated decisions when voting. They have the potential to change the political landscape of their community. Civic engagement is especially critical variable in rural areas such as Yuma, Arizona; where college attainment is extraordinarily low in comparison to urban areas, the individuals who hold political office do not necessarily represent the population. For instance, in Yuma Union High School District, only two out of five Governing Board members are Latino in a school district where more than 80% of the student population identifies as

Latino/Hispanic. This is of great concern but reflective of the low college degree attainment in this particular rural area.

Higher levels of education typically lead to better jobs and higher income. In addition, higher income levels come with access to better health insurance and quality health care. Hence, overall, individuals with a college degree are healthier and live longer when compared to those with a high school education or less. A recent study on diabetes in the United States found that the prevalence of diabetes was 15% among individuals with only a high school degree compared to 8% of individuals with a college degree. In addition, the researchers concluded that adults who did not finish high school lived nine years less than those with a college degree (Zajacova & Lawrence, 2018).

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) (2020) reports that complex social determinants of health, a framework that outlines factors for health outcomes of individuals and communities, are influenced by socioeconomic factors such as education, social and community networks, and income levels. These factors are critical and worthy of closer examination, especially among Latino first-generation students.

Furthermore, decades of research in developed countries have also identified educational status as a major predictor of health outcomes. These studies indicated that health was greatly influenced by social factors such as education and income levels (Montez et al., 2019; Zajacova & Lawrence, 2018; Zimmerman & Wolf, 2014). In fact, that same research showed that individuals with higher levels of education had a higher income and better access to resources for healthier lifestyles. Education increases knowledge and skills that can potentially lead to better health. In other words, education is an investment in one's health and longevity. This raises concerns for the focal

population of this study, Latino first-generation students of rural Arizona, given that only 14% of adults in Yuma, Arizona, hold a bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020).

If Arizona is to achieve the state's ambitious goal of 60% degree attainment among adults 25 years or older, a greater percentage of first-generation students will need to earn degrees (Richardson, 2018). Achieve 60AZ has allied with the Arizona Governor's Office of Education and community organizations, including educational institutions, to advance postsecondary attainment. Through public awareness and public policy, this initiative aims to close the attainment gap in the state of Arizona. It is clear that if Arizona is to increase its rate of postsecondary credential attainment, significantly higher numbers of first-generation students must successfully complete their course of study. However, while first-generation students are enrolling at institutions of higher education in increasing numbers, their success rates are significantly lower than students who have at least one college-educated parent.

According to the Center for First Generation Student Success (n.d.), first-generation students make up 56% of college students. The NCES (2018) found that only 11% of first-generation students who begin their education at a community college earned a bachelor's degree. Nationally, 89% of low-income, first-generation college students leave college within six years of enrolling without completing a degree (Hutchins et al., 2011). In a similar study conducted by the Pell Institute (2009), the organization found that low-income, first-generation students earned a bachelor's degree within six years at a rate of 11%. This compares quite unfavorably with a graduation rate of 55% among students who were neither first-generation nor low-income.

There are some important demographic differences between first-generation students and their peers that are worthy of discussion. Data from the United States Department of Education (USDE) (2012) indicated that 25% of both Asian-American and White students enrolled in higher education were first-generation. The percentage of traditionally marginalized students classified as first-generation is higher at 41% for African American students and 61% for Latino students. Other surveys have found slightly different first-generation rates for each demographic group, but all indicated that Latinos have the highest percentage of first-generation college students (RTI International, 2019). For a state like Arizona, with a large and growing Latino population, this statistic has powerful implications. In fact, a report by the Pell Institute (2018) indicated that 26% of Arizona adults, 25 years and older, have an earned baccalaureate degree while states like Maryland and Massachusetts have more than half of their adults with earned baccalaureate degrees. This stark contrast amplifies the need for immediate and extreme action by Arizona's politicians, civic leaders, and educators.

The need to support first-generation students through their degree completion is particularly acute in Arizona, where over a third of all students enrolled at one of the three state universities identify as first-generation (Arizona Board of Regents, 2016). The percentage of first-generation students is even higher in Arizona's ten community college districts. According to the Arizona Community College Coordinating Council (ACCCC), in 2016, 47% of community college students were first-generation. It should be noted that, in recent years, campaign efforts to enroll first-generation students have increased at colleges and universities across the nation. However, despite the work of postsecondary

institutions, degree attainment among first-generation students remains low and many leave college within their first two years, carrying enormous debt (Lee & Mueller, 2014).

Perhaps even more critical is the wider gap of college degree attainment in rural areas as compared with urban areas of the state. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2020), only 14% of Arizona adults living in rural areas have earned a baccalaureate degree or higher compared to 26% living in urban areas. Higher education options are often more limited for students living in rural areas, many of whom are first-generation and low income. Rural schools are situated in communities that, oftentimes, have unstable economies, high poverty rates, few transportation options and low funding for educational programs (Brenner, 2016). Most rural communities are considered blue-collar and offer fewer employment opportunities that require a bachelor's degree. More often than not, the prospect of attending college seems out of reach to many students living in rural areas.

Rural communities are often located far from urban areas where many universities are located. For many students from rural areas, the opportunity to attend a university often entails moving away from home to a distant urban center (Garret et al., 2017). Attendance also entails moving students away from their family support systems while adding significant housing and transportation costs to their pursuit of a college degree.

Yuma Union High School District (YUHSD) in Yuma, Arizona, boasts above state average graduation rates, 95%, compared to state average of 78% (Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education, n.d.). Yet, these numbers do not translate into baccalaureate attainment. Only 14% of adults in Yuma County have earned a baccalaureate degree (Greater Yuma Economic Development Corporation (GYEDC),

2019). Many first-generation students in Yuma enroll at AWC, where nearly 66% of students are Latino first-generation students and 80% enroll as part-time students. AWC is three hours away from the closest metropolitan area or a state university, so almost all higher educational opportunities are found at Arizona Western College. Despite AWC's partnership with all three state universities (Northern Arizona University, University of Arizona, and Arizona State University), college completion remains low among first generation students in Yuma County (AWC, 2018). Yuma's first-generation students face the challenge of geography, language barriers, poverty, and inadequate academic preparation, as they struggle to complete a college degree.

Despite the barriers that many Latino first-generation students face as they navigate the education system, some persist in their quest to earn a college degree (Huchens et al., 2011). Their determination is admirable but can lead to disillusionment if these students are not supported. Therefore, a framework to support Latino first-generation students through their journey in higher education is critical to their success.

Model of Student Persistence

According to Tinto (1975, 1993), students who connect to their campus academically and socially are more likely to earn a college degree. Students achieved this connection through engaging and participating in student organizations and learning communities. Students who are well-integrated, academically and socially, are more likely to persist than students who fail to connect in a meaningful way with their institution of higher education. Tinto suggested three main conditions which need to be met in order for students to remain at their institution and earn a degree. The first is that students should have access to programs that focus on support, and the second is that the

support program's focus should be on all students, not just some students. The third condition is that programs should offer social as well as academic support. In 1993, Tinto added to his original framework with on exploration of the adjustment difficulty, feelings of isolation, financial hardships, and external obligations faced by first generation students. Tinto's work is mostly grounded in sociology but also incorporates concepts from cultural anthropology and psychology to describe the process that leads many students to drop out. He also made clear that the factors that led many to drop out were also a reflection of the shortcomings of the entire campus community as much as the individual student. Tinto argued that social and emotional conflict rather than academic difficulties are the primary cause of students leaving their institutions of higher education without earning a degree.

A recent qualitative study at the University of Florida examined the perceptions of first-generation students enrolled in a program developed to support and retain them (Schelbe et al., 2019). The researchers found that first-generation students perceived social support to be extremely valuable to their success in education. Furthermore, first-generation students indicated that guidance and assistance in transitioning from high school to college were extremely beneficial to their academic success.

The importance of connecting with faculty and staff is equally important at the community-college level. First-generation students have reported that institutional personnel (both faculty and staff) were the most critical factor in successfully connecting and thriving at their community college (Deil-Amen, 2011). This is extremely important since a majority of first-generation students begin their higher education journey at a community college (Museus & Chang, 2021).

The American Dream Academy (ADA) offers Latino first-generation students the opportunity to connect to staff and faculty from Arizona Western College and Arizona State University. Students are exposed to a variety of college-going workshops that focus on social, academic, and financial readiness that help students feel connected to their future institutions and empowered. The American Dream Academy addresses the financial burden and hardships first-generation students often face, which is a source of deterrence (Tinto, 1993). The American Dream Academy serves as a learning community for Latino first-generation students who start to see themselves as college students. Because many first-generation students are overwhelmed once enrolled at a university or college, they fail to establish the support structure and connections needed to facilitate their success. The participants of the American Dream Academy, both students and their parents, establish those important connections before they set foot on a college campus.

Self-Efficacy Theory

According to Bandura's (1977) theory, self-efficacy is an individual's beliefs and self-perception of his/her own capabilities, which determines their motivation and behavior. Furthermore, Bandura argued that self-efficacy also influences how individuals develop goals and how the individual achieves those goals. The belief in one's ability to overcome challenges and succeed in higher education is an important variable in the success of first- generation students, particularly Latino first-generation students. In a study conducted by Wittner et al. (2019), the researchers studied a group of first-generation college students to examine the effects of self-efficacy on their intention to drop out of vocational school during their first year. According to the study, this group of first-generation students demonstrated less academic self-efficacy, which explains the

struggles first-generation students have in their transition to higher education and the resulting increased chances of dropping out.

Wittner et al. (2019) noted that, because first-generation students often lack family role models who play a critical role in building self-efficacy, their confidence is significantly affected. Radunzel's (2018) study found that academic self-efficacy directly influenced college success and retention, while Pratt et al. (2017) found that self-efficacy of first-generation college students had a critical impact on the confidence and the academic success of first-generation students. Additionally, students with low academic self-efficacy often earn a lower grade point average (GPA). The study concluded that first-generation college students are less confident in their abilities and therefore have great difficulty overcoming challenges and obstacles. First generation students were less likely to seek academic support such as tutoring or writing assistance. They were also reluctant to visit faculty members during their office hours, ask questions in class, or participate in study groups. All of these behaviors were attributed to first-generation students' lack of academic self-efficacy.

Student and parent participation in the American Dream Academy is aimed at building the self-efficacy so important to successful completion of a college degree. Students learn to assert themselves to access the services and programs designed to facilitate their success. Both students and parents learn that the American higher education system is designed to support student success, but they must proactively seek this support.

Parent Model

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) developed a model of the parental involvement process that focuses on multidimensional aspects of parent influences, their decision to become involved in their children's education, and the results of their involvement. Numerous research studies have indicated that the involvement of parents of high school students is positively linked to student achievement, including increased enrollment in advanced courses and increased student self-efficacy (Grolnick et al., 1997; Speroni, 2011; Zarate, 2007).

The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model of parental involvement operates under three constructs that center on parent motivation for involvement and include : (1) personal understanding of their role as a parent participating in the education of their children, (2) positive sense of efficacy for guiding their children successfully in school, and (3) perceived opportunities for involvement from their children's school. Furthermore, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) maintained that parents respond to specific forms of involvement depending on the time necessary, their knowledge and skill, and the specific requests for involvement from their children's school. They suggest that the level of parental involvement, which includes modeling, reinforcement, and instruction, influences the educational outcome for their children. The outcome of the parental involvement process is the gained skills, knowledge, and sense of self-efficacy of their children.

A similar study found evidence suggesting that the outcome of parental involvement is the same for students at risk and across marginalized groups (Wyatt et al., 2015). In fact, an analysis of parental involvement of immigrant parents showed that this

group of parents experienced unique challenges to their involvement in their children's education stemming from language barriers and lack of familiarity with the educational system of the new country (Antony-Newman, 2019).

The American Dream Academy is uniquely designed to adhere to the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler parent model in an immigrant community. Parents are invited by their local high school to participate in the program, which removes the perception that their involvement at the school is not welcome. The ADA program is also offered in both English and Spanish, effectively eliminating the language barrier so common among immigrant parents. Finally, the program is scheduled in the evening to allow parents working during the day to participate.

The ADA is intended to coincide with all three of the theories that guide this research. First, following Tinto's findings, it seeks to facilitate meaningful connections for both parents and first-generation students to the faculty and staff from Arizona Western College and Arizona State University. Secondly, ADA's curriculum specifically builds the self-efficacy skills among both parents and students that Bandura pointed out are important to successfully completing a college degree. Finally, the American Dream Academy proactively invites parents to participate in the college journey of their first-generation students. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) highlighted that, by providing parents with the knowledge and confidence to support their children, successful completion of a college degree becomes significantly more attainable.

Related Literature

This section is centered on the literature that supports the theoretical frameworks introduced in the previous section. The following is a deep-dive discussion and analysis

of the ADA and how the intervention uses each of the social theories to develop a college-going culture in Latino first-generation students in rural Arizona.

First-Generation Students

One of the most difficult and important events in a young adult's life is the transition from high school to higher education. It is an extraordinarily stressful time for students and their parents, who often have made tremendous sacrifices to get their child to college. The process preceding the first day of college is lengthy, often taking years of preparation. When in high school, students spend a great deal of time exploring interests, degrees, and colleges/universities. By their junior and senior years, students prepare for higher education by taking the college entrance exams (ACT/SAT) and begin investigating ways to pay for college: writing a letter of interest, completing the financial aid process, taking campus tours, and attending various college events.

Unfortunately, despite this preparation, substantial numbers of first-generation students arrive at institutions of higher education underprepared for the rigors of college level coursework (Crisp et al., 2015). There are numerous factors contributing to this situation. For instance, many first-generation students may come from homes where education was not stressed or where there are limited financial means for purchasing books, computers, and other educational resources (Crisp et al., 2015). In addition, several reports have also documented that first-generation students disproportionately graduate from high schools with lower achievement levels on standardized assessment instruments (Rothwell, 2015).

Perhaps the most consequential statistic regarding first-generation students has to do with their financial standing. According to the NCES (2018), the median family

income for first-generation students enrolled at two and four-year institutions was $37,565. When only first-generation students at community colleges were considered, the median family income dropped to $34,260. According to the same NCES report, students who were not first-generation had a median family income of $99,635. Such tenuous economic conditions put first-generation students at a greater risk of dropping out.

While hard data are difficult to come by, there are numerous anecdotal studies of students leaving college due to the cost of books, lab supplies, and other ancillary costs of attendance. When combined with food and transportation insecurity, it is not difficult to see why so many first-generation students fail to earn a bachelor's degree. With the expansion of federal financial aid and the growth of university-level programs for first-generation students, there are resources available for students. However, all too often, they lack the connection to their institution that would allow them to identify these resources. Other times, they lack the self-efficacy to utilize the resources and support available (D'Amico & Dika, 2013).

The challenging financial situation faced by many first-generation students contributes to a number of factors that hinder their degree completion; most prominent of those factors is part-time attendance. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2018), 48% of first-generation students attended part-time, defined as less than twelve credit hours a semester. The impact of part-time attendance on degree completion is devastating. A student successfully completing nine credit hours per semester would take over 13 semesters or nearly seven years to complete a baccalaureate degree. Of course, changing majors or having to repeat classes can stretch time to completion even longer. The fact that many first-generation students are required to take remedial or

developmental education courses will be explored later in this paper. However, the need to take non-transferable developmental courses can also significantly add to the time leading to degree completion. Given the various risk factors often associated with first-generation students, taking seven to ten years to complete a baccalaureate degree is highly problematic (NCES, 2018).

Beyond the demographic and economic disadvantages, there are also severe academic challenges faced by first-generation students. According to an article published by the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 36% of first-generation students at public universities reported having to take a remedial class (Mangan, 2017),. The percentage of students requiring one or more remedial courses at Arizona Community Colleges (ACC) was even higher at 62% (2019), although this number was inclusive and did not isolate first-generation students. The need to take developmental coursework can increase the time to reach degree completion. Being told they need to complete remedial coursework before they start college-level work can have a demoralizing effect on first-generation students who may already feel that they do not belong at college (Pike & Kuh, 2005). For a state like Arizona, with a large and growing Latino population of first-generation students, this statistic has powerful implications.

In rural Yuma, Arizona, few students have access to enriching learning experiences, often preventing them from constructing their lives and finding a clear pathway to fulfilling careers through higher education. This is especially true of Latino first-generation students. In fact, first-generation students took fewer advanced placement courses, dual credit classes, and spent less time talking to teachers about their educational goals and dreams (Crisp et al., 2015). This challenge is compounded by the fact that

English is not the first language of nearly 20% of first-generation students (Rothwell, 2015).

Students in Yuma often graduate high school without the foundational skills needed to successfully cope with the rigors of college and university expectations. Fifty-five percent of Latino first-generation college students enrolling at Arizona Western College are English Language Learners (AWC, 2018). Since many of these students were placed in high school ELL courses, many must first complete developmental education courses, which are non-credit courses designed to prepare students for college-level coursework, setting them further behind from attaining a college degree. Needless to say, this is an unmotivating college experience. In fact, only 21% of Yuma graduates meet American College Testing (ACT) reading benchmark requirements (Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education, n.d.). Nationally, yet another academic challenge faced by first-generation students is scoring significantly lower on the ACT (Tate et al., 2015). First-generation students and their parents often misinterpret the results of standardized tests as evidence they would not be successful at an institution of higher education. The American Dream Academy allows first-generation students to put their standardized test scores into context and connects them to the resources available at their institution.

There is great disparity in college-going rates among underrepresented groups. This disparity is particularly acute in rural Arizona. Cahalan et al. (2020) stated that students from high-income families are approximately five times more likely than students from low-income families to earn a baccalaureate degree before the age of 24. In Arizona, the education attainment level is even lower among underrepresented groups. The statistics are sobering; only 13.9% of Latinos, 27.3% of Blacks, 11.2% of American

Indians, and 10.2% of Pacific Islander earn a college degree by the age of 24 (Arizona Board of Regents, 2021). Additionally, in an earlier Pew Hispanic Center study completed by Fry (2011), nearly 74% of Latinos students indicated that their studies were hindered by a need to work in order to provide economic support for their families.

All too often, students move through their high school experience without making meaningful connections between their studies and their life experiences and potential career options. A critical component of the ADA is providing high school students with the tools necessary to build student capacity and self-efficacy and allowing them to explore their interests, find personal strengths, and build confidence through specific and targeted workshops. ADA provides a clear pathway to a successful high school career and a strong transition to higher education. Tinto's (1993) model of student persistence posits that the quality of the interaction between the students and the environment of their academic institutions is critical for meaningful, holistic, student experiences that result in successful completion of college degrees. Tinto also noted that student success depends on the daily actions, dedication of the personnel of the institution, and the establishment of a culture that supports students. Ndiaye and Wolfe (2016) concluded that one of the greatest factors contributing to low baccalaureate attainment among first-generation students is a lack of connection to their institution, classmates, and the instructors. This may be especially detrimental to first-generation students who often struggle to feel a sense of belonging and connection in higher education. The need to support first-generation students through degree completion is particularly acute in Arizona, where over a third of all students enrolled in higher education identify as first-generation (Arizona Board of Regents, 2016). The percentage of first-generation students is even

higher in Arizona's ten community college districts, where, as previously mentioned, in 2016, 47% of community college students were first-generation (ACCCC, 2017).

This points to another factor limiting degree completion among first-generation students. Lack of social capital, which was defined by Soria and Stebleton (2012) as "privileged knowledge, resources, and information, attained through social networks" (p. 675). First-generation students often lack social capital because they do not acquire it from their parents, who lack a college degree (Gofen, 2009). There is a direct correlation between social capital and the development of self-efficacy. First-generation students are less confident in their academic ability and less likely to ask questions or seek assistance from faculty and staff (Jenkins et al., 2009). This reluctance to engage may lead to overall college experiences that are isolating and disconnecting (Kim & Oh, 2013). Without a sense of community and belonging, first-generation students often succumb to the preconceived notion that they are not suited for higher education.

Research conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics (2018), indicated that first-generation students are often non-traditional students, meaning they are older, employed full-time, and are more likely to be the financial provider for their families. In fact, almost 60% of first-generation students reported working at least 19 hours a week while attending college. For non-traditional students, working more than 19 hours a week can have negative consequences for college completion.

First, there is the challenge of finding time to study, complete assignments and visit professors when working long hours. There are also lesser-acknowledged risks in working significant hours each week. Many entry-level jobs come with varying work schedules; when a student's work schedule is changed, they are often faced with the

choice of continuing their employment or their education (Hutchins et al., 2011). This is a particularly daunting decision for first-generation students since they tend to be older than non-first-generation students. According to the United States Department of Education (USDE) (2014), 34% of first-generation students were over the age of 30, which is double the percentage of their non-first-generation counterparts; that same study found that first-generation students were nearly three times more likely to have dependents.

Role of Community College

Transitioning from high school to community college or university can be a daunting and overwhelming task. Preparation for this life-changing transition takes years in the making and knowledge of available school resources. Enrolling in dual credit courses while in high school is often the best venue to put high school students on the path to higher education. Dual credit is simultaneous enrollment of a high school student in a course that results in credit toward both high school graduation and college (Speroni, 2011). These courses are available to high school students at their respective high schools and are oftentimes taught by community college professors on campus or online. High school students who complete dual enrollment classes enroll in higher education at significantly higher rates than students who did not have this opportunity.

Macakova and Wood (2020) found that fewer Latino students entering community college had earned college credit while in high school, putting Latino first-generation students far behind in college credits as opposed to their non-first-generation counterparts. The same study found that many high schools serving low socioeconomic students offer fewer advanced courses due to a lack of teacher qualifications. In fact, Lee

et al. (2022) found that taking at least one dual enrollment course was positively associated with enrolling in college for at least two consecutive years. However, the most important finding of that study was that the greatest positive impact was for minority students, first-generation students, and low socioeconomic students. The net effect is dual enrollment courses effectively increase college access, enrollment, and degree attainment (Gagnon et al., 2021).

Additionally, the path to these advanced courses is enhanced by parents able to guide their students. It also requires that high school counselors deliberately seek out Latino first-generation students and invite their participation as research indicates that this population often does not have the self-advocacy skills to inquire about resources (Mangan, 2015). Furthermore, Giani and Whittaker (2023) and Lee et al. (2022) also suggested that first-generation students are already disadvantaged by their parents' lack of experience with and information about college. Dual credit courses were originally designed for high-achieving students; however, in more recent years, these have been extended to all college-bound students with the goal of targeting historically marginalized populations (Latino et al., 2020). In fact, Speroni (2011) found that dual credit courses were strongly associated with degree attainment, specifically emphasizing that Black and Latino students had greater academic outcomes than Black and Latino students who did not participate in these courses. The academic rigor experienced in high school is a huge indicator of college degree attainment for Latino first-generation students. Increasing learning opportunities for high school students can better prepare them for college and increase their chances of success. Dual credit courses also help first-generation students

develop the connections and engagement to higher education called for by Tinto (1987) and the development of self-efficacy advocated by Bandura (1997).

In rural areas, access to dual credit courses has been challenging because of the distance from a community college, financial barriers associated with the tuition and books, and the lack of qualified instructors. For instance, finding college faculty and/or highly qualified content area teachers with advanced degrees to teach dual credit courses is problematic in rural areas. In Yuma, Arizona, for example, at Yuma Union High School District, there are very few teachers with the qualifications required to teach college-level courses, posing a huge barrier to dual credit access. Less than 10% of the total certified teacher count were qualified to teach dual enrollment courses; this has prompted Arizona Western College in Yuma to find creative ways for offering these courses in collaboration with high schools (AWC, 2018).

In Yuma, the AWC has eliminated the use of the Accuplacer, a standardized assessment instrument designed to determine a student's academic readiness for college-level course work, as a requirement for college course placement as well as dual credit enrollment. AWC contends that the Accuplacer used in isolation is not an accurate predictor of college level success and has taken the steps necessary to remove this test as a barrier to accessing college courses. In fact, AWC (2018) conducted a brief study that found 247 potential students took the Accuplacer, tested into developmental level work, and never enrolled at the college. For many first-generation students, the first communication they had with the college was the news that they were not ready for college level work. This information was enough to convince them that college was "not for them." As a result, Arizona Western College discontinued the use of the Accuplacer

for course placement and instead invested additional resources in tutoring and supplemental instruction. Eliminating the Accuplacer was into response to the lack of available dual enrollment class offerings at Yuma high schools. This move from Arizona Western College helped in motivating students to enroll at AWC and to "see" themselves as college students. Arizona State University continues to consider an applicant's entire high school record when determining admission. The only placement test required is a math placement test to determine appropriate math placement for all freshmen (Arizona State University, n.d.).

Latino Parents

As discussed previously, Latino parents play a significant role in the decision-making of first-generation students. Although the same can be said about any parent, regardless of ethnicity or race, Latino families may face additional challenges. For instance, language barriers can lead to isolation, reducing the chances of learning and using community resources. Research has shown that parental involvement is positively related to college aspirations, college enrollment, and academic preparedness, but parental involvement is often limited for parents of low socioeconomic status (Alexander et al., 2017). Additionally, Latino parental involvement may become more complicated by the bureaucracy of the educational system and the less welcoming attitudes by teachers and administrators. There is also more pressure on parents to understand course planning and college preparation (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). However, many parents of first-generation Latino students do not have the information, understanding, and knowledge about the expectations for college preparedness and therefore are less likely to help their child select advanced courses in high school (Clark & Dorris, 2006). The high

expectations of college-readiness can be overwhelming and at times paralyzing, especially when there is a language barrier.

Parental self-efficacy also plays an important role in how and when parents engage in their children's education. Jasis (2021) found that parents with high self-efficacy were more engaged in their child's education and were able to advocate to improve their children's school experience. Parents with a deeper understanding of the college-going process can make more meaningful connections to support their child. Cuevas (2023) stressed that parents who understand their role as school partners and motivational supporters are more confident in guiding their children, arguing that parents' sense of self-efficacy determines their engagement in their children's post-secondary planning.

In fact, Turney and Kao (2009) found that a main limitation to Latino parental involvement was a language barrier. Parents who did not speak English were less likely to participate in parent-teacher conferences and other school-related activities. This same study found that another significant barrier to parental involvement was the lack of inflexible work hours. Furthermore, the Tomas Rivera Policy Institute (Zarate, 2007) found that Latino parents' most frequently cited reason for low parental participation and communication with schools was a lack of time. Many Latino parents depend on hourly wages and supporting their families typically requires both parents to be employed. The Policy Institute also found that hourly workers tended to miss out on parent conferences or other school events to avoid lost wages.

The Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) model emphasizes the importance of parental efficacy for supporting and advocating for their children so they can navigate the

educational system together. Utilizing this model also helps school personnel to examine and address barriers such as building self-efficacy for involvement, negative perceptions of school involvement, and other life circumstances that might limit or prevent involvement. This study will examine the cultivation of a college-going culture amongst first-generation high school students in the 12th grade by developing strong self-efficacy with parent support and guidance from teachers, advisors, and college staff. This study will investigate whether empowering students and families through knowledge and support networks transforms student self-perceptions and develops self-efficacy for a successful academic career.

Summary

First-generation students are entering the American higher education system in ever-increasing numbers. While this is a positive step for society, these students face unique challenges on their path to a college degree. The current literature indicates that parents play a critical role in students' decisions to attend college and their success once enrolled. Increased levels of self-efficacy among both students and their parents has also been shown to increase degree completion. Finally, there is also a body of research that indicates that an engaged student is more likely to persist to completion.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Setting

San Luis High School (SLHS) is a Title I school serving a high percentage of low-income families. According to the Arizona Department of Education (n.d.), ninety-nine percent of the student population identify as Latino and 90% identify Spanish as their primary language. SLHS is the largest high school in the Yuma Union High School District, with approximately 2,800 students enrolled. It is located in San Luis, Arizona, three miles from the pedestrian bridge that connects San Luis Rio Colorado, Mexico, to San Luis, Arizona, in Yuma County. The American Dream Academy was offered at SLHS for the first time.

Recruiting Strategies

I prepared flyers in Spanish and English inviting parents and students to an informational meeting. It was critical to emphasize that the invitation was on behalf of the San Luis High School principal and counselors. I had to ensure that the messaging on the invitation did not mention the ADA curriculum or expectations. The language used in the flyer included the following:

> Mr. Arvizo and the San Luis High School counseling team are inviting you to an extraordinary evening. Learn how to support your child and prepare him/her for college.

The date, time, and location were included in the invitation, along with the principal's signature and the counselors' names. The invitation was distributed during senior English class, and it was added to the online parent portal. The school also added

the invitation to the school website, the school's official Facebook page. To follow up on the invitations, I requested access to student and parent directory contact information from two random senior English classes.

I placed calls on behalf of the principal, encouraging parents and students to participate in the special evening of information regarding college preparation. It was important for the calls to be made the week before the event and then once again the night before the event. The counselors also sent out reminders on the day of the information session through Remind 101, which is a website that provides a safe way for school officials to text messages to students and parents.

Another marketing strategy I used was to advertise the ADA through Yuma's public. radio station, KAWC Border Radio. The radio station is operated by Arizona Western College as a public service. Border Radio prides itself in supporting community events and highlights the perspectives of people living on the US-Mexico Border. The radio station made several announcements using the information from the flyer during the weekend before the event.

Participants

Study participants included 12th grade students (*N*=20) enrolled at San Luis High School (SLHS) in addition to their parents or guardians (*N*=20). The participants completed the eight-week American Dream Academy (ADA) that took place in the fall of 2022 at San Luis High School. The ADA was structured so that the student and at least one parent were required to enroll in and complete the program together. SLHS was primarily responsible for the marketing efforts to recruit participants to the American Dream Academy. The high school sent messages to parents via text messages, and ADA

was also promoted on the school's website. Marketing materials were produced in both English and Spanish. There was no charge to enroll in ADA, nor was any financial incentive provided.

American Dream Academy

As part of the ADA, I developed a comprehensive curriculum to help parents navigate the American school system to support and advocate for their children through high school and beyond. It is designed to provide the tools necessary for students to prepare for college and self-advocate through their educational journey. The program aims to cultivate a college-going culture by providing opportunities for students and parents to learn together and from each other. The ADA program requires participants to attend weekly two-hour sessions for eight consecutive weeks (Table 1). The curriculum addresses a variety of topics critical for supporting students and their parents as they begin to transition to higher education. The curriculum was written in English and later translated into Spanish by a team of certified translators from Arizona State University.

Table 1
American Dream Academy 8-week Curriculum

	Topic	Agenda
Week 1	Welcome	• Mission and vision of ADA • Current state of education for first-generation students • Overview of the curriculum
Week 2	Setting Up for Success	• High-school graduation requirements • Earning college credits • Study habits and time management • Role of parents • Career Inventory
Week 3	Preparing for Higher Education	• Value of education • Levels of education and requirements • Financial aid and FAFSA • Parent roles in supporting student
Week 4	Scholarships and Portfolios	• Differences between scholarships and grants • Subsidized and unsubsidized loans • Finding scholarships • Volunteer opportunities • Personal statements and letters of recommendation • Parent role during funding processes
Week 5	Preparing for College	• Admission requirements and tracking progress • ASU application • ACT, AP, and dual enrollment courses
Week 6	Future Sun Devils	• Next steps: setting goals and action plans • Appointment with the guidance counselor • ASU campus visit and sessions with current students and parents
Week 7	Community Forum	• Highschool personnel attends forum with parents and students
Week 8	Graduation	• Parents and students receive certificate of completion • Family celebration

Elements of ADA

Welcome Session

For the present study, the initial session of the American Dream Academy was held in the school's cafeteria. On the evening of the initial session, a presentation took

place explaining the program's purpose, the program, mission of the program, and the benefits of participating in the American Dream Academy. The curriculum was discussed in great detail at this time. Families were then asked to sign a pledge form demonstrating their commitment to their child's education by completing the program (see Appendix A). Parents and students were provided with a checklist of documentation they needed to complete the FAFSA application (see Appendix B). The presentation was conducted in Spanish by the program manager. A high-profile community member shared their journey to a college degree during this session.

Setting up for Success

This session focused on high school graduation requirements, earning college credits, and college entrance requirements. Time management and developing strong study habits were also discussed during this session. Parents learned how to support their students to graduate high school, as well as being given information about college-going process along with their students. It is critical for parents to understand the complexity of the high school to college transition and the critical role parents play in the college admission process.

In this session, participants were introduced to me3, an interactive online career inventory tool. The tool includes questions that focus on individual strengths and interests that match potential careers. The application allows students and their parents to explore majors at ASU and potential careers that fit their interests and passion, making them better prepared to select a degree program at the college. This session was held in a computer lab to allow participants to create a me3 online account and use the application. By the end of the second session, families were expected to focus on best supporting their

students in completing a college degree rather than helping them decide *if* higher education is a good choice for them.

Preparing for Higher Education

This session focused on the value of higher education, completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and parents' role in supporting their students. The economic return on a college degree was highlighted in great detail during this session. Bilingual representatives from the Arizona Western College (AWC) financial aid office provided an overview of the importance of applying for FAFSA. Participants were provided a checklist of financial documentation needed to complete the online FAFSA application at the start of the program. This session was held in a computer lab classroom to facilitate the use of technology to complete the online application. Participants were expected to start and complete the FAFSA application during this session with step-by-step guidance from AWC financial aid experts. Completing the FAFSA application can be tedious and lengthy and sometimes required an entire session to complete the application.

Scholarships and Portfolios

In the session, four AWC financial aid experts returned for a detailed discussion of grants, scholarships (merit and need-based), loans (subsidized and unsubsidized), and other forms of financial aid such as college work-study. It was stressed that, to maintain a focus on academics, university students, especially in their first year, should not work more than 19 hours a week. This session was also held in a computer lab classroom so students and parents could search through the ASU scholarship portal. Parents were introduced to the differences in scholarships, grants, and loans, which will help them

make better decisions as they support their college-bound students. Part of the session was dedicated to a discussion on building a student portfolio. An overview of the benefits of volunteer work, such as gaining new skills necessary for the job market, leadership, communication skills, the importance of time management, dependability, and decision making were all explored. Parents were encouraged to support their students by helping to identify opportunities for personal and academic growth. During this session, students outlined their personal statements, which would be required for scholarship applications. Students were provided with a starter template to begin writing their personal statement and were encouraged to complete it by the end of the ADA. Counselors from SLHS were invited to participate in the discussion on securing letters of recommendation.

Preparing for College

The objective of session five was to complete the college application process; topics covered included: benefits of dual enrollment courses, choosing a college or university best suited to the student, filling out college applications, understanding admission requirements, the impact of the American College Testing (ACT) scores, and the importance of meeting with a college admission advisor.

Future Sun Devil

Session six highlighted the importance of planning the transition to higher education. Students and parents were encouraged to develop academic goals as they prepared to complete high school. Participants were provided with a financial planning worksheet (see Appendix C) to facilitate the development of a realistic financial action plan that considered both the direct and indirect costs of attending college. Students were encouraged to set up an appointment with their guidance counselor to discuss their

college-going plans and schedule college campus visits. Because these are often daunting topics for families, this session included a panel of students and their parents from the community who were currently attending ASU or AWC. The panel shared their challenges, struggles, and ultimate success in transitioning to higher education, with the goal of demystifying the college-going process.

Community Forum

The seventh session was dedicated to the Community Forum. The high school principal and other high school personnel participated in this session, answering pre-determined questions from parents that had been generated with the guidance of ADA staff in session six. SLHS and Yuma Union High School District administrators were invited to participate in the forum. In addition, other prominent members of the community also participated in this session. This session aimed to demonstrate community support and encourage parents and students to develop a dialogue with school personnel.

Graduation

At the end of the program, parents and students participated in a graduation ceremony where they received a certificate of completion. For many parents, this was their first experience graduating from any academic program. Students received a certificate of conditional admission to Arizona State University (ASU) along with a future ASU Sun Devil ID card, both of which offered tangible hopes of their acceptance to ASU. Students planning on attending community college were awarded a $500 scholarship in their name.

Two parents were nominated by parent peers to give a commencement speech that would provide an authentic perspective on the value of the ADA. Parent testimonials also provided insight into their growth as supportive parents of first-generation college students. The speeches summarized their learning experiences as well as their new knowledge of college-planning processes. Two student representatives were also selected to share their perspective and to express appreciation for the support of their family and community while sharing their determination to earn a college degree.

Instruments and Data Collection Procedures

This study employed a widely accepted method in research known as explanatory sequential design, which consists of collecting quantitative data in the first phase and qualitative data in the second phase (Doyle et al., 2009). Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) observed that the sequential nature of this method allows for a deeper understanding of participant perspectives. The quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed separately in this approach. The results of the quantitative data were used to plan the qualitative interview questions. The qualitative data collected from interviews and document analysis provided depth to the quantitative data collected from the survey responses.

The qualitative data collected during semi-structured interviews allowed participant parents/guardians to further explain their perceptions and beliefs about supporting their students and helped validate the quantitative data. Including qualitative data in this study ensured that the participants' voices were accentuated. The exact approach for collecting and analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data is detailed in the section to follow. Table 2 outlines the research questions and hypotheses, along with their associated source used to collect data.

Table 2
Research Questions and Data Sources

Research Questions and Hypotheses	Data Sources
1. To what extent does completing the American Dream Academy improve academic self-efficacy among twelfth-grade students? **$H_{01.1}$:** There will be no significant differences in student belief scores taken before and after completion of the ADA. **$H_{A1.1}$:** Student belief scores will increase after completion of the ADA. **$H_{01.2}$:** There will be no significant differences in student knowledge scores taken before and after completion of the ADA. **$H_{A1.2}$:** Student knowledge scores will increase after completion of the ADA. **$H_{01.3}$:** There will be no significant differences in student self-efficacy scores taken before and after completion of the ADA. **$H_{A1.3}$:** Student self-efficacy scores will increase after completion of the ADA.	• Pre & Post Survey • Recorded Interviews • Student & Parent Testimonials
2. To what extent does completing the American Dream Academy increase self-efficacy of higher education among parents of twelfth-grade students? **$H_{02.1}$:** There will be no significant differences in parent belief scores taken before and after completion of the ADA. **$H_{A2.1}$:** Parent belief scores will increase after completion of the ADA. **$H_{02.2}$:** There will be no significant differences in parent knowledge scores taken before and after completion of the ADA. **$H_{A2.2}$:** Parent knowledge scores will increase after completion of the ADA. **$H_{02.3}$:** There will be no significant differences in parent self-efficacy scores taken before and after completion of the ADA. **$H_{A2.3}$:** Parent self-efficacy scores will increase after completion of the ADA.	• Pre & Post Survey • Recorded Interviews • Student & Parent Testimonials
3. To what extent does completion of the American Dream Academy result in completion of the college application process and FAFSA?	• Pre and Post Survey
4. How did participation in the American Dream Academy impact student and parent perceptions of higher education?	• Pre and Post Survey • Recorded Interviews • Student & Parent Testimonials

Quantitative Data

In order to gain insight into the participant's experience in the ADA program, this study included four separate surveys. Two surveys (pre- and post-program) were designed for students, and two (pre- and post-program) were designed for parents. The following subsections discuss each of the surveys.

Student Surveys

The student survey contained 27 statements organized into three general constructs: Beliefs, Knowledge, and Self-Efficacy (see Appendix C). The pre- and post-program surveys sought to measure potential growth in the student's beliefs about attending college, knowledge about the college admission process, and their self-efficacy as it related to the college-going process as a result of participating in the American Dream Academy. All statements were designed to measure understanding or growth based on topics included in the ADA curriculum. The student survey provided four Likert-type response options, from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree).
The beliefs subscale measured the level of agreement a student had with statements related to their personal beliefs regarding attending college." Each of the nine statements in this subscale began with the phrase, "This is what I believe," and the maximum possible score for the subscale was 36. The knowledge subscale assessed the student's overall agreement with the statements regarding their knowledge of the college admission process, and the statements in this subscale began with the phrase, "This is what I know." The subscale comprised 14 statements with a maximum score of 56. Lastly, the self-efficacy subscale measured the student's overall agreement with statements regarding their self-efficacy as it related to the college-going process. The eight statements in this

subscale began with the phrase, “This is what I do.” The maximum possible score for the self-efficacy subscale was 32.

Parent Surveys

The parent survey had a similar format, with 31 items organized into three broad constructs; beliefs, knowledge, and the role of parents in the college-going process (see Appendix D). The parent survey provided the same four Likert-type response options from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). The statements in the parent survey measured parents’ understanding of parental support's role in cultivating a college-going process. For example, parents were asked to react to the statement: “I know the role parents play in completing the FAFSA.”

Survey Procedures

The pre-surveys for parents and students were administered at the beginning of the program’s second week. At that time, the participants had signed the letter of commitment to participate in the program and had a very broad, high-level understanding of the topics included in the ADA curriculum. However, that was prior to any of the topics included in the ADA curriculum being discussed in detail. The survey took approximately 15 minutes to complete. The program facilitators administered the surveys in the classroom, using a traditional pencil and paper format, so no special technology was needed. The survey was made available in English and Spanish, which this researcher translated. The survey was written using simple language to accommodate parents with varying education levels. If a parent needed assistance completing the survey, it was permissible for their student to assist them.

All of the surveys were completed anonymously. Each survey contained a unique number used to match pre- and post-program surveys to measure change accurately. I was on-site during the survey administration. The completed surveys were placed in a locked cabinet for safekeeping.

The post-surveys for students and parents were administered at the end of session seven. Participants received the corresponding numbered post-survey to the pre-survey. The survey was administered by the program facilitator and given directly to this researcher upon completion. The survey protocols adhered to the guidelines found in the *Handbook of Survey Methodology* (Wolf et al., 2010).

Qualitative Data

The second phase of explanatory sequential design was to collect and analyze qualitative data to obtain explanations of the quantitative results (Creswell & Clark, 2007). Following a mixed-methods approach, I composed a set of interview questions that sought to explain the results of the quantitative data. Participants, both students and parents, were interviewed individually to ensure confidentiality. A semi-structured interview allows interviewers to explore comments made by participants and permits a deeper understanding of their perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The interviews were video-recorded and transcribed. The participants' personal information was not identified, but each participant was referred to by a number assigned. No personally identifiable information was included in the final report.

Before beginning each interview, participants were asked if they preferred to interview in English or Spanish; all of the interviews were conducted in Spanish. The interview also involved code-switching, the practice of alternating between two or more

languages in conversation. Code-switching is quite common among young first-generation immigrants. All interviews were transcribed into English by the researcher, who is fully bilingual.

Participation in the interview process was voluntary for both parents and students. There was no compensation provided for those agreeing to be interviewed. All interviews were conducted via Zoom to facilitate the respondents' scheduling logistics and convenience. Each interview lasted approximately fifteen minutes.

For this study, I developed ten potential scripted interview questions designed specifically for students (see Appendix E). The questions attempted to ascertain if the students felt that the ADA helped prepare them for the transition to higher education, increased their self-efficacy, and provided them with a better understanding of the college admission process. Each of the ten scripted questions was asked of each participant during the interviews. All questions were posed in an open-ended manner, allowing the participants to share their experiences in a more revealing manner. Participants were also asked follow-up questions to explain their responses further. The semi-structured format aimed to allow for the authentic student voice to be heard. As described in the book, *Qualitative Interviewing* (Rubin & Rubin, 2011), interviewing is the "art of hearing data" (p. 10).

Quantitative Data Analysis

The dataset comprised pre- and post-ADA responses from students and parents who participated in the study. The surveys collected the respondents' perceptions regarding Self-Efficacy (Beliefs, Knowledge, and Self-Efficacy). After completing the surveys, students' responses were paired with those of their parents. The completed

responses were also checked for data completion and missing data. After that, the responses were coded with numbers. For example, *Strongly Disagree* was coded with "1"; *Disagree* was coded with "2"; and so on. Once the data were ready, they were imported into IBM SPSS version 29 to be analyzed.

Firstly, the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to understand the quantitative data better. The results of the descriptive statistics were presented in mean ± standard deviation. The data were also analyzed for instrument reliability using Cronbach's alpha following descriptive statistics. Lastly, inferential statistics were conducted to answer research questions one, two, and three. The following subsections discuss the selected statistical analysis for relevant research questions.

The first research question addressed was: To what extent does completing the ADA improve academic self-efficacy among students? This question was answered by comparing the students' pre- and post-ADA responses for each Self-Efficacy subscale (Beliefs, Knowledge, and Self-Efficacy). Each subscale or variable was measured at a continuous scale, and the data were paired samples (pre- and post-survey data). The initial plan was to use the paired-samples t-test to assess the differences for each subscale. However, the post-test Knowledge data did not meet the assumption of normality of distribution, $p \leq .05$. Therefore, to study the differences between pre- and post-ADA responses in Knowledge, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test (Field, 2017) was utilized. That test is appropriate for data that do not meet the normality assumption of distribution.

The second research question addressed was: To what extent does completing the ADA improve academic self-efficacy among parents? This research question was

answered by comparing the parents' pre- and post-ADA responses for each Self-Efficacy subscale (Beliefs, Knowledge, and Self-Efficacy). However, as described in the next section, the Self-Efficacy subscale had a low-reliability score, resulting in the subscale being dropped from further analysis. Therefore, only the Beliefs and Knowledge subscales were analyzed for the parents' responses. Since the variables being assessed were ordinal, containing four values, both subscales were measured at a continuous scale. Similarly, the initial plan was to use the paired-samples t-test to assess the differences for each subscale. However, the post-test Knowledge and pre-test belief subscales or variables did not meet the assumption of normal distribution. In such cases, Wilcoxon signed-rank test is the most appropriate test to study the differences between the scores before and after the ADA (Field, 2017).

The next research question addressed was: To what extent does completing the ADA result in successful completion of college applications and FAFSA? In addition to the questions on Beliefs, Knowledge, and Self-Efficacy, two *yes* or *no* questions were added to the student and parent surveys. The questions were aimed at obtaining a percentage of FAFSA and college application completion. The responses for completing the college application process and FAFSA were coded with "0" for no and "1" for yes. To determine whether there was a change in completing the college application process and FAFSA, McNemar's test was selected. McNemar's test is appropriate for studying differences in a dichotomous dependent variable from paired groups (Field, 2017).

Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data gathered from the participant interviews provided insight into the participants' perspectives. The methodology used was guided by Charmaz's (2014)

constructivist grounded theory, which seeks to construct a theory around issues that are important to the participants. I used Glaser and Strauss' (1967) constant comparative method to interpret the qualitative data gathered through the semi-structured interviews and written testimonials from participants. This method required systematically organizing information from transcribed data, searching for patterns and themes through coding, and interpreting the results.

Thematic Analysis

I followed Miles et al.'s (2014) thematic analysis, an iterative and methodical process for analyzing qualitative data. Using this inductive approach to qualitative analysis allowed the development of codes from transcribed data to shape a narrative that might emerge from the raw data (Mills et al., 2006). I began by transcribing the video interviews and developing files for each participant. I then applied descriptive codes to the transcripts by writing labels on words, phrases, or sentences that provided data on participants' perceptions of ADA. This was followed by a second coding cycle to identify interesting excerpts while applying the codes, adding new codes if necessary, and adjusting and revising as needed. Later, I grouped the codes into themes and used a reiterative process for evaluating and revising the themes identified.

Document Analysis

To augment and corroborate data derived from participant interviews and increase data accuracy, I also examined the transcripts of parent and student graduation speeches to identify patterns related to the participants' experiences after completing the ADA. Two students and two parents were elected participants to deliver a speech written collaboratively by the participants during session six; they then delivered their speeches

to the ADA graduating class. These written testimonials served as official documentation of the personal experiences of both parents and students during the ADA.

Document analysis requires repeated review, examination, and interpretation of the data in order to gain meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). In analyzing the written testimonials, I used the same codes used to organize and interpret the interview transcripts. Lastly, data from the graduation speeches were compared with the results of the interviews to identify patterns or themes.

Mixed Methodology

Mixed-methods research requires a purposeful mixing of methods in data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of the evidence (Creswell & Clark, 2007). This approach allows a panoramic view and a more comprehensive understanding of study participants' experiences. Using this design draws on the strength of quantitative and qualitative data to help answer the research questions of this study. This study was built on the quantitative data derived from pre- and post-program surveys of parents and students. Qualitative data drawn from participant interviews and document analysis, combined with quantitative data, were analyzed to fully understand the participants' perceptions of the ADA.

To ensure the validity and increase the quality of my study, I aimed to capture different dimensions of the same phenomenon through the triangulation of data from the surveys conducted eight weeks apart. For example, pre-survey results from questions related to "what I believe," "what I know," and "what I do" were compared to the post-survey results. The side-by-side comparison method in which qualitative and quantitative data are integrated identifies areas of complementarity results or themes (Creswell &

Creswell, 2018). Ultimately, qualitative, and quantitative data become interdependent in addressing the research questions. The benefit of mixed methods is to “produce a whole through integration that is greater than the sum of individual qualitative and quantitative parts” (Guetterman et al., 2015, p. 556).

Summary

In this chapter, I explained the study's setting and participants. I also provided details about the innovation, including a brief curriculum overview. Further, I explained the measuring tools I used to gather quantitative and qualitative data. Finally, the mixed-methods design for this study was discussed, including the plan for data analysis. The next chapter reports the results of the study.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Chapter 4 presents the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the relationship between the two and establishes potentially significant connections between the constructs, resulting in a variety of outcomes. Results from this study are presented and discussed in the sections that follow. The results from the quantitative data are found in first section, followed by the qualitative data results. Prior to presenting the results, a brief discussion is included outlining the data sources and collection procedures.

Quantitative Data Results

Descriptive Statistics

The results in this section are organized accordingly. First, I present the results of the student and parent surveys using means, standard deviation, and differences between the means. Next, I establish the reliability of the survey scores using Cronbach's alpha. This is followed by an analysis organized by research questions, first by establishing the normality of distributions and then applying the appropriate inferential measure. Tables 3 and 4 outline descriptive statistics by student and parent group and present the mean and standard deviations of pre-and post-test scores across the three measures (Belief, Knowledge, and Self-Efficacy). The tables show the student and parent mean scores for each measure, before and after completing ADA. The delta, change in mean scores, are represented as integers. For reference, the percent change is included to express the change in mean scores as a percentage. The percent of change was calculated by subtracting the post-test from the pretest mean score, resulting in the delta. The delta is then divided by the Pretest mean score and finally multiplying the result by 100. The

scales used in the surveys for each measure have a 1-4 range, where 1 indicates *Strongly Disagree* and 4 indicates *Strongly Agree*. The results indicate an increase in mean across, *Beliefs*, *Knowledge*, and *Self-Efficacy* for students and parents.

Table 3
Mean Student Scores for Beliefs, Knowledge, and Self-Efficacy (N = 20)

	Pre-test		Post-test		Delta	Percent Change
Scale	$\bar{x}_1$	σ	$\bar{x}_2$	σ	Δ	%
Beliefs	2.51	0.37	3.54	0.32	1.03	41.04
Knowledge	2.17	0.43	3.82	0.26	1.65	76.04
Self-Efficacy	2.02	0.54	3.47	0.31	1.45	71.78

Table 4
Mean Parent Scores for Beliefs, Knowledge, and Self-Efficacy (N = 20)

	Pre-test		Post-test		Delta	Percent Change
Scale	$\bar{x}_1$	σ	$\bar{x}_2$	σ	Δ	%
Beliefs	2.47	0.29	3.54	0.32	1.07	43.32
Knowledge	1.80	0.28	3.75	0.28	1.95	108.33
Self-Efficacy	2.47	0.21	3.80	0.11	1.33	53.85

Table 5 displays descriptive statistics reporting the number of students (pre- and post- ADA) who completed college admission applications and FAFSA. Prior to attending the ADA, only 10% of students had submitted college applications, while 0% completed FAFSA forms. As indicated in Table 5, there was an increase in admission and FAFSA applications across students who completed the ADA program, with both percentages jumping to 85%.

Table 5
Frequency of Students who Completed College Admissions and FAFSA (N = 20)

	Completed Applications Pre-ADA		Completed Applications Post-ADA	
Type of Application	N	%	N	%
Admissions	2	10	17	85
FAFSA	0	0	17	85

Instrument Reliability

The reliability scores of the student and parent self-efficacy surveys were assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The α value of the student's self-efficacy survey was .94, indicating the instrument's excellent internal reliability. The Cronbach's alphas for the subscales ranged from .78 for Self-Efficacy to .93 for Knowledge, indicating that the student survey instrument had good reliability. As for the parent self-efficacy survey, Cronbach's alpha for the Self-Efficacy scale was -.68. After removing the problematic item, the scale's alpha remained low at .31, suggesting very poor reliability. I decided to remove this scale and not include it for further analysis. The alpha scores for the remaining scales were .78 (Beliefs) and .89 (Knowledge), and the alpha score for the overall survey minus the Self-Efficacy scale was .94, suggesting that the instrument had very good reliability. Table 6 shows Cronbach's alpha values for both student and parent surveys.

Table 6
Internal Consistency Values for Student and Parent Scales

		Cronbach's α
Students	Belief	0.88
	Knowledge	0.93
	Self-Efficacy	0.78
Parents	Belief	0.78
	Knowledge	0.84
	Self-Efficacy	*Excluded*

Research Question 1. To what extent does completing the ADA improve self-efficacy among 12th grade students?

Before running the inferential statistics to answer this research question, the student data were first examined for the normality of distribution. The Shapiro-Wilk test was run to assess the normality of distribution (Table 7). The test showed that almost all variables had normal distribution, $p > .05$. Only post-test Knowledge was not found to meet the assumption of normality of distribution, $p \leq .05$. For this reason, two different statistical tests were used to answer research question 1. A paired-sample t-test assessed the differences between the before (pre-test) and after (post-test) scores for the Beliefs and Knowledge scales. This test is appropriate for paired-sample data that meet the normality assumption of distribution. On the other hand, the differences between the before (pre-test) and after (post-test) scores for the Knowledge scale were assessed using Wilcoxon signed-rank test (Field, 2017).

Table 7
Results of Shapiro-Wilk Test for Normality of Distribution for Student Data

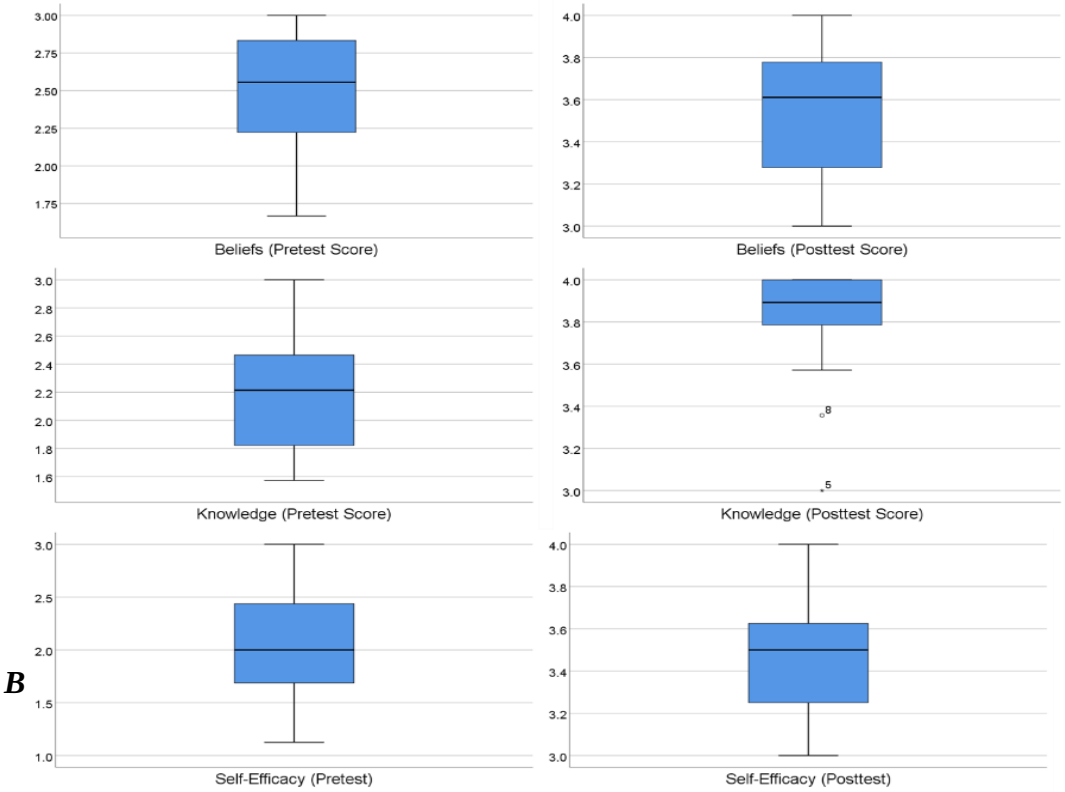
		W	*df*
Pre-ADA	Beliefs	0.95*	20
	Knowledge	0.96*	20
	Self-Efficacy	0.97 †	20
Post-ADA	Beliefs	0.93*	20
	Knowledge	0.72***	20
	Self-Efficacy	0.94*	20

$p \leq .001$ *** ; $p \leq .01$** ; $p \leq .05$ * ; $p \leq .10$ †

In addition to testing for normality of distribution, the data were assessed for outliers. Visual inspection of boxplots showed an extreme outlier in post-test Knowledge data (Figure 1). Since there was only a limited number of cases in the data and the outlier was a genuine response from the research participant, I decided to check as to whether keeping the outlier would impact the final results by running statistical analyses with and without the outlier case. Statistical analyses on the Knowledge scale with and without the outlier showed similar results. Therefore, the outlier was retained and included in the proceeding analysis. The results of the statistical analyses are presented in the following sections.

Figure 1

Boxplots for Student Scales Before and After ADA



B

H01.1: There are no differences in the belief scores among twelfth-grade students after completing the American Dream Academy.

HA1.1: There are significant differences in the belief scores among twelfth-grade students after completing the American Dream Academy. A paired-sample t-test (Table 8) was run to assess the differences in student beliefs about attending college before (2.51 ± .37) and after (3.54 ± .32) the ADA (Table 8). The test showed statistically significant differences in the belief scores among twelfth-grade students after completing ADA, $p <$ .001, t (19) = -8.68, 95% CI [-1.28, -0.78]. If the test were to be repeated with a new sample representative of the target population, the 95% Confidence Interval (CI)

indicates that the mean will be between -1.28 and -0.78 95% of the time. Since the mean (-1.03) fell between the upper and lower bounds of the CI, we can state that the results support the alternative hypothesis. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted. These results suggest that attending ADA increased student belief scores.

Table 8
Paired-Sample T-Test Results for Student Beliefs Scale (N = 20)

T Statistic	$\bar{x}$	σ	SE $\bar{x}$	df
–8.68***	-1.03	0.53	0.12	19

$p \leq .001$ *** ; $p \leq .01$** ; $p \leq .05$ * ; $p \leq .10$ †

Knowledge Scale

The hypotheses for the statistical analysis are:

H01.2: There are no differences in the knowledge scores among twelfth-grade students after completing the American Dream Academy.

HA1.2: There are significant differences in the knowledge scores among twelfth-grade students after completing the American Dream Academy.

A Wilcoxon signed-rank test was run to assess the differences in students' knowledge about the college admission process before (*Mdn* = 2.29) and after ADA (*Mdn* = 3.67). The statistical analysis was selected because the post-test knowledge score did not meet the assumption of normality of distribution, $p \leq .05$. There are statistically significant differences in the knowledge scores among twelfth-grade students after completing ADA, $z = 3.92$, $p < .001$. Therefore, we can reject the null hypothesis and

accept the alternative hypothesis. The findings suggested that attending ADA increased the students' knowledge scores.

Self-Efficacy Scale

The hypotheses for the statistical analysis are:

$H_{01.3}$: There are no differences in the self-efficacy scores among twelfth-grade students after completing the American Dream Academy.

$H_{A1.3}$: There are significant differences in the self-efficacy scores among twelfth-grade students after completing the American Dream Academy.

A paired-sample t-test was run (Table 9) to assess the differences in students' self-efficacy related to the college-going process before (2.47 ± .21) and after (3.80 ± .11) the ADA. The test showed statistically significant differences in the self-efficacy scores among twelfth-grade students after completing ADA, $p < .001$, t (19) = -9.75, 95% CI [-1.76, -1.14]. Therefore, we can reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis. The findings suggested that attending ADA increased the students' self-efficacy scores.

Table 9

Paired-Sample T-Test Results for Student Self-Efficacy Scale (N = 20)

T Statistic	$\bar{x}$	σ	SE $\bar{x}$	df
–9.80***	-1.45	0.66	0.15	19

p ≤ .001 *** ; p ≤ .01** ; p ≤ .05 * ; p ≤ .10 †

Research Question 2. To what extent does completing the ADA improve self-efficacy among parents?

As previously described, the Self-Efficacy scale was dropped from further analysis due to a low-reliability score. Therefore, only the Beliefs and Knowledge scales were analyzed from the parents' data. Before running the inferential statistics to answer this research question, the data were examined for the normality of distribution using the Shapiro-Wilk test (Table 10). The test results showed that the pre-test Knowledge and post-test belief variables had a normal distribution, as shown by *p*-values that were greater than .05. However, the post-test Knowledge and pre-test belief variables were not normally distributed, as shown by *p*-values ≤ .05. Since the data were paired and one of the pairs did not meet the assumption of normality of distribution, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test was selected to study the differences between the scores before and after the ADA (Field, 2017).

Table 10
Results of Shapiro-Wilk Test for Normality of Distribution for Parent Data

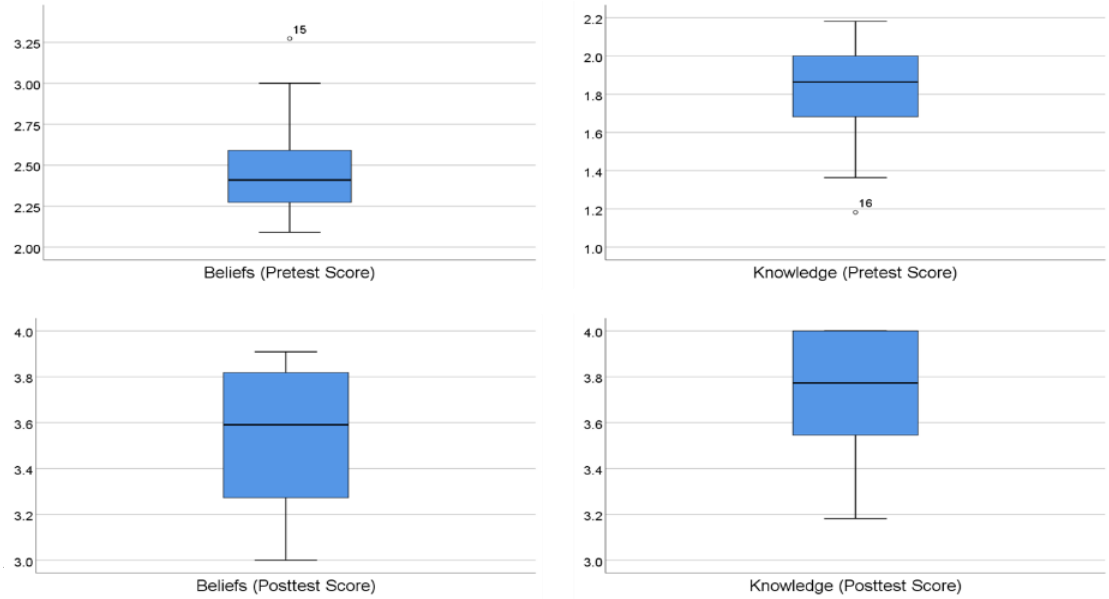
		W	*df*
Pre-ADA	Beliefs	0.90*	20
	Knowledge	0.93†	20
Post-ADA	Beliefs	0.92†	20
	Knowledge	0.83**	20

p ≤ .001 *** ; p ≤ .01** ; p ≤ .05 * ; p ≤ .10 †

Additionally, the data were assessed for outliers using boxplots. Visual inspection of the boxplots found no extreme outliers from the data (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Boxplots for Parent Belief and Knowledge Scales Before and After ADA



The hypotheses for the statistical analysis are:

H02.1: There are no differences in the belief scores among the parents of twelfth-grade students after completing the American Dream Academy.

$H_{A2.1}$: There are significant differences in the belief scores among the parents of twelfth-grade students after completing the American Dream Academy.

A Wilcoxon signed-rank test was run to assess the differences in parents' beliefs before (*Mdn* = 2.41) and after the ADA (*Mdn* = 3.59). Wilcoxon signed-rank test determined statistically significant differences in the belief scores after the parents attended ADA, $z = 3.93$, $p < .001$. Therefore, we can reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis. The findings suggested that attending ADA increased the parents' beliefs about attending college.

Knowledge Scale

The hypotheses for the statistical analysis are:

$H_{02.2}$: There are no differences in the knowledge scores among the parents of twelfth-grade students after completing the American Dream Academy.

$H_{A2.2}$: There are significant differences in the knowledge scores among the parents of twelfth-grade students after completing the American Dream Academy.

A Wilcoxon signed-rank test was run to assess the differences in parents' knowledge about the college admission process before (*Mdn* = 1.86) and after the ADA (*Mdn* = 3.77). Wilcoxon signed-rank test determined statistically significant differences in knowledge scores after attending ADA, $z = 3.93$, $p < .001$. Therefore, we can reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis. The findings suggested that attending ADA increased the parents' knowledge about attending college. The next series of tests are aimed at addressing the third research question which is as follows:

Research Question 3. To what extent does completing the ADA result in the successful completion of the college application process and FAFSA?

McNemar's test was used to determine whether there was a change in completing college applications and FAFSA. The responses for completing the college application process and FAFSA were no (0) or yes (1). McNemar's test is appropriate for studying differences in a dichotomous dependent variable from paired groups (Field, 2017).

College Application

McNemar's test was conducted to assess the impact of ADA on college application process completion. After attending ADA, the number of students who completed the application increased from 3(15%) to 17(85%). McNemar's test with continuity correction found that proportion of change in college application before and

after ADA were statistically significant, $\chi^2(1) = 15.06$, $p < .001$. These findings suggest that attending ADA significantly increased college application completion.

FAFSA Completion

McNemar's test was conducted to assess the impact of ADA on FAFSA completion. After attending ADA, the number of students who completed FAFSA increased from 0 to 17 (85%). McNemar's test with continuity correction found that the changes in FAFSA completion proportion from before to after attending ADA were statistically significant, $\chi^2(1) = 15.06$, $p < .001$. These findings suggest that attending ADA significantly increased FAFSA completion.

Summary

These findings showed significant increases in student and parent beliefs and knowledge scores post-ADA. Before attending ADA, no student had completed the FAFSA, and only three (15%) completed college admission applications. However, post-ADA, 17 (85%) students completed the FAFSA and college admission applications.

The quantitative results of the student and parent surveys showed a statistically significant increase in beliefs, knowledge, and self-efficacy after attending ADA (see Tables 3 and 4). The parent survey data showed an increase of 43% in beliefs in the average score after completing the ADA. There was 108% increase in knowledge after completing the program. Although the data showed an increase in the average score of the parent self-efficacy score of 54%, this scale was not included in the quantitative analysis due to the low-reliability score. The student survey data showed an increase of 41% in beliefs, an increase of 76% in knowledge, and an increase of 72% in self-efficacy. Additionally, the increase of 85% in the proportion of college application completions

was significant at the .001 level; and the increase of 85% in the proportion of FAFSA completions was also significant at the .001 level (see Table 5). The data in this study supported these results, indicating the success of the ADA in this area.

Qualitative Data Results

Data from this qualitative portion come from two data sources: interviews and testimonials. In this participatory research, I played the role of facilitator. I administered the surveys, completed the semi-structured interviews, and witnessed the testimonials in an attempt to answer my fourth research question noted below:

Research Question 4. How does participation in the American Dream Academy impact student and parent perceptions of higher education?

Interviews

Ten students and ten parents gave their written consent to participate in a semi-structured interview, which took place during a two-week period immediately following the conclusion of the American Dream Academy. Student and parent interviews were jointly conducted and analyzed. (For the questions, see Appendices E and F.) The interviews were recorded via Zoom, and lasted approximately 15 minutes. Since all interviews with the students and parents were conducted in Spanish, accurate translation was critical. Although I spent a significant amount of time translating the interviews, as I am fully bilingual, I wanted to ensure that the most appropriate terms were used to capture the essences of their voices and perspectives with fidelity. Therefore, I sought the help of certified translators from Arizona State University, School of International Letters and Cultures, to assist with translating scripts. This was also an important step for ensuring trustworthiness. Patton (2002) argued that qualitative researchers'

trustworthiness is linked to the competence of the researcher conducting the study. Further, Adamson and Donovan (2002) emphasized that the credentials of the translator will affect the quality of translations during the coding and data analysis processes.

Since participants in this study were Latino, first-generation, and came from Spanish-speaking families, it was essential to use their phrases as codes. Saldaña (2021) highlighted that NVivo coding uses words or short phrases from the participant's language as codes that honor the participant's voice. Through this initial coding procedure, 15 codes resulting from patterns identified in participants' statements were identified.

Testimonials

Participants were expected to participate in at least six of the eight weekly sessions to complete ADA successfully. Students and parents were required to attend the program together. Twenty families completed the American Dream Academy.

During session five, participants were asked to vote for three parents and three students who would represent the group to deliver speeches of their experiences during ADA at the graduation ceremony. A total of six speeches (three by students and three by parents) were a collaborative effort that demonstrated the collective perspectives of the students and parents. I asked the participants to reflect on their experiences in ADA and highlight what they found most valuable about attending the program. The speeches were considered testimonial documents and were analyzed as part of this study. The written speeches by students and parents were analyzed separately.

Analysis of Qualitative Data

Drawing from connections between the initial codes, the codes were grouped together based on the similarity of participants' statements into larger overarching categories (Table 11). From 24 qualitative transcripts and documents, 679 instances were noted. Figure 3 and Figure 4 show the frequency of codes found within each category for each qualitative collection.

Table 11
Thematic Codebook

Code	Description	Illustrative Quotations (Student and Parent)
Challenges and Barriers	This code was used when participants highlighted perceived difficulties in pursuing a college degree.	"The challenges that I face now is not knowing if I'll get any scholarships until I'm already in college." "The only barrier for my daughter that I can think of is money. I worry that we may not qualify for a scholarship."
College Admission	This refers to the process of applying to an institution of higher education and the steps required to be admitted.	"Now I understand what I need to do to get admitted to college. I have a good GPA and I know I can go to ASU. I have never completed an application before, but this was not so bad." "I didn't know what to expect with applications and what colleges were looking for. I only knew that good grades were needed but I had no idea what a GPA was and how that determines scholarships."
College Staff	This refers to the various college personnel participants interacted with during the college exploration process.	"AWC staff was so patient with us. We didn't have all the tax forms for completing the FAFSA but they stayed with us until we returned with the correct papers. They were very good to us." "I don't think we could've completed this confusing application. The AWC staff was patient and walked us through the entire process. We were so tired afterward. The college president even brought us pizza. That's how much they care about our children."
Confidence	This code is used when participants expressed that they had the skills and knowledge to navigate the college application process.	"I feel very confident about going to college and earning my nursing degree. I'm so happy that I can stay here in Yuma. I'm very excited." "We learned so much in this program. I'm very confident that my child will go to college. She's a very intelligent girl and has determination and courage. So, I know she'll get a good degree."

Feeling Helpless	This code is used when a participant indicated that they felt they lacked the ability to navigate the college-going process.	"Well, I wasn't sure where to begin. I had so many questions but didn't really know who to ask or even how to ask the right questions." "I didn't know how to help my son because I never went to college. I barely finished middle school in Mexico, so I didn't know anything about going to school here. I felt bad because he would talk about it with me, but I never had answers. I felt like I was letting him down."
Feeling Prepared	This code was used when participants indicated that the program gave them the knowledge needed to enroll in higher education	"I feel better prepared after completing ADA. It was full of information that I needed to know to go to college. For example, I didn't know that my GPA was that important for scholarships." "I learned so much in this program. My husband and I feel ready to support our child. We just want him to feel prepared too."
Feeling Supported	This code was used when participants expressed that program or college personnel were responsive to their needs.	"My parents talk to me more about college. Before, they didn't ask many questions but now we talk about it all the time. They ask me about school all the time and about my plans when we have dinner." "I feel that as a parent, this program has supported me in giving me the knowledge to be able to support my daughter. I had many questions and the staff answered all of my questions. They even prepared us with what questions to ask the college counselors."
Feelings about First Generation	This code was used when participants reflected on their status as first-generation students.	"I'm very proud of myself. I'm the first one in my entire family to go to college. I didn't even think about how I felt about it but now that you bring it up, I feel so happy and proud of myself. I can help my family better, financially when I get my degree in engineering." "We're so proud of our son. He'll be able to accomplish what we couldn't in Mexico. He carries a big weight on his shoulders because it's a lot of pressure being the first one to go to college. We look up to him. We have hope that he'll have a better life for his family."
Gained Knowledge	This code was used when participants referred to the program's unique structure of parents and students learning together.	"I learned more about FAFSA and the college application process. I also learned about volunteering in my community and how that will help me gain skills. I also learned about staying organized and how that will help me be a good college student." "Wow! I can't begin to tell you how much my husband and I learned in this program. I wish we knew about this program last year. We especially learned about support that's available for families at AWC."
Learned Together	This code was used when participants spoke of the financial aspects of attending	"I wasn't sure about doing this program with my mom, but it was really fun. We even played games at the beginning of each session. They were like icebreakers but for the families. I liked learning with my mom. I felt like we got closer."

	college including federal financial aid, grants, loans, and scholarships.	"It was such a nice experience coming to school with my daughter. I learned new things about her and her dreams. I want to support her. She's so intelligent and has such wonderful manners. I'm so proud of her and so happy that we learned some new things together. I saw a different side of her in this program."
Paying For College	This code was used when participants reflected on their participation in the American Dream Academy.	"I learned so many ways to pay for college, like the Pell Grant, the Obama Scholarship, and merit scholarships. I know the difference between need-based and merit-based scholarships. This makes me more confident that there is help for me to go to college."
		"Yes, I learned so much about scholarships and loans and work-study programs. I want to be able to guide my daughter about paying for college. But most of all I want her to know that her father and I will do everything possible to help pay for her college."
ADA Experience	This code was used when participants highlighted the increase in college going ambition as a result of the program.	"I really liked this program. It gave us so much information and the staff helped us so much. My teachers, counselors, and principal were here too. They cheered us on and helped to answer questions too. The college staff was so helpful with the FAFSA and college applications."
		"This was an incredible experience. I just wish this program was available starting in the 9th grade because then we'll be able to know what to expect at each high school year. A lot of this information was new to most parents. I found support from the other parents too. I even made new friends because we were all going through the same thing. I feel like this program involved so many other people from our school and ASU and AWC. That made it so special. Thank you."
Motivation	This code was used when participants indicated that they had acquired to ability to navigate the college going process on their own.	"I was motivated by my parents. They encourage me now more than ever before. They believe in me, and I don't want to let them down. I think this program helped us to stay motivated and they believe in us."
		"I found myself encouraging my daughter a lot more now. I feel like this program empowered me as a parent to guide my child more and better. I feel like I know more, and this new knowledge motivates me as a parent to keep encouraging my daughter and other families too."
Resourceful	This code was used when participants highlighted perceived difficulties in pursuing a college degree.	"The program showed me where to find answers. They taught me how to not be shy and encouraged me to ask questions, lots of questions."
		"I didn't know what I didn't know. So, that made me have no questions. But the more I learned in this program the more I learned the right questions to ask and how to ask and who to ask. I learned to seek out my own answers by reaching out to the right folks and by being persistent if I don't get the answers right away."

After completing multiple cycles of coding, I synthesized codes by grouping statements rooted in the participants 'own words and patterns in perspectives were identified. As I continued to organize categories, the interconnectivity of concepts became apparent and theme-related interpretations and assertions were made. The themes conceptualized from the data are as follows: a) *Knowledge of college expectations,* b) *Self-perception of attending college*, c) *Challenges and barriers of attending college, and* d) *Family support in the college-going process.* Table 12 provides a summary of the themes, theme-related components, and assertions. In the next section, I define and describe the characteristics of each theme, followed by participant quotes that serve as evidence to support each theme.

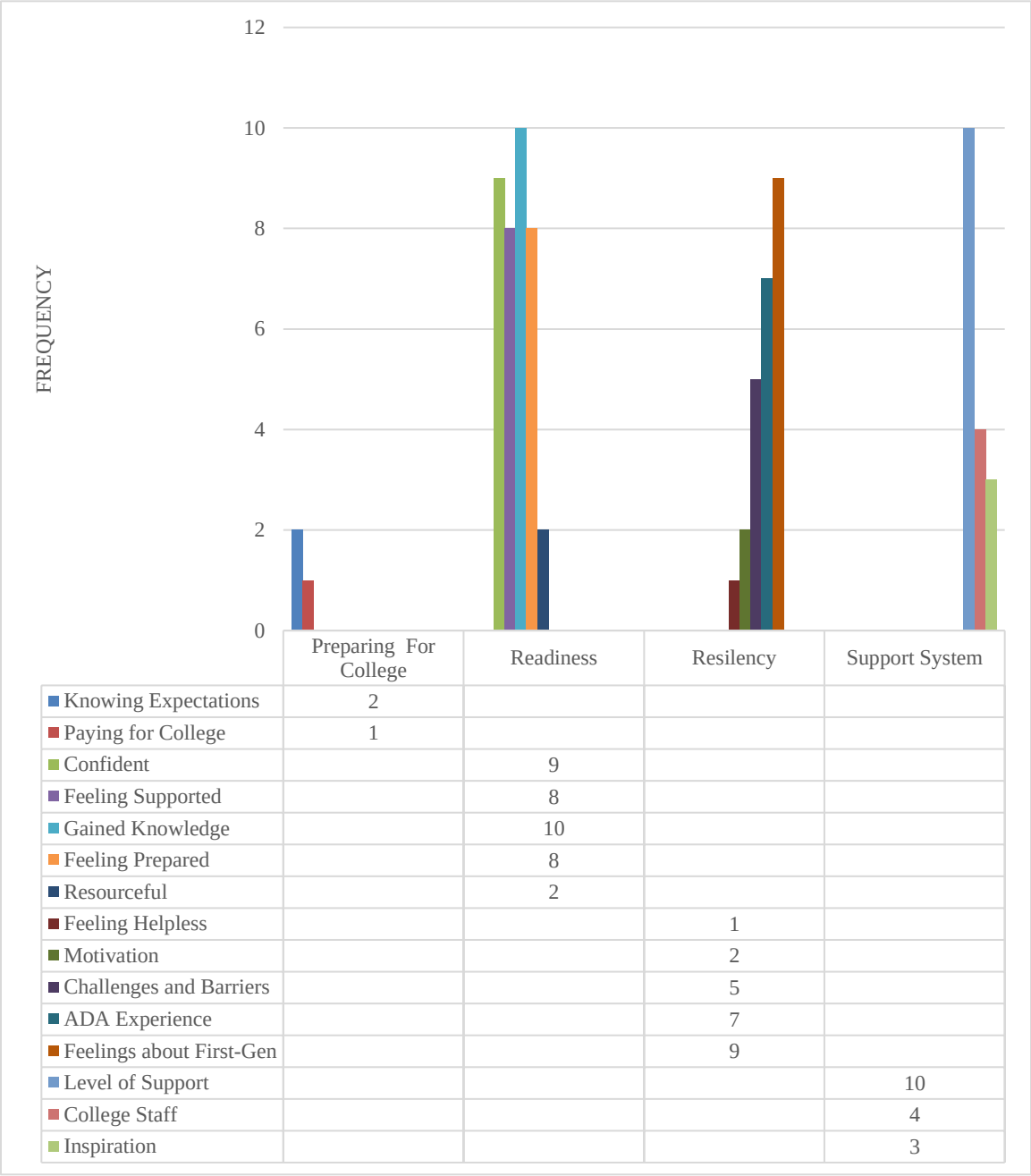
Table 12

Themes and Related Components

Theme	Theme Related Component	Assertion
Knowledge of Expectations	• Students gained the knowledge necessary to be prepared for the expectations of college. • Parents gained the knowledge necessary to understand expectations of college to support their child. • Both students and parents highlighted understanding of college expectations.	• Students' knowledge about the rigors of college and accessing information was a result of attending the ADA. • Parents can provide support to their children after learning about the expectations of getting into college.
Perception of Higher Education	• Students used language indicating their intent to attend college. • Students expressed confidence that they will graduate from college. • Both students and parents gave examples of how their college-going perceptions have changed.	• After completing ADA, students see themselves as successful students. • Parents see their students as completing a college degree after learning about the college-going process through ADA.
Challenges and Barriers	• Students could identify common challenges associated with college. • Both parents and students highlighted their planned approach to overcoming challenges in attending college	• Students and parents demonstrated resiliency in overcoming challenges as their perception changed about the college-going process.
Family Support	• Parents identified ways to support their students applying for college. • Parents expressed an understanding of the rigors of college. • Students identified a number of ways their family can assist them.	• After completing ADA, parents learned new ways to support their students. • Parents gained a new perspective on the expectations of being a college student. • Students have a stronger relationship with their parents as a result of completing the program as a family.

Figure 3

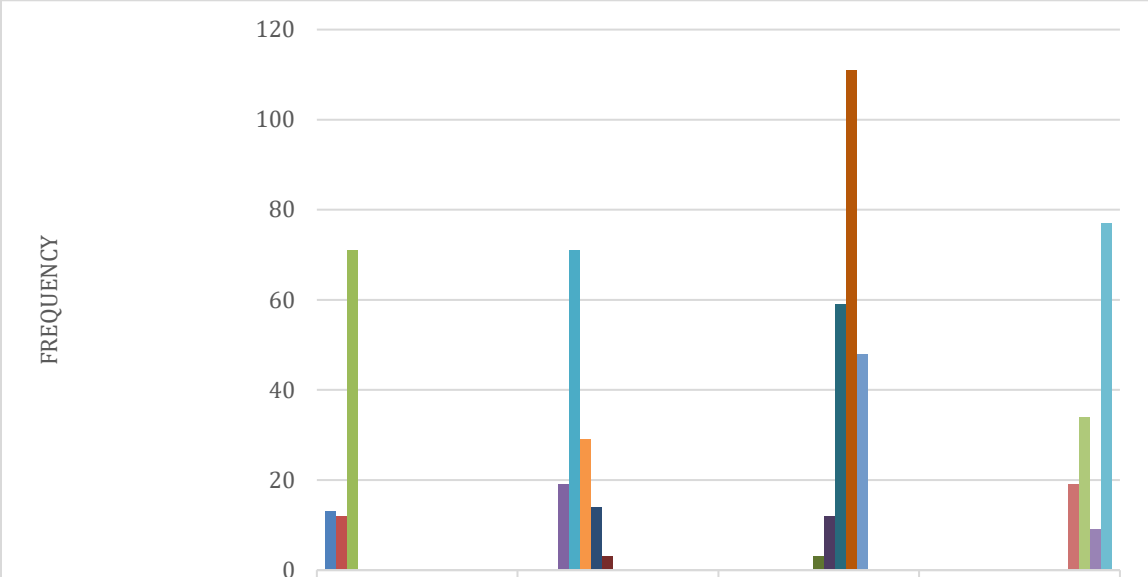
Frequency of Codes from Student and Parent Testimonials



	Preparing For College	Readiness	Resilency	Support System
Knowing Expectations	2			
Paying for College	1			
Confident		9		
Feeling Supported		8		
Gained Knowledge		10		
Feeling Prepared		8		
Resourceful		2		
Feeling Helpless			1	
Motivation			2	
Challenges and Barriers			5	
ADA Experience			7	
Feelings about First-Gen			9	
Level of Support				10
College Staff				4
Inspiration				3

Figure 4

Frequency of Codes from Student and Parent Interviews



	Preparing For College	Readiness	Resiliency	Support System
Knowing Expectations	13			
College Admission	12			
Paying for College	71			
Confident		19		
Feeling Supported		71		
Gained Knowledge		29		
Feeling Prepared		14		
Resourceful		3		
Feeling Helpless			3	
Motivation			12	
Challenges and Barriers			59	
ADA Experience			111	
Feelings about First-Gen			48	
Level of Support				19
College Staff				34
Inspiration				9
Learn Together				77

Knowledge of College Expectations

Many first-generation students lack knowledge regarding the expectations of higher education. Oftentimes, parents of first-generation students cannot guide or support their children because they themselves lack the knowledge and experience (Dumais, 2010). During the ADA, participants were exposed to a number of educational sessions that focused on the differences between high school and college expectations. I invited a panel of current college students and their parents to speak about their experiences as first-year college students. Parents of first-year college students discussed their concerns, fears, and how they support their students as they learned together how to navigate the American higher education system.

One topic discussed in great detail was academic preparation for college. I covered information about grade point average (GPA), high school resumes, extra-curricular activities, college prep classes, and volunteer work. The discussion between parents and students was starkly different. For instance, while students focused more on the process of college admission applications, parents referred to the preparation that is required for admittance to college. One parent expressed their surprise at the time it takes to become ready to attend college:

> I was totally misinformed about the importance of GPA. I didn't know that the GPA was carried over from year to year and that their first year of high school is when students need to really focus on GPAs and grades.

Another parent spoke of the impact of her lack of knowledge on her child's decision to go to college. She expressed regret and feeling helpless before the program:

> I feel so bad that I didn't know how to support my daughter. I know she wanted to go to college because she mentioned it to me for the first time two years ago, but I didn't know anything and I was afraid that I just didn't have the answers. I could have attended this program a long time ago to learn more so that I could have guided her better. I learned so much here and I'm so happy that I learned how to help her and what to expect when she's in college.

The students interviewed were more focused on the process of applying for college admission. One student explained that the knowledge she gained in the program would be critical to looking for scholarships, filling out college applications, and asking for letters of recommendation from her teachers:

> I'm not sure where I would be if it weren't for this program and its people. You've all helped me so much. I wasn't even motivated to go to college because this is so overwhelming. I felt as if I was drowning, and I don't like to feel that way, so I gave up. But I learned so much here.

Another student stood out because she appeared to be the most confident about attending college. However, during the interview, she expressed that she may have been overly assured:

> I thought I knew everything about going to college. But I was wrong. For example, I didn't know the difference between merit and need-based scholarships. I also didn't know about the student-work programs, like the Earn-to-Learn, that allows students to earn money while getting work experience. I learned a lot from the student panel. I asked them lots of questions, especially the ASU students.

Perceptions of Suitability for Higher Education

Self-assurance is crucial for creating a college-going culture within a family and within a community. After completing the American Dream Academy, student participants reported feeling more confident in their ability to attend college and earn a degree. One student discussed why she was more confident than before by explaining:

> I wasn't sure if I had what it takes to go to college. But I learned that I had good grades, and about different ways or scholarships that I can apply for that could give me a good chance to go to college. I have a better understanding of college. The student panel gave me good information, and if they can do it, so can I.

Another student indicated that her self-perception of being able to attend college changed during the program, and that she had misunderstandings and questions for which she had never sought answers:

> I didn't see myself as a college student, to tell you the truth. I didn't think that resources were available for me. I always thought I'd join my mother in cleaning houses. But this program changed my mind. It turns out I do have the grades to go to college and I do qualify for many of the scholarships that AWC has for students like me. I know that getting to college is possible. I want to stay here in Yuma and there's a lot that I can do here. I want to be a nurse someday and AWC has a great pathway for me. You connected me to the people who will get me started and I know that there is financial help for me.

After completing the American Dream Academy, students were able to envision themselves as college students. Students believed that they had the confidence and ability to go to college as a result of attending the program.

Parent participants also developed new perceptions of their child's ability and readiness to succeed in college. Like their children, they also began to visualize their child as a college student. Parents also communicated feeling confident about understanding the expectations and rigors of college. One parent mentioned that her biggest fear was that her daughter would experience too much freedom and not enough supervision in college. She expressed concern that she wouldn't be able to support her daughter because she had never experienced such freedom at a young age. However, after attending the ADA she saw herself as the biggest support system for her daughter:

> I know that my worries are normal because she has never lived away from home. The fears set in and take a hold of me, but I trust her. She's incredibly smart and responsible and going away to college doesn't mean that I'll stop parenting her. It doesn't mean that I won't check in on her. It was so good to hear that the other parents felt the very same way. The panel was so helpful with answering all of our questions. It helps that they were very honest about some things that they are still working through. Afterall, we all have our doubts, but this program showed us that we have options and that there's always a solution to anything. I think as long as we know how to support our children and understand our roles as parents of college students, we find ways of making their dreams happen, they'll be okay. I honestly think my girl will be alright. She'll earn her degree. She's still not sure about what she wants to be but she'll figure that out soon. I completely trust her.

Another parent indicated that he feels more confident in knowing what to expect and how to support his son both financially and emotionally. He said that his confidence

in himself as a father allows him to see his son as a college student and have a good career. He said:

> I know that my son will be able to go to college because I understand how to help him. He'll need my support more than ever and I understand what we have to do to help him reach his dream. I understand my role in all of this. I know that I cannot ask too much of him while he's in school. I cannot expect him to work full-time while he goes to school part time. That's not a good way to support him through college. I also understand that there are financial resources that we can use to get him through so that he can finish school. He wants to become a border patrol agent in Yuma and now we know that AWC has a great program for him. Our family can picture him in his uniform already. He'll be a great agent and we can't wait to be there at his graduation.

Parents expressed that, with the new knowledge they gained from completing the American Dream Academy, their perception of suitability for higher education had changed. They indicated that the tools the program provided allowed them to better understand how they can guide their child in the college application process while pursuing a college degree. In a few short weeks, they had come to believe that college was for their family.

Challenges and Barriers of Attending College

Students and parents both discussed the challenges and barriers they have faced as immigrants to the United States. They spoke of the hardship caused by their economic status and the language barrier that often left them feeling isolated and helpless. The topic

of money was a recurring theme discussed by multiple families. Their lack of financial stability was a central focus of the parent's comments. As one parent put it:

> We always think about how we'll make it through next month. So, college was not considered in our family because it didn't seem realistic. Our main concern was always to put food on the table and keep a roof over our heads. But this program gave us hope and showed us the possibility of sending our son to college.

Another parent expressed the concern of being a single mom and questioning her capability to pay for her daughter's college:

> Since my husband died, we have been surviving on my income, but we barely make the rent. My daughter contributes to our income by working at a restaurant at night and on weekends. But I know that she won't be able to keep this up if she goes to college. She'll need to cut back on her hours so that she can focus on school. That's our priority. She wants to be an X-ray technician and I know that AWC has a very good program. The hospital and AWC have a wonderful program that will help us pay for her school. We wouldn't have known that without the American Dream. This program brought folks from AWC to talk to us about the options for students wanting to go into the medical field. I'm confident that she'll be able to finish her degree. We just need to work out a few things before she's ready, but I know where to seek help and where to find answers. That's already half the work.

Another parent cited the language barrier as the most challenging to obtaining information about college. However, offering this program in Spanish has provided

families with opportunities to do so. This parent discussed her insecurities as a parent due to her lack of English:

> Since coming to the U.S., I've had this feeling of isolation because I don't understand the language. I didn't know how to ask questions for my children. I didn't feel that I was able to adequately guide my own children. I didn't know anything about college. In fact, I never thought any of my kids would be interested in going to college. But I know that there is always a way to pay for college. This program gave us the tools to support our children as they work towards reaching their dream. I feel like the barrier of language doesn't matter to help my child. I don't feel helpless anymore. I learned so much in this program. There is a way.

While some students mentioned their families' economic plight, it was the parents who focused on this topic. Additionally, without the English language ability of their children, most parents expressed frustration with the language barrier they faced on a daily basis. The American Dream Academy being offered in Spanish eliminated the language barrier while providing parents with the tools they needed to understand the various ways to pay for college.

Students expressed different challenges as the prepared for college. First-generation students share a similar sense of responsibility as they embark on their higher education journey. Multiple students discussed their personal challenges as the first in their families to navigate the American school system. One student shared her feelings about what it means to be a first-generation student:

> I have this weight on my shoulders that I carry with me. I'm the first to go to college and the first to earn a degree. I'll be the one who will get my family out of poverty. I worry that so much responsibility is on me. I feel real pressure, but I know my parents are 100% behind me. They've learned how to support me here, which is something that I don't think I ever felt before. We learned so much together and that gives me the confidence I need to keep moving forward. I know my parents will help me through future challenges. This program showed me and my family that we can face barriers and fears together and can do anything.

Another student described originally feeling lost and a lack of belonging. She described these feelings as being a potential barrier to her success. Before ADA, she couldn't see herself going to college. She felt "stuck." She further explained:

> I couldn't see past high school graduation. It was like being stuck in molasses. I wanted to do something. I wanted to go to college and be like the students I see in the movies. You know, like when they live on campus and have all these friends, but I didn't know how to get there. I've always wanted to be a businessperson. I'm good at business and numbers. After talking to students in the panel, I realized that we all have the same fears of being alone. It's not like I could ask my parents to help me because they didn't know what I was going through. I couldn't ask them for guidance because they've never been through this either, so I felt alone, stuck. But this program gave me the courage to move. I don't feel stuck anymore. I know there's so much help for us. People really want to help me. There's so much information out there for us, for people like me.

While the perceived challenges and barriers were different for students and their parents, completion of the ADA provided both groups with the knowledge, support, and tools necessary to overcome challenges and barriers that might impede them in the college-going process.

Family Support in the College-Going Process

Effectively engaging the entire family during all aspects of the college-going process is crucial for a successful transition from high school to higher education. This is especially true of marginalized groups such as first-generation families, immigrants and students of color. Providing support and guidance to families creates a deeper understanding of the college-going process and builds stronger family relationships. Parents, as well as students, reported similar appreciation for the college staff that was available during the FAFSA application process, which requires parents and students to work together. Both parents and students discussed feeling supported by the college staff, who consistently engaged during the ADA program. A student whose parents struggled with the FAFSA application stated:

> I am so happy that the staff were able to help me and my parents to complete the FAFSA because I don't think that we would've done it alone. It was too difficult to understand for us, and we had some important tax forms missing. But they were really patient and even waited until almost 10 o'clock at night to help us finish it.

Other students focused more on their "improved" relationship with their parents. This speaks to the influence that parents have on motivating their children, particularly in the college access process. Several students expressed feeling more supported by their

parents as a result of having more conversations that focused on college. For example, one student mentioned that "my parents now ask me more questions about college, usually during dinner. My mom asks me questions about school more often now. That's why I feel more supported, like they understand me now, and they want to help."

One parent in particular, who lacked the appropriate documentation to complete the FAFSA application, made special arrangements with the AWC financial aid staff to help her outside of class. This parent was grateful for the staff of AWC and for their willingness to help her. She discussed her appreciation:

> I'm so grateful for all of you. You have been so kind and generous with your time. You truly understand families like us who are totally new to this process. Navigating the college-going process is quite difficult. There's too much to know in such little time. I don't understand how others have gone through this process alone. If it weren't for dedicated staff, I don't know if I could help my child or even know where to begin. I'm grateful for the support this program has given us. I'm more confident as a parent after attending this program because I know there is help for my daughter and that she'll be able to make it in college.

After attending ADA, parents understood the critical role they play in supporting their child. This sentiment was repeated by multiple parents during the interviews. For instance, one parent expressed his joy of being able to provide guidance to his son now that he has a better understanding of college expectations:

> Before attending this program, I didn't have answers for my son when he asked about going to college. I tried to avoid talking about it because I didn't know enough. I didn't want to give him the wrong advice and I couldn't provide

guidance. But now I can offer advice and guidance to my son. I feel I can support him better. I can say that I am part of his support system.

Another parent reported her increased involvement in her son's education. She shared that dinner time discussions are now entirely different. She said that her family now talk about her son's plans and school activities because she's more aware:

> Our dinner time is more engaging now because we talk more about school. I'll ask about his day at school and ask about events where I might need to be a part of. I'll ask about his classes and homework, or I'll ask about appointments with counselors and other things like that. I can see that he's happy about our conversations. We get more excited about dinner now. Before, our dinner conversations were minimal and mostly about social events but now they are more focused on college talk. I think my son understands that we support him better because we have a deeper understanding of the college-going process. I think our relationship grew stronger and better.

Both parents and students expressed an understanding of the symbiotic relationship required to navigate the college admission process. Both groups interviewed confirmed the survey results expressing great satisfaction with their participation in the American Dream Academy. All participants consistently reported seeing their family as suitable for college, and all agreed that the program provided the knowledge and tools needed to navigate the American higher education system.

These sentiments were re-affirmed in the written participant testimonials delivered by both students and parents during the program's final session. Transcripts of the full testimonials can be found in Appendix G. There were a number of common

themes expressed by both students and parents. Both groups expressed how grateful they were to be able to participate in the ADA. Both students and parents felt supported, encouraged and motivated by the program staff.

Both groups expressed a new belief that college was within their financial means, with financial aid, scholarships and work-study options available to them. As a family unit, they came to understand their ability to overcome the challenges and barriers to attending college.

Perhaps most powerfully, both student and parent speeches expressed with certainty that college attendance was suitable for their family. Together, they felt prepared to complete the application process, navigate the financial aid process, and understand the rigors of earning a college degree

Vignettes

While the quantitative and qualitative data provide powerful indications of the value of the American Dream Academy, there are powerful stories of the individual families who participated in the ADA. These deeply personal stories truly give voice to the program's participants, their struggles, and triumphs. The vignettes are found in Appendix H.

Summary

These qualitative findings suggested that students gained knowledge about the rigors and expectations of college as a result of completing the American Dream Academy. Parents also developed a deeper understanding of the American school system, including higher education, after attending the ADA. After completing the American Dream Academy, both students and parents are more confident about attending and

completing a college degree, with both students and parents demonstrating resiliency in overcoming difficulties and challenges as their perception changed about the college-going process. Additionally, parents learned different ways to support their students through their college-going journey, while gaining new perspectives on the expectations of being a college student. Finally, students now have a stronger relationship with their parents as a result of completing the program as a family.

The conclusions from these analyses can be summarized as follows. Results from both quantitative and qualitative analyses are consistent with each other. The quantitative results consistently indicate that the ADA program was effective. Scores for students and parents across all scales increased after graduation from the ADA, demonstrating its effectiveness in these measures. These findings were also reflected in the qualitative results, where interviews and testimonials indicated increased belief, knowledge, and self-efficacy measures for both students and parents. Taken together, this study demonstrated the importance of programs like ADA in the lives of first-generation college students such as those in Yuma, Arizona.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This mixed-method action research aimed to determine whether the American Dream Academy offered in rural Yuma, Arizona impacted the self-efficacy, beliefs, and knowledge of the college-going culture among first-generation Latino students and their parents. In this chapter, I connect the results to the literature used to frame this study. I also discuss how the quantitative and qualitative results complement each other. A deep-dive discussion of the areas of convergence and dissonance is presented in this chapter, as well as implications for higher education practice and areas where future research is called for.

Complementarity of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

Triangulation of data is critical in mixed-methods research because it demonstrates how qualitative and quantitative data support each other and often build on one another. It also establishes the convergence, complementarity, and dissonance of the data (Erzberger & Prein, 1997). Triangulation enhances the validity of research and increases the chances that the findings will be credible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Creswell and Creswell (2018) stipulated that triangulation is part of the mixed-methods approach to justify the results from different data sources. I used a side-by-side comparison method that integrated several data sources to identify areas of convergence and dissonance. This process helped to establish trustworthiness and confidence in the results through surveys, interviews, and testimonials.

I used the protocol Farmer et al. (2006) developed to triangulate the collected quantitative and qualitative data. I began by listing the assertions from the results of the

qualitative analysis. Next, I used the quantitative findings discussed in Chapter 4 to determine the degree of convergence in which data were in agreement, partial agreement, silenced or dissonance. Table 13 demonstrates the complementarity of the data, validating the results of this study.

Table 13
Outcomes of Triangulating the Quantitative and Qualitative Data

Qualitative Assertions	Quantitative Survey Data	Convergence
• Students' knowledge about the rigors of college and accessing information resulted from attending the ADA. • Parents can support their children after learning about the expectations of getting into college.	• Student Knowledge Construct: This construct was related to the student's overall agreement with the statements regarding their knowledge of the college admission process. This subscale showed a positive change. Overall, there was a 76% increase after completing ADA. • Parent Knowledge Construct: These questions dealt with statements regarding their knowledge of the college-going experience. The results of the post-test showed the most significant change. Overall, there was a 108% increase in knowledge after completing ADA.	Agreement
• After completing ADA, students see themselves as successful college students. • Parents see their students completing a college degree after learning about the college-going process through ADA.	• Student Beliefs subscale measures the level of agreement a student has with statements related to their personal beliefs regarding attending college. The post-test results indicate an increase of 41% to "Strongly Agree." • Parent Beliefs construct focused on levels of agreement regarding personal beliefs about the college process. The results of the post-test show a positive increase of 43%.	Agreement
• Students and parents demonstrated resiliency in overcoming challenges as their perception changed about the college-going process.	• Student Knowledge construct: 2 out of 14 questions addressed a change in perception about the college-going process • Parent Knowledge construct: 2 out of 11 questions addressed the change in perception about the college-going process.	Partial agreement
• Students have a stronger relationship with their parents due to completing the program as a family.		Silenced
• Parents gained a new perspective on the expectations of being a college student.	• Parent Knowledge construct: the questions in this construct dealt with ways of supporting their children through school. • Self-efficacy construct: the questions in this construct addressed ways of supporting their child.	Agreement

Convergence

After creating a visual representation of data triangulation, I identified areas of overlap in data sets. There were three areas where the data sets were in full agreement. The most positive outcome of this study was the results of the post-test survey, which indicated a notable increase in knowledge by students and parents. The results show that both quantitative and qualitative data are in full agreement. This demonstrates that qualitative data gathered through the semi-structured interviews complement the quantitative data from the participants' surveys. This also supports the assertions that students' increased knowledge about the rigors of college and accessing information about attending college resulted from completing the ADA, as well as strengthening the assertion that parents can support their children after learning about the processes involved in college enrollment. Another area in which the data sets fully agree is the personal beliefs in their ability to accomplish tasks. The results of the *Beliefs* construct are positive; the students' post-survey indicated a shift to "Strongly Agree" for the statements of this construct. The parents' post-survey had similar results, showing a positive change to "Strongly Agree." This outcome supports the assertion that after completing ADA, students could see themselves as successful college students. Similarly, the parent survey results support the assertion that parents see their students completing a college degree after learning about the college-going process through ADA.

Dissonance

Two outcomes did not show full agreement across data sets. In both cases, no quantitative data were collected that could be compared to the qualitative results garnered

from the interview process. The most noteworthy qualitative data set results were students' relationship with parents. Students revealed that, due to attending and completing the American Dream Academy with their parent(s), their relationships became stronger. Quantitative data did not corroborate this because the pre-and-posttest items did not assess relationships with family. Another area of disagreement was a demonstrated resiliency in overcoming challenges as their perception changed about the college-going process. However, two out of 14 questions in the pre-and-posttest in the *Knowledge* construct did address change in perception, as did two out of 11 questions in the parent pre-and-posttest *Knowledge* construct.. Although the quantitative data did not measure direct resiliency in overcoming challenges, there was evidence of resiliency through interviews and testimonies.

Outcomes Related to Research and Theory

The four research questions were designed to understand the perspectives of first-generation Latino students and their parents. The quantitative and qualitative methods used to answer these questions resulted in outcomes consistent with the literature. Research supported implementing support systems for first-generation Latino students and documented the impact of parental involvement and influence on the college-going behavior of their children. The trifecta of theorists (Bandura (1977), Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993), and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) provided the theoretical framework for this work.

Discussion of the Results

To what extent did completing the American Dream Academy improve self-efficacy among twelfth-grade students? Data from a pre-and-post ADA survey

administered to student participants during the first session and again at the last session of the ADA program show that self-efficacy had improved after completing the program.

Recall that Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as the individual belief, confidence, and persistence toward completing a task. This is an important outcome because high levels of self-efficacy are linked to stronger persistence among first-generation students who do not have college-educated parents to help guide them through the admissions and enrollment process (Cahalan et al., 2020; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Tinto, 1987). Self-efficacy is equally important following enrollment, as first-generation students may need academic tutoring, career advising or seek the assistance of their professors (Chang et al., 2020; Crisp et al., 2015; McCulloh, 2020; Tinto, 1987). Students with higher levels of self-efficacy are more likely to self-advocate for their needs on campus.

To what extent did completing the American Dream Academy increase self-efficacy of higher education among parents of twelfth-grade students? Data from a parent pre-and-post survey, which replicated the student survey, that was administered during the first session of the program and the final session of the program indicated that self-efficacy among parents did indeed increase because of attending the ADA. These results contributed to an understanding of the influence and impact of parental involvement on student perceptions of the college-going process, as aligned to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995) model of parental involvement.

Parents are quite often their child's primary influence when it comes to deciding on their future career. Numerous studies have indicated the association between student achievement and parental self-efficacy (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Patrón, 2020;

Peterson et al., 2018; Pstross et al., 2016). Self-efficacy in parents plays a key role in maintaining a strong relational bond and influencing their children's educational achievement. A parent with high levels of self-efficacy can serve as an educational partner in helping their child navigate the college-going process (Jasis, 2021). This is a challenge for parents who did not attend college since they do not have the experience to help develop educational self-efficacy, or for those Latino parents whose limited English language ability is often a barrier to developing the educational self-efficacy needed to support their children.

Overall, these improvements were attributed to the American Dream Academy sessions. The data also confirmed growth in students' beliefs in their ability to persist to their goal of attending college, in addition to parents' beliefs in their ability to support and guide their child.

To what extent does completion of the American Dream Academy result in the completion of the college application process and the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)? There was a significant increase in the proportion of college application and FAFSA completions, indicating the likelihood that several of these students may enroll in college, which is also shown in the literature (Carnevale et al., 2021; Crisp et al., 2015). Numerous studies have shown that students who have completed the FAFSA and submitted at least one college application by the end of their senior year in high school have an increased likelihood of enrolling at college and finishing a degree (Benson et al., 2007; Borjian, 2018; Carnevale et al., 2021; Crisp et al., 2015). Tinto's (1987) model of student persistence emphasized that students who are more knowledgeable about the college-going process and expectations are more likely to see themselves as college

students, increasing the likelihood of completing a degree. Many families assume that a college education is not financially viable for their families and never bother to complete the FAFSA. However, Tinto (1987) also stressed that financially prepared students have increased chances of earning a college degree. This is particularly important for first-generation students from lower socioeconomic strata who may need federal financial aid to complete a degree.

The results indicate the success of the ADA in supporting students and their parents in completing the FAFSA and a college application. These quantitative results align with Ramos-Sánchez & Nichols's (2011) research about the impact of high self-efficacy on creating a college-going mindset among first-generation students. Students with high self-efficacy adjust better during the first year of college than those with lower self-efficacy. Students who are knowledgeable about the college-going process have higher self-efficacy and lower attrition rates. High expectations of self may improve performance and increase a person's willingness to persevere (Bandura, 1997).

Hoover-Dempsey and Saddler (1995) highlighted that parents must understand their roles in their child's education to become more engaged and involved. This understanding helps parents cultivate a college-going culture within their families.

These findings further support numerous studies of first-generation students that show that knowledge of specific topics about the college-going process increases self-efficacy, motivation, and attitudes needed for a successful transition to a post-secondary institution (DeWitz et al., 2009; Pratt et al., 2017; Radunzel, 2018; Speroni, 2011). A more comprehensive understanding of the college-going process and expectations is critical for navigating a successful transition to college. This is especially true for first-

generation Latino students who may have not been exposed to college-prep workshops or classes. The results of this study indicate that students' knowledge of the college enrollment process had a positive increase due to completing the ADA. That is in line with the numerous studies that concluded that students who participate in college preparation activities increase their chances of earning a post-secondary degree (Benson et al., 2007; Borjian, 2018; Carnevale et al., 2021).

Building positive relationships with faculty and staff also contributes to increased self-efficacy. Tinto (1987) emphasized that student connections to faculty increased the chances of belongingness and retention among first-generation students. The ADA was facilitated by the university, college, and high school staff to establish early connections and encourage building rapport. This approach is supported by previous research indicating that students increase self-efficacy and post-secondary adjustment when connections with university personnel are established early on (Ndiaye & Wolf, 2016; Museus & Chang, 2021; Tate et al., 2015).

Discussion of Qualitative Findings

How did participation in the American Dream Academy impact student and parent perceptions of higher education? Data from semi-structured interviews provided a comprehensive understanding of students' and parents' transformational perspectives on the college-going process during their participation in the ADA. Even though both groups felt they had the knowledge and self-confidence to navigate the college admission process, parents' perceptions about the college-going process differed from those of the students. Parents focused more on gaining the knowledge they felt they lacked to support and advocate for their children, having concluded that having a deeper understanding of

their role in their children's education allowed them to feel more confident about the college-going process. These results support the model of parent engagement (Hoover-Dempsey & Saddler, 1995), which emphasized that parents engage in their child's education when they have developed a personal understanding of their role within their child's education. This further indicates that parents develop a more positive sense of self-efficacy for helping their children succeed in school.

These outcomes coincide with studies that support pre-college workshops and courses increasing college-readiness specifically in first-generation students (Jenkins & Janosik, 2009; Lee et al., 2022; Hutchens et al., 2011). Macakova and Wood (2020) found that participation in college preparatory activities and workshops increased high school seniors' sense of belongingness and self-advocacy. Additionally, several studies have concluded that variables affecting first-generation students' academic adjustment and performance included a sense of belonging and family, social, and institutional support (Dewitz et al., 2009; Phinney & Haas 2003). The qualitative results show a positive shift in student perceptions about the college-going process, including feeling more parental support.

Tinto's (1975) model of student persistence stressed that students' perceptions of their social integration into the institution represented an important factor in their persistence. Student persistence is developed by the experiences created through interactions with their environment; this means that students who feel connected to their peers and institution have a more positive educational experience and tend to persist in their post-secondary goals. The results also support Freire's (2017) stance on learning

communities' role in integrating marginalized groups by increasing student participation and engagement inside and outside the classroom.

This study's quantitative and qualitative results demonstrate that students and their parents benefited from completing the ADA. Results from all four research questions highlighted the benefits of the ADA. Both student and parental levels of self-efficacy increased. A very high percentage of program participants completed the FAFSA and college applications.

Limitations

Several limitations had an impact on the results and outcomes of this study. One of the problems of organizing a college-readiness program is timing. A program such as the American Dream Academy, which prepares high school seniors for post-secondary education, must follow the FAFSA calendar. Students must begin the FAFSA application when the application portals open to increase their chances of obtaining the most financial assistance. Therefore, scheduling to implement ADA at the high school was extremely challenging; I needed the support of the school and district level administrators to schedule this program before the FAFSA application opening date.

Another limitation of this study was that the participants of ADA were self-selected, indicating that a certain level of intrinsic determination and commitment to education already existed. All the student participants had a 2.3 or higher grade-point average, one of the qualifications to enter college. This particular group of student participants was quite homogenous, given that 100% of participants were bilingual, Latino, and first-generation college students. Therefore, the findings of this particular study may not be a good representation of the overall student population across Arizona.

This limitation may pose a challenge for generalizing the results across larger student populations.

A final limitation of this study was a relatively small participant sample size. The results are based on the 20 students and parents who completed the program; while this is a sufficiently large group from which to draw statistically valid conclusions, it is important not to overgeneralize the findings.

Implications for Practice

Latinos are America's fastest growing demographic group; the United States 2020 census found that the Latino population grew by 23% in the previous decade (US Census, 2021). Much of this increase is driven by recent immigrants coming to the United States in search of a better life for their families. If these immigrants are to achieve the American Dream, it is imperative that they are able to successfully navigate the American system of higher education. Low levels of education in their native counties among parents, a language barrier, transportation insecurity in rural areas and precarious financial situations are all significant barriers to earning a college degree for first-generation students.

Despite the formidable barriers facing first-generation Latino students, the American Dream Academy successfully supported students on their journey to higher education. Providing intense support to both parents and students in a culturally and linguistically appropriate program, the ADA provides the participants with the tools they will need to navigate the college enrollment process. With appropriate support, first-generation Latino students can complete college, contribute to a vibrant economy and live the American Dream.

A potential implication for practice is that this type of intervention is labor-intensive. As discussed in the limitations, a great deal of planning and scheduling is involved in implementing a program like the ADA. This includes many logistical variables such as location, time, and organization. The ADA, and similar programs, must be scheduled in the days leading to the opening of the FAFSA application because missing the FAFSA deadline may pose financial burdens on students. The sessions must also be in the evening or on weekends when working parents can participate. All of these factors may limit the ability of other organizations to replicate the ADA model.

Another potential implication is the need for multi-institutional collaboration. Including the local community college and the state university can complicate staff and resources availability. For example, financial aid counselors were scheduled to work after hours with the parents. Although this was a great benefit to the students and parents, it proved to be costly. Identifying and reserving classrooms also required extensive planning.

As I discuss in Chapter 2, even though colleges and universities have support systems for first-generation students, parents often need opportunities to be part of their children's college experience. This is especially true of first-generation parents dealing with a language barrier. Colleges and universities must do more to connect with marginalized families in their native language so that parents can support their children through their educational journey. This involves identifying and hiring bilingual facilitators, translating educational materials, and creating recruiting materials in English and Spanish, all of which can be both time-consuming and costly. Additionally, engaging parents early ensures a better transition for their children into higher education.

Finally, local community college involvement is critical for supporting first-generation students, especially in rural areas. As discussed extensively in Chapter 2, community colleges offer lower tuition than universities, allow students to stay close to home while completing a degree, and offer smaller class sizes. These attributes can benefit first-generation students seeking to earn a college degree.

Recommendations for Sustainability

The American Dream Academy was customized to meet the needs of the San Luis community. A deep understanding of the social and economic challenges of the local area and its people is an essential aspect of tailoring the delivery of ADA. For instance, since most families' primary language is Spanish, it was important to reach potential participants using their native language. Therefore, flyers and social media announcements needed to be in Spanish. Catering to working parents by offering the ADA evenings is another aspect of customizing programming for parent engagement. Anticipating the needs of participants should be considered while planning a program like ADA. For example, since the sessions were offered in the evenings, having food and drinks was essential to convey a sense of a caring community. This demonstrated to parents and students that their engagement and commitment were valued.

Preliminary work began with securing buy-in from appropriate stakeholders and other school-based leaders. Having school leadership on board is essential for program sustainability. The next phase of the preparatory work is logistical, such as reserving classrooms, computer labs, AV support, and janitorial services. Careful consideration of an appropriate timeframe to implement the ADA is the most critical aspect of planning.

For example, offering the ADA to high school seniors around the opening of FAFSA was essential to maximum financial aid.

Implementing a program like the ADA requires a great deal of preparation and collaboration from multiple institutions and community members. Building and maintaining deep relationships with the community is critical for the sustainability of ADA. An ongoing public commitment by all parties involved is necessary for such programs to be sustained long-term. This requires a commitment of funds and human resources by the high school district, the community college, and the university partner. With this long-term commitment, programs like the ADA will become an embedded aspect of the community's educational ecosystem.

Implications for Research

There are several broader implications for research regarding first-generation students. These include the educational implications of global migration to the United States and the need for extending the ADA to younger high school students and perhaps even middle school students. The potential impact of offering college preparation courses online is also a topic for future research.

In recent years, the United States has seen an influx of immigrant families from around the globe. Families arrive with children in tow who will need to enter school and, ideally, eventually earn a college degree and contribute to a vibrant economy. Given that many of these recent immigrants will likely be first-generation families, we must find effective means to support these learners. Future research is called for on the best practices associated with supporting immigrant students through higher education.

Another opportunity for future study is to explore the effectiveness of programs like the American Dream Academy that will target students much earlier in high school or even in middle school. Some studies have found that children begin to form their attitude about attending college as early as fifth grade (Cahalan et al., 2020; Clark & Dorris, 2006). Offering a high school program as early as the 9th grade would prepare students for dual enrollment, Advanced Placement courses, and other college-going events, all of which are important to beginning the process of a successful post-secondary transition. It would also be beneficial for studies to be conducted measuring the effectiveness of middle and early high school programs.

The American Dream Academy was conducted with in-person, face-to-face sessions requiring participants to be physically present to participate. While this was determined to be the most effective means of reaching the program's goals, it likely prohibited some families from participating. Future study on the effectiveness of on-line college preparation programs for first-generation Latino students would add to our understanding of this topic.

Next Steps

Although the ADA successfully supports high school seniors and their parents to take the appropriate steps toward enrolling in higher education, this is only the beginning of their journey. Identifying programs and services that will continue supporting students through their first year of college is critical for long term success. Programs such as Gear Up (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) and TRIO that build on the skills learned in the ADA, can help first-generation students adjust better socially and academically. These programs help first-generation students by mentoring,

tutoring, offering study skills workshops, and summer enrichment programs on college campuses. Connecting to such programs while still in high school would give students and their families a solid start to their college experience.

Conclusion

This study highlights the need to implement the American Dream Academy, or similar programs, in high schools to support often marginalized first-generation students and their parents. The results of this study serve as evidence that ADA supports the transition of first-generation Latino students to higher education. The critical role of parents was verified as the success of ADA requires that it be implemented with fidelity, meaning students and parents must participate together. The ADA was successful because it was offered fully in Spanish, the preferred language of both students and parents. Programs like ADA are essential for supporting and ensuring that first-generation students have the knowledge to complete college applications and ultimately achieve college success. In states like Arizona with large immigrant populations, it is critical that similar programs be successfully implemented to support first-generation students and their parents during their college-going quest.

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APPENDIXA

PARENT PLEDGE FORM

Parent's Pledge

This document affirms your desire to register for the American Dream Academy workshops to be held in this school. These workshops are carried out with the intent to help your children achieve their maximum academic potential, and to help you help them in their academic achievement.

1. I love my children and that is why the dreams I have for their lives will come true.
2. From this moment on, I make the decision to ensure their success and to have the opportunity to go to college.
3. For the educational wellbeing of my children, I commit to faithfully attend these workshops. This is how I will acquire the knowledge, tools and the motivation necessary to carry them to success.
4. I will resist all obstacles and inconvenience that arise, and I will not fail in my commitment to complete the program. I know that the effort and the commitment will be rewarded and bear fruit in my children's education.
5. In order to arrive at my dream of my children attending the university, it will be necessary to be actively involved in the school and in my community.
6. I pledge to fulfill my duties as a parent to my children and, at the same time, advocate for and demand the best quality of education and school resources for them.
7. I will regularly visit the school in order to remain close to my children's learning process and to collaborate with the teachers and administrators. The only way to ensure the quality of education they receive is to be close and actively involved.
8. I am the first and best teacher for my children. In the first 18 years of their life, they will spend 75% of their time at home. For that reason, I will do my part by creating a caring home that facilitates and motivates their learning.
9. I will be engaged with my community in order to obtain the benefits of support networks that it offers me, such as the library, recreation centers, and organizations that provide services.
10. I believe that there is no better institution for my children than the family. For that reason, I commit to give them the best that exists in me and secure strong bonds with my children that will be the foundation for the rest of their lives.

Parent Signature: _____

This agreement made this _____ day of _____ , 20_____

Please fill out the form below and return it to a recruiter from the American Dream Academy.

Pledge Number

15-563

Parent / Guardian Information:

Full Name: _____

Home Phone: _____ Other Number: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Child(ren) Information: Please provide us with the full name of all your children.

Full Name of Each Child	Grade	Name of their School
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		

American Dream Academy Parent Commitment Form - SX Reg Rev. 05/10

APPENDIX B

FAFSA CHECKLIST FOR STUDENTS AND PARENTS

Complete the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) at **studentaid.gov** to apply for federal, state, and college-based financial aid.

Dependent students must include both student and parent data on the FAFSA. Determine your dependency status by answering the questions on the back.

REQUIRED INFORMATION	WHERE TO FIND IT
☐ Student and parent 2021 Federal Income Tax Forms and, if applicable, Schedule K-1 (Form 1065)	Personal records or visit **irs.gov/transcript**
☐ Student and parent 2021 W-2 Forms	Personal records or contact your employer(s) or visit **irs.gov/transcript**
☐ Student and parent Federal Student Aid usernames and passwords	Create student and parent accounts at **studentaid.gov**
☐ Student driver's license number	Personal records
☐ Student and parent email addresses	Student: _____ Parent: _____
☐ Student and parent Social Security numbers	Personal records or call the Social Security Administration at 800-772-1213
☐ Student and parent dates of birth	Parent 1: ___/___/_____ (Month Day Year) Parent 2: ___/___/_____ (Month Day Year)
☐ Date parents were married/remarried, separated, divorced, or widowed	___/_____ (Month Year)
☐ Student and parent savings/checking account balances	Student: $_____ Parent: $_____
☐ Student and parent investments (ie. stocks, bonds, mutual funds, 529 plans, rental properties) excluding home and retirement	Student: $_____ Parent: $_____
☐ Current value of business or investment farm	$_____ or contact your accountant
☐ 2021 Child support paid or received	$_____ or contact Nebraska Payment Center at 877-631-9973 or **https://childsupport.nebraska.gov**
☐ 2021 Workers' compensation benefits	$_____ or contact your employer
☐ 2021 Housing/food/living allowance for military and clergy	$_____ or reference Leave and Earnings Statement (military) or W-2 form (clergy)
☐ 2021 Veteran's noneducation benefits	$_____ or contact Department of Veterans Affairs toll free at 844-698-2311 or **va.gov**
☐ Student Alien Registration Number/USCIS Number for eligible non-citizens	Contact U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services at **uscis.gov**

Source: studentaid.gov

APPENDIX C

STUDENT SURVEY

American Dream Academy Student Survey

Please indicate how much you **agree** or **disagree** with the following statements. The right answer is the one that is most true to you. Please fill in the circles completely.

Directions: For the following sections please indicate your level of agreement with each of these statements. Based on a four-point Likert Scale: *1= Strongly Disagree,* 2 = *Disagree,* 3 = *Agree,* 4 = *Strongly Agree.*

Strongly Disagree 1	**Disagree 2**	**Agree 3**	**Strongly Agree 4**	**This is what I believe (Beliefs)**
○	○	○	○	1. My parents are my most important teacher(s).
○	○	○	○	2. It is my and my parents' responsibility to make sure I finish high school.
○	○	○	○	3. It is my and my parents' responsibility to talk about the importance of continuing my education beyond high school.
○	○	○	○	4. It is my and my parents' responsibility to communicate with my teacher(s) regularly.
○	○	○	○	5. It is the responsibility of both me and my parents to talk about my school day.
○	○	○	○	6. My parents and I can make a significant difference in my school performance.
○	○	○	○	7. I can do even the hardest homework if I try.
○	○	○	○	8. I can learn the things taught in school.
○	○	○	○	9. I can figure out difficult homework.

Strongly Disagree 1	**Disagree 2**	**Agree 3**	**Strongly Agree 4**	**This is what I know (Knowledge)**
○	○	○	○	10. I understand the important terms and concepts necessary to help me graduate from high school prepare to get a university education.
○	○	○	○	11. I understand the important academic standards and requirements I must meet to succeed academically.

○	○	○	○	12. I know the steps required to help me succeed academically and go to a university.
○	○	○	○	13. I know how to work with my teacher(s), principal, counselor and others at my school.
○	○	○	○	14. I am prepared for the rigor of college.
○	○	○	○	15. I understand the impact of my grade point average (GPA) toward college admission.
○	○	○	○	16. I understand how to earn college credit.
○	○	○	○	17. I know the difference between community colleges and 4-year universities.
○	○	○	○	18. I know how to find scholarships to pay for college.
○	○	○	○	19. I know the importance of completing the FAFSA.
○	○	○	○	20. I understand that there are possible solutions to paying for college.
○	○	○	○	21. I see myself going to college.
○	○	○	○	22. I know the complete cost of attending college, including both direct and indirect costs.
○	○	○	○	23. I know how to apply for college admission.

Strongly Disagree **1**	**Disagree** **2**	**Agree** **3**	**Strongly Agree** **4**	**This is what I do (Self-Efficacy)**
○	○	○	○	24. I keep in touch with my teacher(s) about my academic performance.
○	○	○	○	25. I keep in touch with my teacher(s) about my participation in class.
○	○	○	○	26. I talk with my parents about the importance of continuing my education beyond high school.
○	○	○	○	27. I have developed a plan with my parents to make sure I succeed academically and be prepared to get a college degree.

○	○	○	○	28. I make sure I attend school every day.
○	○	○	○	29. I can go and talk with the most of my teacher.
○	○	○	○	30. I can get my teachers to help me if I have problems with other students.
○	○	○	○	31. I ask the teacher to tell me how well I'm doing in class.

Directions: For the following section please answer *Yes* or *No*.

Yes	**No**	**This is what I have completed**
○	○	I have completed the FAFSA.
○	○	I have completed the college admission application.

APPENDIX D

PARENT SURVEY

American Dream Academy Parent Survey

Please indicate how much you **agree** or **disagree** with the following statements. The right answer is the one that is most true to you. Please fill in the circles completely.

Directions: For the following sections please indicate your level of agreement with each of these statements. Based on a four-point Likert Scale: *1= Strongly Disagree,* 2 = *Disagree,* 3 = *Agree,* 4 = *Strongly Agree.*

Strongly Disagree **1**	**Disagree** **2**	**Agree** **3**	**Strongly Agree** **4**	**This is what I believe (Beliefs)**
○	○	○	○	1. I am my child's most important teacher.
○	○	○	○	2. My child's teacher cannot make sure my child will succeed academically without working with me as a partner.
○	○	○	○	3. It is my responsibility my child finishes high school.
○	○	○	○	4. It is my responsibility to talk with my child about the importance of continuing his/her education beyond high school.
○	○	○	○	5. It is my responsibility to communicate with my child's teacher on a regular basis.
○	○	○	○	6. It is my responsibility to make sure my child completes his/her homework.
○	○	○	○	7. It is important to talk with other parents from my child's school.
○	○	○	○	8. It is my responsibility to talk with my child about the school day.
○	○	○	○	9. A student's motivation to do well in school depends on his/her parents.
○	○	○	○	10. Other people have more influence on my child's grades than I do.
○	○	○	○	11. I can make a significant difference in my child's school performance.

Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4	This is what I know (Knowledge)
○	○	○	○	12. I understand the important terms and concepts necessary to help my child graduate high school and be prepared to enter college to complete a degree.
○	○	○	○	13. I know how to support my child so that he/she is successful in completing high school.
○	○	○	○	14. I understand the important academic standards and requirements my child must meet to succeed academically.
○	○	○	○	15. I understand the rigors and expectations of college.
○	○	○	○	16. I understand the importance of completing the FAFSA.
○	○	○	○	17. I know the steps required to help my child succeed academically to go to college.
○	○	○	○	18. I understand that there are possible solutions to paying for my child's college education.
○	○	○	○	19. I can see my child going to college.
○	○	○	○	20. I understand the college admission process.
○	○	○	○	21. I understand the complete cost of college, including both direct and indirect costs.
○	○	○	○	22. I understand that working full time during college may limit academic success.

Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4	My Role in My Child's College-Going Process (self-efficacy)
○	○	○	○	23. I keep in touch with teachers about my child's academic performance.
○	○	○	○	24. I talk with my child about the importance of continuing his education beyond high school.
○	○	○	○	25. I have made a plan to make sure that my child succeeds academically and graduates from high school prepared to get a university education.
○	○	○	○	26. I understand the role parents play in the completion of the FAFSA.
○	○	○	○	27. I make sure my child attends school every day.
○	○	○	○	28. I talk with my child about my expectations for his/her success.
○	○	○	○	29. I ensure that my child is completing his/her homework regularly.

Directions: For the following section, please answer *Yes* or *No*.

Yes	No	This is what I have completed
○	○	I have completed the FAFSA.ap
○	○	I have completed the college admission application.

APPENDIX E

STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about your experience during the American Dream Academy.
2. On a scale from 1-4, how confident are you in your ability to complete a college degree? Please explain your answer.
3. Describe your experience filling out the FAFSA.
4. Did you learn about ways to pay for college that you were not aware of before? If so, please explain.
5. Describe any challenges or barriers you face that may prevent you from reaching your educational goals.
6. How do you feel about being a first-generation Latino student preparing to go to college?
7. After you and your parents completed ADA, describe the level of support you have received from your family members.
8. Did you learn about the admission requirements at college/university? If so, please elaborate.
9. After completing the American Dream Academy, do you feel better prepared for the expectations of college? Please explain.

APPENDIX F

PARENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about your experience during the American Dream Academy.
2. On a scale from 1-4 how confident are you in your child's ability to complete a college degree? Please explain.
3. Describe your experience filling out the FAFSA.
4. Did you learn about ways to pay for college that you were not aware of before? If so, please explain.
5. How do you feel about your child being a first-generation Latino student preparing to go to college?
6. After completing the American Dream Academy, do you have a better understanding of the expectations of college? Please explain.
7. Describe any challenges or barriers that may prevent your child from reaching his/her educational goals.
8. Did you learn about the admission requirements at college/university? If so, please elaborate.
9. After completing the Academy, how will you support your child as he/she transitions to college? Please explain.
10. Did you learn about high school graduation requirements at SLHS? Please explain.

APPENDIX G

STUDENT AND PARENT TESTIMONIALS

Student Testimonial 1. *Good evening, family and friends. My name is Vicente, and like everyone else, I know how important education is for many students. Being the child of parents who had no formal schooling, it has been difficult to have the right support about school and college. I remember that I used to get frustrated at not knowing how to do my homework and that my mom couldn't help me with it because she didn't speak English. Thanks to the determination and moral support of many, I have been able to stand out and realize that I can become whatever I want and I know that I can and you can go to college because we have the support of many people and most importantly, our parents. Just as I like to do well, I like to see others be successful. Thanks to the American Dream Academy, I am sure that many students will feel more confident of themselves and will be able to become whatever it is they want to become. I take with me good memories that will help me in the future. Thank you so much everyone.*

Student Testimonial 2. *Thank you all for coming here tonight. I want to also thank my parents for being here and supporting me. I am also speaking tonight for all of my fellow peers in the American Dream Academy. We have learned so much these past few weeks. We are grateful for the support that our teachers, counselors, principal, AWC, and ASU have given us. You have given us the inspiration and motivation to go to college. You have also given our parents the courage and knowledge to support us. We're all going to college because of your support. Thank you.*

Student Testimonial 3. *Thank you all for being here tonight. I am honored to be picked as tonight's speaker. The American Dream Academy has been our support system. They gave us all the information we needed to apply to college and to complete FAFSA. The principal and college president and teachers all gave us the courage to go to college because they believed in us. I want to also thank our parents here tonight because without you we wouldn't be here. Your dedication to us means so much.*

Parent Testimonial 1. *Good evening, everybody. I'd like to start by thanking the organizations involved in offering this great opportunity for us. It was a great experience learning all the information received every Tuesday. We feel more prepared to help our children secure a spot in college. Maybe we thought that going to college was a big and*

difficult step, but this was because we didn't know how our children can get ready and how easy it is to be able to seek financial help. Now that we know of the help that can be given, what a GPA is, an advanced class, an ACT exam, FAFSA and many more terms that help us make this process easier. Information is a very powerful weapon because it is what is needed to open many doors. I am sure that this material will give us the confidence to continue searching for information and to be able to open more doors along with our children. Thanks to my classmates, parents, grandparents, uncles, and families who took some of their busy and valuable time to attend and help our students find a better future. Thank you very much for your attention.

Parent Testimonial 2. *I am Francisco Casillas. I had an experience 10 years ago when the Border Patrol caught my son-in-law, my daughter's husband. She had to leave to follow her husband, taking her children with her. The problem began when my grandchildren had to go to school in Mexico and did not understand anything. I had to bring my grandson to continue his studies with me in the US, where he was born and where he knew the language. Since then, I continue to support him, hoping that one day he will appear before me with a college degree. American Dream Academy and Arizona State University, thank you very much. This course gave me hope that my son can go to college. I have always heard that attending college in the United States costs a lot, but thanks to this program, I realized that it can be done. Thank you because, as a mother, I learned about the importance of being aware of my daughter's grades and behavior and the importance of being in touch with teachers, counselors, and school, because not everything depends on them. Parents have the final authority. Also, this course helps us understand our children, and share topics related to them and to their interests. American Dream Academy and Arizona State University, thank you very much.*

Parent Testimonial 3. *Good evening. My name is María Garibay, mother of two children, Fernando and Anahí. I think education is very important. Something that I am always talking about with my children, is that my wish is for them to study. I see them in a future where they are college students. I thank the American Dream Academy program because it gave me the tools to help my children achieve their goals academically and have a successful future.*

APPENDIX H

VIGNETTES

The names used in these vignettes are pseudo-names to protect the privacy of the participants.

Vignette 1. The first two families to be highlighted, as most in Yuma, had never set foot on a college campus and, in fact, have rarely traveled outside of Yuma. Their two children decided to apply to Arizona State University to enter in the fall of 2023. I wanted both families to experience a tour of the ASU Tempe campus. I arranged a tour with Access ASU Educational Outreach Student Services. The contact person provided a specific day and time for the families to tour the campus. Access ASU also included lunch vouchers for the families. Although it was a hardship for the parents to take off work, they felt it was an important step to support and encourage their children. I met the families on campus late Friday morning since Fridays tend to be the least busy day for tours. Access ASU hires student workers called ASU Student Ambassadors, who provide a detailed walking tour of the campus. I went along to help translate for the parents while students huddled close to the Student Ambassadors. The tour included a visit to one of the newest student housing buildings, libraries, bookstores, and the Memorial Union. Students asked questions about student clubs and other logistical questions. The families were grateful for the opportunity to take a guided tour, and the students seemed more at ease after chatting with the student ambassadors. The students and their parents received an overwhelming amount of information, but informational packets were available so they could review them later as a family. By the end of the tour, exhaustion kicked in, but the excitement continued.

I decided to follow up with each of the families the following week to see if they had questions and encouraged them to discuss their plans as a family. In the next several

weeks, I continued to help with the process. Since both families met the criteria for the Obama Scholarship, applied early to ASU, and completed an early FAFSA application, securing on-campus housing was necessary. I continued to meet with both families on weekends to walk them through the process. Each family also registered for an orientation day which turned into another tour of Tempe, Arizona. The students have decided to be roommates, have secured housing and are registered as full-time students.

Vignette 2. Melissa and her mother, Blanca, couldn't attend the FAFSA day during the American Dream Academy. Blanca and Melissa had a prior work commitment that prevented them from attending the session. They asked if it would be possible to come in at the weekend to complete the application. The family and I met on the Arizona Western College (AWC) campus on Saturday afternoon. I reserved a computer room on campus so that we could each use a desktop computer. We worked through the afternoon and into the early part of the evening. Since I'm not an expert in FAFSA, I had to learn how to navigate the system myself. We explored and learned together, and after numerous tries, we were successful in completing and submitting the application. Melissa is excited to attend Arizona Western College for the fall of 2023 semester.

Vignette 3. The last two stories that I would like to briefly highlight are of the Martinez and the Orozco families. These two families were not able to complete the FAFSA application due to their immigration status. However, they both completed the American Dream Academy and were still able to apply to AWC for fall 2023 courses. Although their future is uncertain, they were remarkably optimistic and determined to change their course of life. Both families know the challenges they will be facing, but their positive outlook is admirable. Mr. and Mrs. Martinez shared this:

> We know that our son will probably not find a job in his field after graduating from college but the knowledge that he will gain can transform his life and the lives of his children. He will be the one to guide them through college.

Mr. and Mrs. Orozco were similarly grounded in the uncertain reality of their future. They faced the biggest obstacles because the entire family are migrant workers, which means they follow the seasonal agriculture work. Mr. Orozco works in the farms of Arizona for half of the year and spends half of the year working at farms in California. This is putting a steep financial burden on Mrs. Orozco and their daughters, Angela and Petra. Petra is the oldest and aspires to be a certified nurse assistant. She understands that her dream will be difficult at the moment, but she's determined to get her certification. Her persistence and family support allows her to think outside the box by finding alternative ways to accomplish her goals. She shared the following:

I may not be able to work in the U.S. as a nurse assistant, but I can work in Algodones (a city in Baja California, Mexico, known to provide medical services to U.S. and Canadian citizens). When I get my certification at AWC, I'll be able to take that certificate and work for a dental clinic or eye center or something like that. My mom and dad are supportive, and that's all I need. I'll be able to help out my mom even more because I heard that we get paid really well in Algodones.

APPENDIX I

ASU IRB APPROVAL/EXEMPTION FOR THE USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS

APPROVAL: MODIFICATION

Kathleen Puckett

MLFTC: Teacher Preparation,
Division of 480/727-5206
Kathleen.Puckett@asu.edu

Dear Kathleen Puckett:

On 11/1/2022 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Modification / Update
Title:	Creating a College Going Culture Among Latino First Generation Students in Rural Arizona
Investigator:	Kathleen Puckett
IRB ID:	STUDY00014421
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	• IRB Protocol 2022REV , Category: IRB Protocol; • Letter of Consent REV, Category: Consent Form; • Parent Permission SP REV, Category: Consent Form; • Parent-Permission REV, Category: Consent Form; • Permission Letter from SLHS, Category: Off-site authorizations (school permission, other IRB approvals, Tribal permission, etc.); • Recruitment Letter REV, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Recruitment Letter SP REV, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Translation Certificate , Category: Translations;

The IRB approved the modification.

When consent is appropriate, you must use final, watermarked versions available under the "Documents" tab in ERA-IRB.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Laura Corr