



# ¡Si, Se Puede! Stories of First-Generation, Mexican American Community College Alumnae

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### Abstract

The stories or *testimonios* of 7 first-generation, Mexican American women community college alumnae who persisted and achieved the associates' degree at Phoenix College revealed nine themes. Frameworks for this research were Laura Rendón's Validation theory (1994), Tara Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth theory (2006), and Gloria Anzaldúa's Mestiza Consciousness theory (2007). Also informing the analysis of the stories was the use of Critical Race Theory and LatCrit.

This qualitative study revealed themes that fell into the following categories: requisites for success, obstacles to success, and assets students possess. Themes requisites for success: family members give student inspiration to achieve, mentor helps student navigate barriers, Phoenix College diversity helps student feel welcome, ACE Program supported student progress beyond high school years. Themes obstacles to success: challenges with financial aid, single-parent responsibilities, SB1070 & Proposition 300 impact on undocumented Latina student and documented Latina students. Themes assets students possess: faith in God, Si, se puede ...yes, I can attitude.

In this research, the Latina graduates told stories of strengths they did not realize they had until faced with challenges. All the Latinas received validation from significant individuals: family, mentors, advisors, faculty or close friends.

### Review of the Literature

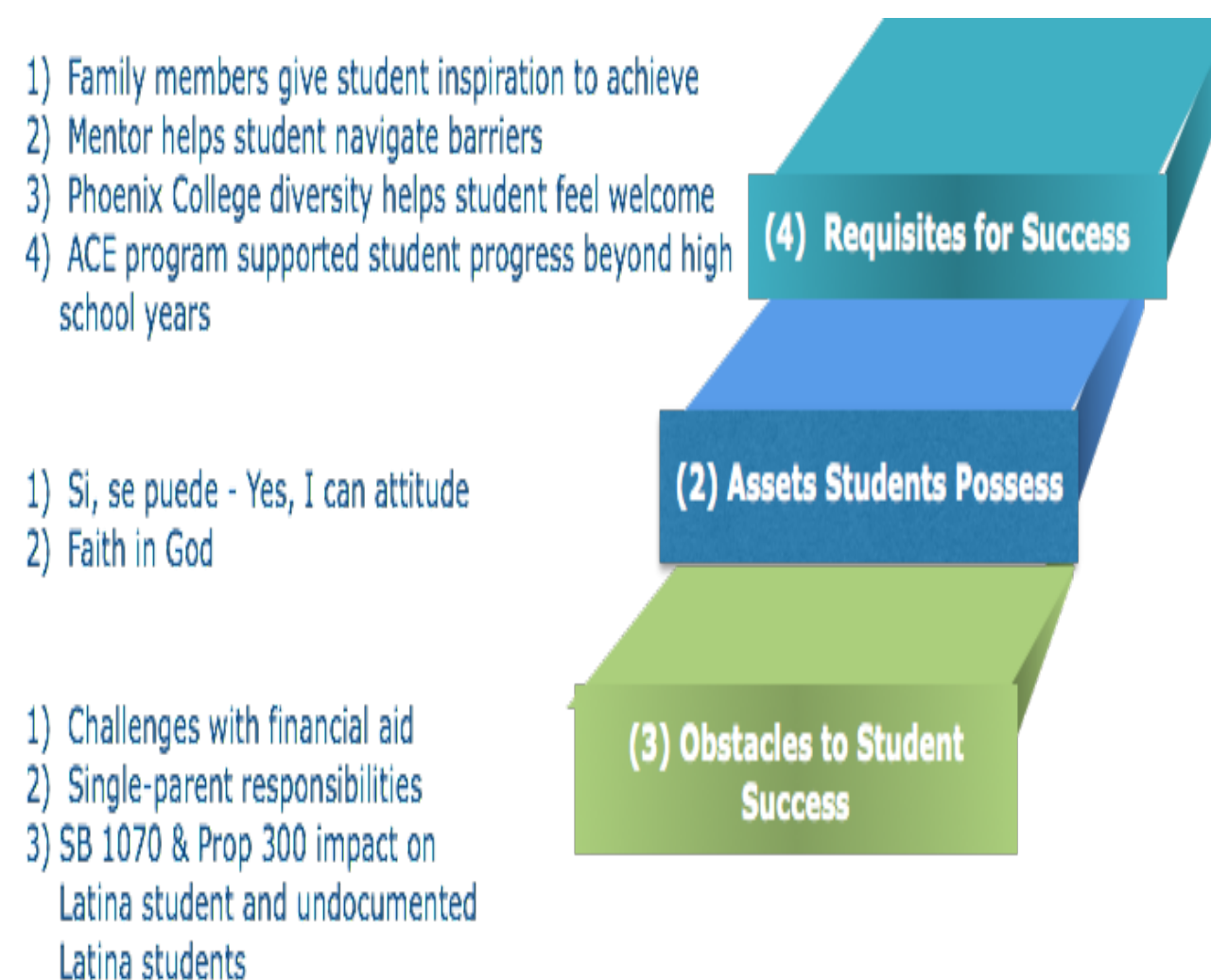
Hispanics comprise 25.2% of 18 to 24-year-old students enrolled in two-year colleges according to the according to the Pew Research Center (2012). While enrollment Hispanic students is up, graduation rates are not. The research literature on the Latino education pipeline has gaps in terms of data disaggregated by sex and ethnicity at the community college level. The research that does exist is predominantly deficit-based placing ownership of lack of success on the individual student. This research study attempts to fill some of that gap by studying strengths of first-generation, Hispanic women students who have successfully completed their associate's degrees.

### Method

This qualitative research study utilized a convenience sample of 7 first-generation, Mexican American women who graduated from Phoenix College between 2008 and 2013. A semi-structured face to face interview was conducted with each participant. Once the stories were collected, the stories underwent narrative analysis utilizing Dedoose, and then SimpleMind. During the coding and mind mapping of themes, Critical Race Theory and LatCrit lenses were mindfully considered in addition to Validation theory (Rendón), Community Wealth theory (Yosso), and Mestiza Consciousness theory (Anzaldúa).

Themes uncovered from the individual stories were validated by one large group meeting of four of the original seven participants.

### Findings



### Results

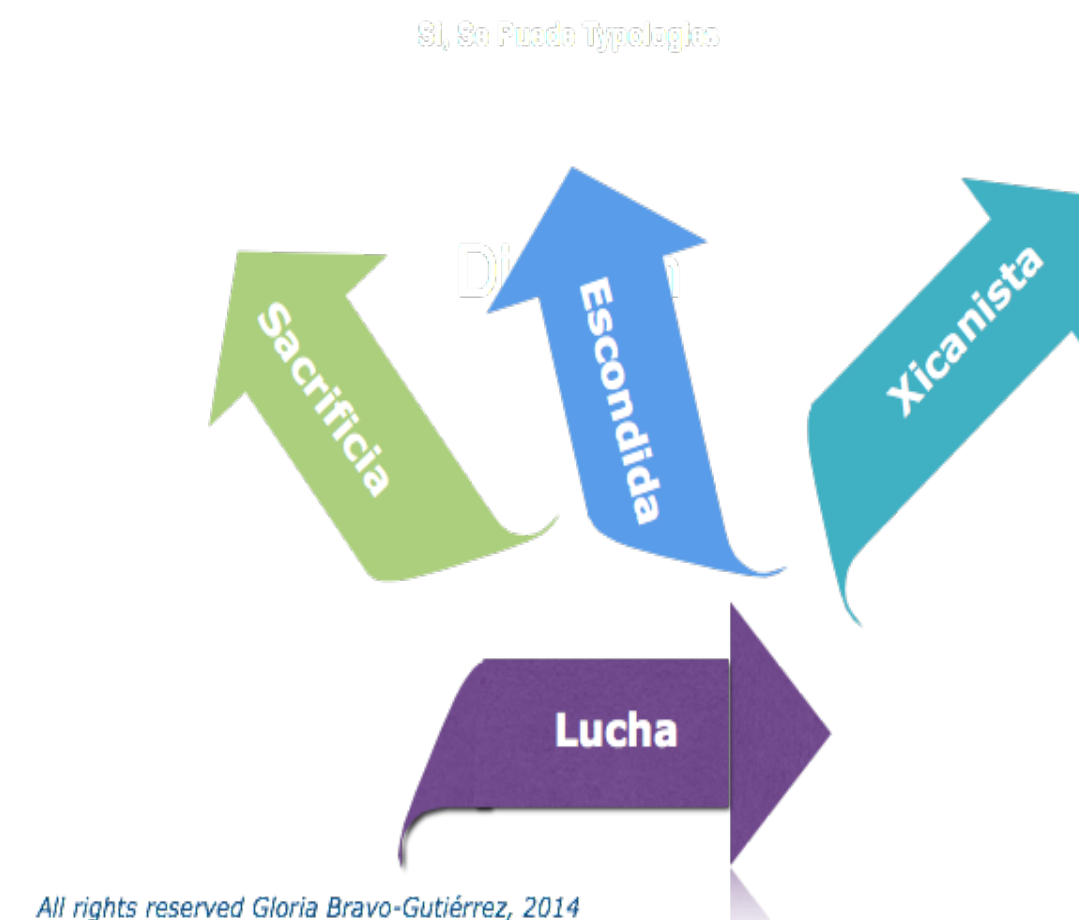
There were 9 findings from the research which fell into three categories:

- Requisites for Success
- Assets Students Possess
- Obstacles to Student Success

The *Findings* displays the summary of the results.

Overarching typologies that emerged between several of the participants were Xichanistia, Escondida, Sacrificia, and Lucha. Xichanista captures the flavor of social activism while Escondida depicts more of a lower profile focused solely on academics. Sacrificia is placing focus on others before herself and doing what must be done for the moment. Lucha is focused on survival and reality. There is fluidity in the typologies and individuals may flow and shift over time. The graphical depiction is listed below under the heading *Typologies*.

### Typologies



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### Conclusions

The community college is the overwhelming choice for first-generation, Hispanic student entry for a variety of reasons including convenience and comparatively low cost tuition relative to other colleges and universities. What this study found was that additional factors drew these Mexican American women to Phoenix College and enabled them to be successful; among the most important was the campus cultural diversity which helped the students feel welcome and at home among students and faculty who could relate to them easily. First-generation, Mexican American women brought community wealth with them to their college experience which appeared to be embraced and appreciated at Phoenix College and fostered their success.

Faculty and advisors, especially the ACE program advisors, served to mentor and validate students through their academic years and partner with the Latinas to help them be successful.

While systems appear to be in place to support students for the most part, in their academic programs, two areas of opportunity highlighted in this study were the financial aid process as well as the academic advising process. In each case, additional advisors plus streamlining of the processes would assist Latina students in overcoming those challenges/barriers more easily to achieve their associate's degree and transfer to a university.

### Bibliography

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