Hispanic Students: Acculturation, Expectations, Support, and Perceived Barriers

Academic success among immigrant populations concerns higher education administrators, faculty, and counselors. In their study Fiebig, Braid, Ross, Tom, and Prinzo (FBRTP) explore this issue by focusing on how the personal characteristics of Hispanic community college students predict acculturation, career planning, family kin support, perceptions of barriers, and expectations for the future – all of which can affect academic success.

FBRTP analyzed the survey responses of 219 Hispanic students taking remedial courses at a Hispanic-serving community college in California. The students completed a voluntary questionnaire packet that contained demographic questions, an acculturation scale, a career development inventory, an outcome expectation scale, a kinship support measure, and a measure of perceived educational barriers. FBRTP used logistic regression to model the relationships between student demographics and the various scale measures.

FBRTP made the following points among others:

1. “...Hispanic community college men will have higher expected acculturation scores than their female counterparts. This underlines, perhaps, a cultural trend where males in these collective societies are encouraged or rewarded for acculturating to the dominant Anglo culture; whereas attachment patterns for females focus on females remaining psychologically close to their family.” [p. 858]

2. “...being the first person in the family to attend college and being either first or second-generation predisposes these students to be at greater academic risk because of their lower acculturation scores.” [p. 858]

3. “It was not the first-generation students as expected, but only the second-generations that had significant expected kinship outcomes. Specifically, males wanted more family support while these second-generation females were moving away from their need for family support...Again, students who are the first in their family to attend college have significant expected kinship scores (as was seen with their lower acculturation levels) as their need for kin support was lower. This must create personal levels of stress for these students as they are the first to go to college and yet feel they do not need the support of their family; at the same time, they are more rooted in their culture of origin.” [p.859]

4. “Generational status does predict levels of career knowledge. Specifically, we see that first-generation females will have lower scores, and the opposite is true for first-generation males who are expected to have delved deeper into their possible vocational options.... The second-generation students are still at risk as they, too, are expected to have lower levels of career planning along with their lower expected acculturation scores. Generational status can be perceived as a barrier for first-generation females and second-generation students in general.” [pp. 859-860]

5. “For first- and second-generation students, their perception of educational barriers is anticipated to be lower than for students residing in the United States longer... However, our results do not apply to first-generation females, who are anticipated to have higher educational
barriers. This finding starts to create a picture of the first-generation female who is less acculturated into the American system and is, thus, experiencing more barriers.” [p. 860]

6. “These findings highlight the positive impact that birth order has on children, as being the oldest Hispanic female creates a female who is more likely to seek kinship support and also have less perceived barriers.” [p. 860]

7. “…a trend is emerging where students who are the first in their family to attend college will have lower acculturation scores, seek kinship support less, and as a result perceive more educational barriers. These results explain the impact—and sometimes negative impact—that these contextual barriers have on the educational and vocational aspirations of Hispanic community college students.” [p. 860]

8. “Women have higher expectations that their future career will match their interests than males. As seen with these students as they get older, their outlook on the future declines slightly. Perhaps this is due to more exposures to the realities of knowing the academic as well as vocational demands. Yet, it is the first-generation students who have the highest outcome expectations. This is positive as the higher the students’ outcome expectations, the more likely they are to be engaged in school (Kenny et al., 2006).” [p. 860]

9. “As seen with all the scales, it is again the students who are the first in their family to attend college having significant expectations for the future – and these students have lower expected outcome scores. It truly appears that Hispanic students who are the first person to attend college are at higher risks when looking at four of the five scales.” [pp. 860-861]

The findings by FBRTP may help college counselors, faculty, and administrators to expand their awareness of students whose expectations, kinship affiliation, acculturation status, and perceptions of barriers increase their vulnerability to negative academic situations. The college’s institutional culture and practices should encourage success and create a sense of belonging for all students, but this appears to be especially important for Hispanic students. Differences within the Hispanic population (by gender and generational status) can make a difference in the efficacy of targeted resources and counseling for retention and success.

Jennifer Fiebig (Emmanuel College, Boston Massachusetts), Barbara Braid (Bakersfield College, California), Patricia A. Ross (Bakersfield College), Matthew A. Tom (Emmanuel College), and Cara Prinzo (Emmanuel College) document their study in the article “Hispanic Community College Students: Acculturation, Family Support, Perceived Educational Barriers, and Vocational Planning,” in the Community College Journal of Research and Practice (Vol. 34, No. 10, August 2010, pp. 848-864).

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