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**Corporate Fogs and Mestiza Visions:  
Parallels between student and institution experiences in a faith-based college**

by  
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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Social/Personality Psychology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The Graduate Center of the City University of New York

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## Approval

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Psychology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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## Abstract

Corporate Fogs and Mestiza Visions:  
Parallels between student and institution experiences within a faith-based college

by  
Jennifer Ayala

Adviser: Professor Michelle Fine

The term “migrants” has been used to describe students for whom college seemed to be an unknown and perhaps unwelcoming land because of the oppressions associated with class, race, ethnicity, and generational status (Mann, 2001; Tinto, 1982). “Migrants” entering the academy bring with them a combination of assets, pressures, and gaps in opportunity, shaped in part by structural conditions and marginalizing experiences. Understanding these multiplicities and combinations, and examining how institutions address them (or do not), represents a critical aspect of the debate about the twin issues of underserved students’ access to and persistence in college. This was the focus of the current study.

The study took place within the context of a small, urban, Catholic liberal arts college, whose mission is to provide a holistic, service-oriented education for an explicitly diverse student body. Methods included interviews with staff, classroom observations, participant observation and interviews with students conducted by student researchers as part of a participatory design. These multiple methods not only yielded understanding of students’ experiences, but also revealed insights about the college. Parallels were made between students’ struggle for inclusion in the context of college and the college’s struggle for inclusion in the context of an increasingly corporatized Higher

Education “market,” one that values the attraction and retention of upper class students (Aronowitz, 2000; Berger, 2000; Bok, 2003; Kirp, 2003). I explore the following in this dissertation: 1) Gifts students offer to the academy even as they double as scenes of personal academic struggle 2) Manifestations of class as material reality, psychology, policy, discourse of capital, and corporate consciousness; 3) Teaching and learning characterized by “validation” within “holding environments” and mutual transformation frameworks (Rendon, 1993; Powell Pruitt, 2004). Successful “migrants” are reframed as “transnationals” who both seek and provide transformative learning experiences, and can perhaps model for institutions a mestiza consciousness (Anzaldúa, 1987; Delgado Bernal, 2001; Glick-Schiller, Basch, Szanton Blanc, 1995).

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The future is in your hands America.  
 NO Place else for me to go but there America.  
 College where, not where I live America.  
 All I see is jail America, but I'm free, right America?  
 More likely to look through glass talking on the phone to my mom  
 than to get an education.  
 Why America?  
 Becoming cheap labor for AT&T and Victoria Secrets.  
 Getting paid only a quarter a week, but slavery over right.  
 High school with no books but jails with cable.  
 Where do we stand America?  
 My future in your hands America.  
 Do you see me America, do you feel me!  
 Lucky to be where I be America.  
 Don't use and abuse me.  
 Let me become the pioneer that opens your eyes.  
 Let me become the actor that opens your heart.  
 Let me be the student in your land America, not a number.  
 Think of me as a healer of the mind and body.  
 Do you really think I want to be the one with the blur over my face on  
 COPS?  
 Can my children have books and desks in their schools, America?  
 Can my nieces and nephews have a basketball team and music lessons, America?  
 I want to be the Future and not a repeat of the past.  
 I seen the chains on my people America.  
 You're choking me America.  
 Let me have a future America.  
 Let me be the voice for all that can't speak.  
 My future in your hands America, it is time to give it back.  
 I am the truth teller, I speak to you America,  
 land of the free but not for me.

— *Future* by Malan Bullock, 2002 pre-college student

As part of a project conducted in a summer bridge program, where students co-  
 created a “zine” with the theme “Schools not Jails,” this student powerfully voices her  
 concerns/critique in verse of this country’s commitment to the education of youth of  
 color. The allocation of local, state and federal dollars belie the claims made to “leave no  
 child behind” (Fine, Bloom, & Chajet, 2002; Orlofsky, 2002). No child left behind, but  
 what future lies ahead for young people of color who try to move on to higher education

in the face of eroding social policies and hard-fought protections. Persistent inequities that reach as far back as early educational experiences and opportunities (or lack thereof), further back to ancestor's opportunities, and as deep as the capitalist fibers making up the fabric of the economic and political system, deeper at the hegemonic forces that dictate what is legitimate knowledge, who constructs it and who is permitted access to it. Many have documented the effects of these inequities as they manifest themselves in the educational experiences of youth of color, working class youth and first generation youth. Lower high school graduation rates, higher chances of being in overcrowded overworked and under resourced settings, lower likelihood of attending college, higher chances of being herded into tracks without college preparation courses. Almost college material.

For those who do get past these obstacles, and/or are provided with nurturing and vigorous learning environments, getting into college is an end in itself, a signal of success that someone has "made it." Once accepted, the journey (or maze) begins often unescorted. Not at the start of classes, but in the period of time before, as students are expected to effortlessly decipher financial aid paperwork, provide various forms of documentation, immunization records, more testing to get placed into the appropriate courses, orientations, registration and more paperwork. Missing a step could have sometimes devastating consequences: If some financial aid paperwork is missing or parts of it incorrect, delays or even denials in financial aid could result. Almost a college student.

Once through the doors and into the classroom, entrance does not guarantee admittance into the opportunity structure of college. Comparing the experience of college to entering an unknown and unwelcoming land, students are positioned as

migrants into the academy (Fine, Bloom & Chajet, personal communication; Mann, 2001; Tinto, 1982) having to learn the codes and styles of success, constructed and measured by those in power, with an eye and heart towards home (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Many scholars who are of color, first generation and/or of working class backgrounds reflecting on the process and experience of college described aspects of it as alienating, frustrating, fragmenting, and spirit-draining (hooks, 1994; Lara, 2002; Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Perez, 1999). Attaching numbers to these feelings and impressions, students of color and low income students are more likely to be placed in remedial courses (NCES, 2001), in general are more likely than White students to receive grades of C's and D's or lower (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2002), are less likely to persist after the first year (CSRDE, 2002), and less likely to graduate in six years (Carey, 2004; NCES, 2001). Almost a college graduate.

Theories abound explaining this gap in achievement, attainment, and opportunity, mostly framed as a student's [in]ability to persist or an institution's [in]ability to retain. This paper will focus on the experiences of "migrants" who enter the four-year college experience, and follow through their progress; who remains, who departs and what are the structures and processes that facilitate or hinder these outcomes. This is an important issue given the current/recurring debates on access to higher education, as persistence is a crucial aspect of access. In the existent literature, attention is focused on equal access as defined by the numbers and proportions of students of color enrolling into elite institutions (Bowen, Bok, & Loury, 1998). Persistence, however, is another indicator of access, particularly among those institutions already enrolling larger numbers of students of color. Conversations between different literatures related to persistence will be

presented in the following sections, where education perspectives document the disparities in preparation found in high school on through higher education, sociological perspectives such as social reproduction theory attempt to explain these disparities, psychological theories insert personal dimensions, and critical race theories and cultural studies offer ways of looking at subverting the disparities. Let us now turn to these interdisciplinary conversations, noting the silences, overlapping voices, and interruptions along the way.

### The production of [under]preparation

A common complaint among college faculty is that students are not adequately prepared for college level work. Many freshmen, for instance, need to take (or are placed into) one or more remedial courses (29% overall in 1995), particularly colleges with higher numbers of students of color (43%) (Adelman, 1998; Carey, 2004). But what constitutes adequate preparation and who has access to it? What are students (and which students) really being prepared for? SAT scores and high school GPAs are among the more common measures of academic preparation used by college admissions boards as well as financial aid (Postsecondary Education Opportunity, 1996). However, Postsecondary Education Opportunity (1996) has found that women, White and Asian students, higher income students and students with college-educated parents are more likely to have higher high school GPAs than students of color, lower income and first generation students; therefore, admissions and financial aid decisions based on this indicator favor these groups. Recent studies have found that the rigor of the high school curriculum (Education Trust, 2004; Horn & Kojaku, 2002; NCES, 2000) as well as the quality of teaching in high school make a crucial difference in student learning and

preparation (Education Trust, 2004; NCES, 2000; Haycock, 1998, 2003). Specifically, Horn and Kojaku (2001) found that seventy-nine percent of students who had the opportunity to complete rigorous high school curricula<sup>1</sup> persisted in their initial postsecondary institution and eighty-seven percent continued towards achieving a bachelor's degree three years after enrolling (whether in their initial college of choice or after transferring). This measure was a more effective predictor of college success than SAT scores. The impact of high school curriculum rigor is such that differences typically found between students in at risk situations and those without melt away if you take into account whether they have completed at least the New Basics curriculum (NCES, 2000).<sup>2</sup>

Tied to rigorous course content, the quality and effectiveness of those teaching the courses is another important factor in student academic success in high school (Haycock, 1998, 2003). Sanders and Rivers' (1996) Tennessee study found that

students who had three highly effective teachers in a row scored more than fifty percentile points above their counterparts who had three ineffective teachers in a row, even when the students initially had similar scores...Students with comparable initial achievement levels have 'vastly different academic outcomes as a result of the sequence of teachers to which they were assigned'... (cited in Haycock, 2003, p. 13).

Therefore, being assigned to a sequence of good teachers versus ending up with a series of ineffective teachers could mean the difference between being placed into the gifted

---

<sup>1</sup>A rigorous curriculum "includes four years of English, four years of Mathematics (including precalculus or higher), three years of a foreign language, three years of social studies, three years of science (including biology, chemistry and physics), and at least one Advanced Placement (AP) class or test taken" (Horn & Kojaku).

<sup>2</sup> Recommended by the National Commission on Excellence's A Nation at Risk, the core New Basics Curriculum includes 4 years of English, 3 years of mathematics, 3 years of science, 3 years of social studies (NCES, 2000-35).

track and being placed into lower or remedial tracks (Haycock, 2003). To quote Kati Haycock, good teaching really matters (1998).

Given the knowledge about preparation factors contributing to college access and success, why do inequities persist? Students of color and low income students are still less likely to gain access to or persist in higher education; in fact, despite some gains in enrollment and persistence, recent years have seen a widening of the educational attainment gap (Nieto, 1993; NCES, 2002). For instance, in 1971 approximately 19% of White and 5% of Latino /a twenty-five to twenty-nine-year-olds had earned a bachelors degree or higher, a difference of fourteen percentage points (NCES, 2002). In 2001, the numbers were 33% and 11%, respectively. Although the degree attainment level doubled for Latinos/as, White students also saw an increase, thus widening the gap to about twenty-two percentage points. An examination of the distribution of opportunities for preparation to college reveals underlying, ongoing practices that can be described as segregationist and oppressive.

Along many dimensions, there is an unequal distribution of resources in educational institutions. Fewer low income and students of color, even those who have college educated parents (Fine, personal communication) are participating in/have access to the rigorous high school curriculum so vital to success in college (Education Trust, 2004; Nieto, 2003). High schools that have larger numbers of students of color and low income students receive far less funding (state and local) for their education than schools in wealthier neighborhoods or neighborhoods with fewer students of color (Nieto, 2003; Orlofsky, 2002). In terms of technological resources, perhaps not surprisingly, high schools that serve students of color and low income students are less likely to have

Internet access in the classrooms than schools with majority White and middle class students: 43% are connected in contrast to 74% (Renner, 2003). Another critical resource, teacher talent, is also inequitably distributed. The less qualified, less effective and less experienced teachers are segregated into the lower income, high proportion of student of color neighborhoods (Haycock, 1998, 2003; Nieto, 2003). Specifically, low income students and students of color have more uncertified teachers teaching core courses (30% vs. 17%), have more inexperienced teachers (21% vs. 10%), and more out of field teachers (30% vs. 22%) than White middle class students (Haycock, 2003; Nieto, 2003). As an example, in Tennessee, “African American students were twice as likely as white students to be assigned to that state’s least effective teachers and (conversely) less likely to be assigned to the most effective teachers” (Haycock, 2003, p.12). By the end of high school, African American and Latino students have reading and math skills that are comparable to those of White students at the end of middle school (Haycock, 2003). Less funding at local and state levels, fewer chances of getting placed into higher tracks with more rigorous curricula, more chances of being taught by less qualified and effective teachers— one could ask what high school students of color being prepared for are? Appellate Judge Alfred Lerner, who overturned a groundbreaking finance equity decision in New York City that found that schools were being funded inequitably to the benefit of middle class suburban schools, offers the following about what constitutes a “sound, basic education”:

the skills required to enable a person to obtain employment, vote, and serve on a jury are imparted between grades 8 and 9 ... a sound basic education.... Society needs workers at all levels of jobs, the majority of which may very well be low-level (cited in Gonzalez, 2002; Nieto, 2003).

Here, not only is Lerner acknowledging that the current K - 12 system is inequitable in terms of how it educates students and what their outcomes will ultimately be, he is making explicit that this is acceptable, perhaps even desirable, within a capitalist society. Some of these trends seemingly get reproduced at the college level. Renner (2003) has observed that students of color are segregated into the lower status institutions. Students of color are less likely to get into what are considered the more “selective colleges” (defined in large part by SAT and degree of privilege), and are more likely to attend higher education institutions that are located near urban areas, offer only associate degrees and are not research universities (Renner, 2003).<sup>3</sup> Such institutions are more financially strapped than the more elite colleges and universities, replicating some of the trends in access to educational resources found in high schools. Also similar to patterns found in high schools, students of color are more likely to take developmental course work once in college. This is meaningful in that students who require extensive remediation have been found to graduate at lower rates than students who do not require any developmental classes: One study found that only nine percent of students taking remediation classes earned a bachelors degree in contrast to fifty-four percent of students who did not have to take any (Adelman, 1998; Carey, 2004).

In terms of resources and funding, shifts in patterns of awarding financial aid are fast becoming a hardship for low income students, as grants are being replaced by loans, and “Bs not need” (Winter, 2002) is increasingly becoming the policy mantra at many institutions (Paulsen & John, 2002). To keep up with rising tuition and related college costs, many low income students must work full-time and/or may need to contribute

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<sup>3</sup>The purpose of illustrating these points is not to reify traditional definitions of preparation, good education and quality schools, but does demonstrate the differential access to options and opportunities.

significantly to caregiving responsibilities, if not shoulder it altogether. Nora (1996) found that students of color in these situations, that “needed to work for financial reasons were 36% more likely to drop out” and “female students who had to leave campus immediately after class to help care for family were 83% more likely to withdraw” (Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000). With regard to the resource of “teacher talent,” it would be interesting to investigate the role of “teacher quality” on academic achievement at the college level, given its power in influencing high school student outcomes. One study suggests that it is important for college students as well, finding that “first-year students who perceived their instructors to be organized and prepared ... tended to demonstrate greater cognitive gains than their peers who perceived that they had received less well-organized and prepared instruction” (Pascarella, Whitt, Nora, Hagedorn, Terenzini, 1996, p.186). In higher education, the reward structure is such that “teacher quality” is measured by such indicators as research and scholarship, to the exclusion of (rather than as a complement to) pedagogy or relationships with students (Levine, 1994). This is an area worthy of further study. Academic preparation is clearly a compelling consideration in the issue of college persistence, particularly the ways in which it is constructed and inequitably distributed according to class and race/ethnicity. However, it is not the whole story, as studies have demonstrated that a student’s decision to stay or leave higher education is informed by a complex array of factors and processes.

#### Two popular theories of persistence

Cabrera and colleagues (1992) have found overlapping and complementary insights between two popular theories of student attrition once in college. Tinto’s (1987) interactionist theory of student departure is, whether in praise or critique, one of the most

talked about and empirically tested theories of student persistence. Centering on entering student characteristics as they fit into, or do not, the college milieu, Tinto's model identifies social and academic integration and goal and institutional commitments as key variables. According to his theory, the more committed a student is to the college s/he is attending or the more committed s/he is to achieving a degree in general, the more likely s/he is to persist in higher education. These goal and institutional commitments are reciprocally connected to how integrated they are to the college environment, socially and academically. For example, a student's biography informs his or her level of commitment which in turn influences the level of integration. Becoming more integrated into the college environment and academics feeds back into the student's level of commitment.

Traditional psychological theories also take student characteristics as a starting point, as they break down the problem of persistence into individual cognitive or socio-emotional processes (see Bean and Eaton's works; 1995, 2000). Relevant psychological processes include how students deal with the stress of college life/work (stress and coping models), the level of confidence they have in themselves to "do college" (self-efficacy), and the degree to which they feel in control of their successes and disappointments in college (attribution theory) (Bean & Eaton, 2000). These attitudinal and motivational processes do not simply sprout from within their individual psyches but are shaped in part by contextual factors and experiences. Bean and Eaton (2000) offer a comprehensive psychological model of student persistence that can be summed up this way:

Students enter college with a complex array of personal characteristics. As they interact within the institutional environment several psychological processes take

place that, for the successful student, result in positive self-efficacy, reduced stress, increased efficacy and internal locus of control. These internal processes are reciprocal and iterative with continuous feedback and adjustment. These processes in turn lead to academic and social integration, institutional fit and loyalty, intent to persist and to the behavior of persistence itself (p.58).

Drawing parallels to Tinto's model, Bean and Eaton examine motivation (where Tinto identifies commitments) and add intentions to persist, attitudes and behaviors (Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, & Hengstler, 1992). Whereas commitment is the closest variable in the causal pathway to the behavior of persistence for Tinto, intention to persist is closest in Bean and Eaton's model. The degree of fit between institutional and individual student characteristics is also prominent in both models (Cabrera et al., 1992).

Each of these models begins with student characteristics as they interact with or react to the institutional environment. Tinto's model enjoys "near paradigmatic status" (Braxton, 2000) in the field of student persistence. Psychological perspectives can offer some possibilities for investigating agency within systems and institutions that impose constraints. These factors are interrelated. The issue of under preparation is closely linked to socio-structural concerns, such as funding and resource distribution, and the fit between individual and institutional characteristics is also linked to culture and power. The following sections will highlight structural issues and power relations as they relate to persistence, from how students perceive and experience these imbalances on an interpersonal or group level, to how they play out in the larger societal context.

#### Oppression as psychological threat and/or assault on persistence

Experiences of discrimination and cultural assaults, aside from their direct impact on student persistence, can indirectly shape students' behaviors and motivations. The experience of discrimination, even the threat of discrimination, has been found to

negatively impact students' academic performance. Massey and Fischer (2002), testing Steele's (1997) theory of stereotype threat ("underperforming because of an unconscious fear of living up to negative stereotypes") on a sample of 4000 students across institutions, found that once measures of stereotype threat were taken into account, the GPA differential between African American and Latino students and White students dissipated (Massey and Fischer, 2002; Steele, 1997). Specifically, students with the combination of high performance burden (the belief that "how I perform reflects on my family and my group") and high internalization of stereotypes were most likely to receive low grades.

A variant of stereotype threat may also be activated when considering what Nelson (1994) calls "receptivity to institutional assistance," or lack thereof. Students who seek out and participate in support services and other forms of institutional assistance colleges offer, tend to perform better (Nelson, 1994). However, as many practitioners observe, students who need it the most often do not take advantage of such services (Nelson, 1994). Coping theorists may identify this as employing an avoidant coping strategy— instead of taking a proactive stance, students deal with the situation by avoiding taking actions that may help (Bean & Eaton, 2000; Eaton & Bean, 1995). However, for many students of color, it may have more to do with shame than with using passive coping strategies. Seeking out these resources or being told they may require them may activate the stereotype threat of not being able to handle the intellectual work of college (Nelson, 1994). Using resources such as tutoring may also be seen as a passive strategy, the easy way out, and attempting to figure the work out on their own may represent a proactive stance. It could also be that the support services are not offered

using culturally responsive frameworks. For these reasons, researchers and practitioners have called for interventions to frame the target as the risky situation (such as a historically difficult course), and not the student at risk (Low, 2002; Steele, 1997; Garland, 1993). Another approach has been to use positive, revisionist labels for programs so that they are not associated with remediation or deficiency, but instead are seen as an honor and challenge (Garland, 1993; Steele, 1997; Tierney, 2000).

#### Persistence patterns as Social Reproduction

The bulk of the literature on student persistence actually focuses on reasons why students depart (Delgado Bernal, 2001). In a recent book that attempts to “rework the student departure puzzle,” (2000) Berger elaborates on Bourdieu’s theories to frame the issue of student departure in higher education in social reproduction terms. He proposes that it is the interaction between institutional and individual capital that best predicts persistence/retention. Educational institutions, dressed in dominant discourses of meritocracy, are ultimately another mechanism through which existing social hierarchies and inequities are reproduced (social reproduction theory). As such, certain types of capital are needed to gain access to, remain and excel in higher education institutions. Capital can refer to a number of things, but Berger narrows the construct down to two key components: Economic and cultural. Economic capital is self-explanatory, referring mainly to the possession of or immediate access to material resources. This ties in to the larger discussion of the role of finance in student persistence.<sup>4</sup> Cultural capital is more of a symbolic resource and essentially refers to possession of/access to the codes, life/styles, skills, etc. of those in power. This was the primary focus of Berger’s piece. As with

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<sup>4</sup>For in depth discussions related to the role of finance/finance inequity in college persistence, see Hu & John, 2001 and Paulsen & John, 2002.

economic capital, privileged youth often inherit this cultural capital through primary socialization— “good parenting.” Reinforced in schools, it then gets framed as “individual merit.” Something that is expected of all yet accessible to few, as it is not explicitly taught in (though it is rewarded by) schools. Thus, capital is tied to social class and is defined by its exclusivity, as a possession, actual or probable, of the elite. A goal of the upper classes is to maintain their status and this is accomplished by building on the capital they already possess— what Berger refers to as “optimizing capital.” The question of access and retention for elite students is not whether they can, should or deserve to go on to higher education, but is more a matter of what prestigious university they will graduate from to optimize their capital, thereby maintaining, if not increasing their wealth.

Berger then points out that seeking to optimize capital is not only a venture that individual students undertake, but one that organizations do as well. As a business, higher education institutions try to maintain or increase their own capital (for example, increasing enrollment, having a good reputation) and the societal reward structures are such that in order to achieve this, institutions have to “produce a specific type of social product in terms of the students they graduate”-- one that re/produces the existing social order. In other words, for institutions to gain status they must aspire to attract elite students and exclude students who have lower levels of capital since admitting them makes the institution appear less “selective” and “reputable.”

For these reasons, it may appear that students who come in with higher levels of cultural capital can have higher persistence rates just as education institutions with higher levels of capital have better retention rates. However, Berger clarifies that a better

predictor is the degree of congruency between the level of cultural capital students have versus what capital the institution possesses: If a student has a high level of cultural capital and goes to an institution that does not have a correspondingly high level of cultural capital, that student is less likely to remain in that institution. Likewise, students with less access to capital are not as likely to persist in higher capital schools, but have more of a chance to persist in institutions with correspondingly lower levels of capital. Retention/persistence, Berger concludes, is a function of the interaction between the amount of cultural capital the student comes in with and the cultural capital the institution has.

Although this analysis powerfully explains who stays and who leaves, what is not clear is how this can change or what types of interventions could be fashioned to address the disparities. What I take from this perspective is that it is important to take into account the structural context and underlying cultural patterns educational institutions are molded from. At the end of the piece, however, there is an interesting space where cultural studies and critical race theory can interrupt:

It has been suggested that colleges, because of their own organizational habitus, often fail to recognize valuable skills, abilities, attitudes, perceptions and knowledge possessed by students from traditionally underrepresented groups in higher education... This knowledge has been identified as “border knowledge” or knowledge that lies outside the canon, outside the cultural mainstream ... essentially a form of cultural capital deemed unworthy of exchange in mainstream settings (p. 120).

#### Rethinking cultural capital

As it stands, capital is defined explicitly in terms of the culture of power, leaving students outside this circle of power seemingly lacking the requisite skills—trickling back to a deficit model (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). However, students at the margins can possess different skills, such as navigation/negotiation (of different social worlds)

skills, translation skills, border knowledge, multiplicity, and biculturality (Rendon et al., 2000). Instead of cultural capital, Solorzano and Yosso (2001) and Cuadraz and Pierce (1994) suggest we consider “endurance labor,” defined as “the relentless drive to persist in spite of and many times because of adversity,” as a more appropriate construct for the academic success of marginalized students. Unlike traditional notions of cultural capital, this concept “originates from the disempowered and moves towards equality through the creation of inner and collective strength that challenges the status quo's power relations” (p.486). These are resources that are not only unrecognized by mainstream sources as legitimate, they are more often viewed as markers of deficit. As demographic trends over time demonstrate a “net increase” of students of color entering college (Murdock & Hoque, 1999), these forms of capital will become increasingly of value, necessitating systemic change within and across institutions. The following section will explore how such border knowledge can be framed as a legitimate and valuable form of capital—underground passports if you will, for migrants into the academy (Delgado Bernal, 2001; Rendon, 2000).

### Critical interruptions

Through novels, essays, *testimonios* and scholarship, many women of color have reflected on their college educational experiences and described common themes of isolation, alienation, fragmentation, in short, how the process of schooling has wounded (and in some ways facilitated) them (for e.g., hooks, 1994; Lara, 2002; Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Perez, 1999). Enduring cultural assaults from professors in the classroom or other students, ethnocentric biases across the curriculum, the separation from family and community as a prerequisite to individual scholarly pursuits. As border crossers

between family, communit(ies), and academy, some find themselves detained on one side, perhaps exiled from another, or become skilled border crossers— forming bridges, on their backs if necessary, as they move between spaces (Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1987). Sometimes the weight of this bridge can create internal fissures, turning healthy multiplicity into fragmentation— a splintering of body, mind, and spirit, of family, community, and schooling. Speaking back to the institutions that have wounded them, these authors have begun to theorize their pain and mark their strategies of survival and resistance. In such narratives, variables like racism, sexism, mestiza consciousness, and liberatory resistance surface as meaningful avenues of inquiry in student persistence. This is where critical race theory enters the education and opportunity discourse.

Examining students' educational experiences requires an analysis of the relationships of power in which they are situated. Race, class, gender, sexuality and its intersecting oppressions are central considerations for a critical race theory in education. Documented disparities in educational attainment between African American and Latino students and White students are not viewed as a function of race per se, but of the perceptions and experiences of systematic discrimination tied to these identities. If racism instead of race is a variable related to persistence, it may suggest different targets for investigation and change/intervention. For instance, if disparities were seen as linked to race, then the question might be what is it about these groups, what characteristics do they have that others do not, that lead to their lower levels of attainment. If the problem is framed as racism, then it may be more appropriate to examine what practices or aspects of the high school or higher education institutional environment are being experienced as hostile. In some ways it is easier and perhaps "safer" to examine the characteristics

students have that put them in danger of attrition. However, these characteristics are more of a proxy for gaps in opportunity and distribution of resources, a gap whose depth and contours are outlined by race, ethnicity, class and gender.

Solórzano (2001) identifies other components to a critical race theory, including the challenging of dominant discourses and ideologies in education, particularly of meritocracy, objectivity, and color blindness, among others. Making explicit the institution's assumptions about what is legitimate knowledge and who produces it, who can excel in higher education under what conditions, what are the race, class, gender, sexuality politics on campus, can be a first step in revising them in a more inclusive fashion. This is a challenge to existing power relations (Solórzano, 2001). Tierney (2000) takes it a step further and reminds us of the power of (re)definition. Creating positive, revisionist definitions in education can be a way of reclaiming power as a shared asset and not simply a commodity possessed by the few. Once the constraints of these assumptions are unfastened, a fuller view of students' diverse needs and assets is revealed. With this more expansive vision, the final three basic tenets of critical race theory become clearer: A commitment to social justice principles across curricula and pedagogy, putting students' experiential knowledge at the center, and collaborating/crossing disciplinary borders to advance these goals (Solórzano, 2001). Bowen and colleagues (1998) find that students of color are more committed to social change during college as well as after.

Delgado Bernal (2001) offers a qualitative analysis of the educational experiences of Chicanas that in several ways departs from traditional formulations of student persistence. First, instead of examining the characteristics of who departs, she takes a

close look at the strategies of those who remain and succeed. She also shifts the cultural capital deficit frame to one which views the cultural knowledge and “pedagogies of the home” that Chicanas bring to the university as a survival strategy and asset. Borrowed from Anzaldua’s pioneering *Borderlands* text (Anzaldua, 1987), an important construct in Bernal’s piece is “mestiza consciousness.” Although mestiza consciousness describes a complex, fluid hybridity, for the purpose of placing it within a social science/education discourse, Delgado Bernal operationalizes it as a “transformational resistance strategy” that includes “how a student balances, negotiates, and draws from bilingualism, biculturalism, commitment to communities and spiritualities (p. 628).” The negotiation of multiplicities embodied by a mestiza consciousness can be considered an academic success strategy and a form of capital that should be recognized and nurtured in academic settings.

However, at times the very multiplicity that helps Chicanas and other students of color negotiate these different dimensions of their lives can be a source of stress (Belle, 1987) as they must juggle multiple and often contradictory commitments, roles, obligations, and expectations (Flores-Gonzalez, 1999; Nora, 1996). Although I agree that it is crucial to recognize and nurture these border skills, I am left to wonder if the bridges between these social worlds must always be carried on the backs of women of color. What would it look like if educational institutions displayed a mestiza consciousness? What would it take for the institutions to act as bridges or at least facilitate their construction (or even acknowledge their importance)? The following section will address how the literature touches on these questions.

### Who has to change, who's asked to fit?

It is not only students who must adapt to a new culture but institutions that must allow themselves to be changed... (p.62, Rendon, 1992).

Tierney, Rendon and others offer beginning steps in shifting the gaze from individual student characteristics to institutional ones, calling for institutions to take some responsibility in student outcomes. Challenging interactionist theories (i.e., Tinto) based on assimilationist assumptions, they would agree that the fit between student and institution is an important factor in student persistence; however, they question why students of color necessarily need to be the ones changing to fit the institution. Tierney (2000) asks us to re-examine persistence models that suggest such unidirectional socialization:

Rather than a model that assumes that students must fit into what is often an alien culture and that they leave their own cultures, I argue the opposite. The challenge is to develop ways in which an individual's identity is affirmed, honored and incorporated into the organization's culture. Of necessity, we must seek ways not only to aid the individual in succeeding, but also in developing ways for the organization's culture to adapt to new individuals and groups (p.219)

One interpretation of Tierney's statement is that organizations and the students who populate them can/should change each other in empowering ways. Institutions should validate and take seriously the experiences and identities of their students without essentializing them.<sup>5</sup> Uri Treisman, for example, developed a successful mathematics curriculum for African American students which took into account their experiences. It is an important but not sufficient step to recognize and legitimate women's studies, ethnic studies, GLTB studies, and the like, as one way to address multiplicity. Having corners

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<sup>5</sup> One possible danger in an institution's attempt to accommodate the experiences of marginalized students is how institutions interpret their experiences and translate it into practice.

and pockets of safe spaces is a critical starting point, but it cannot stop there (Rendon, 1993; Rendon et al, 2000).

An institution, thus, can demonstrate a “mestiza consciousness” in various ways: Providing challenging and transformative learning experiences along with the necessary tools to fully engage them (Tierney, 2000; Garland, 1993), validating students’ experiences in and out of the classroom (Rendon, 1993; Rendon et al., 2000), embracing and negotiating multiplicities (Delgado Bernal, 2001), actively fighting against oppressive practices and ideologies (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001), supporting students’ movement between social realities (Delgado Bernal, 2001; Rendon et al., 2000), and learning from students how to build bridges through partnerships between community groups, families, and other organizations. This way, College/ University is not an alien territory jealously guarding its borders but a transformative extension of shared educational terrain nourished over time by many sources (Jimenez, Ayala, Herrera and Lara, in press).

Such organizational change can be slower and more difficult to achieve because of the current deeply rooted power arrangements. However untenable, such change does not have to be unattainable. Systemic change can be a collaboration from the ground up; not a light switch but a slow moving current, through small but infectious movements in transformative programming, activities, curricula, and pedagogical approaches as a supplement to policy. At the moment, these issues describe, for the most part, hopes and desires of what could be; empirical work is needed to further investigate these questions of institutional strategies and responsibility.

### Summary and Research Questions

It is well documented that there are persisting inequities in full access to a college education. Access is not only about getting in the door; it involves actually staying through graduation and developing networks of opportunity along the way. Many have theorized about why some groups have more or less access to higher education as it relates to persistence than others. Compelling financial, psychological, sociological and cultural reasons have been offered. However, traditional models of persistence/retention have been developed on majority White middle class populations — the population of students who traditionally have inhabited the academy— in an effort to determine how colleges and universities can keep from losing their higher capital students to other institutions. Therefore, what are assumed to be indicators of success and persistence, developed from these populations, may not apply to other groups who have not traditionally been granted access to the academy in the same way.

Financial/economic explanations tie the issue of persistence to resources; students without the means to pay for tuition and related expenses in general or who commit long hours of outside employment are less likely to be able to remain in college. Funding, and not simply through loans that many students will find difficult to pay, is critical to the persistence process, but not enough to explain the gaps in persistence and opportunity. Connected to economic and social resources, social reproduction theory explains the process by which some students persist and others do not. The fit between institution and student is key to determining persistence and retention; however, the educational system, molded by the cultural norms of those in power, is set up to attract and graduate upper class students through ideologies of meritocracy. The main limitation of this theory is

that it does not offer a way out and begins its analysis and concepts using the culture of power as the starting point. Psychological theories offer the role of personal agency, exploring the ways in which students make sense of their surroundings and experiences, and how individual cognitive processes inform over time their decisions to persist. However, exclusive focus on individual processes shifts the focus from institutional responsibility.

Cultural studies and critical race theory offer other avenues of inquiry, challenging researcher and practitioner to view the process of persistence using a bottom up perspective, through the eyes of migrants into the academy. Whereas traditional models of persistence take as a given the role of student involvement in campus activities, Rendon (1993) has found instead that validation is the critical factor for many students, who because of work or family obligations, often cannot attend these kinds of extracurricular events. She writes, "Validation is a powerful, interactive process involving a student and a validating agent..." which often "[occurs] out of class .... substantiating that there are other forms of engagement that can have a positive impact on persistence" (p. 149). Solórzano recommends thinking about Cuadraz and Pierce's (1994) concept of "endurance labor" as a potent variable in student persistence because it is grounded in the experiences of marginalized groups. Similarly, in a poem that demands the reader to re-examine the commonly used term "high-achiever," which connotes a certain degree of ease and privilege, Cuadraz (1989; in Hurtado, 2003) describes how instead, she sees herself as a "hurdle-jumper":

I want to be known as a hurdle-jumper, not as a high achiever  
 You see, high achiever connotes an easy path,  
 I am here to say it wasn't  
 And it still isn't

High achiever connotes that you've arrived somewhere  
And I am here to say I'm still going.

...  
I am a Hurdle-jumper because I don't come from  
A Class of "Achievers"  
I come from a Class of  
Mexican jumpin' beans.  
For your information,  
that makes me a Hurdle-jumper  
Cuadraz (1989; in Hurtado, 2003)

Finally, institutions are being asked to take more responsibility in student outcomes, not simply by requiring the students that walk through its doors to assimilate, but to itself be willing to transform. Validation, mestiza consciousness, endurance labor, hurdle-jumping— these are intriguing concepts to apply to persistence in higher education.

“Migrants” entering the academy bring with them a combination of assets, pressures, and gaps in opportunity, shaped in part by structural conditions and marginalizing experiences. Understanding these multiplicities and combinations, and examining how institutions address them (or do not) is an important part of the debate on the twin issues of access and persistence.

Some literature focuses on students of color as tokens in elite institutions while others document the happenings of large community colleges. But what occurs in the interstices, in the smaller educational centers that house significant numbers of students of color, first generation and working class/poor students? This study will investigate in one such context, the institutional, pedagogical, social and psychological obstacles and opportunities for migrants into the academy, asking the following questions:

- What are some characteristics of survival and persistence in the first year of college?

- What do “migrants into the academy” (students of color, first generation, and/or working class students) identify as pressures and supports in surviving college? How does this compare to what faculty and administrators identify?
- What are the multiplicities and border skills possessed by migrants into the academy? Under what conditions can they represent pressures versus supports? How do they help students persist?
- To what extent do higher education institutions recognize or capitalize on these skills as assets (through curricular approaches, programming, and policies)? In what ways do they undermine them?
- In what ways can higher education institutions demonstrate a mestiza consciousness and/or create opportunities for bridging? What are structural strategies colleges can use to support or provide scaffolding to migrants into the academy? How/would these approaches improve persistence/retention?

#### Outline of research plan

This project will further explore the relationships between race, class, gender and opportunity structures in higher education as manifested through persistence (Fine, 2004). Using multiple methods, the relationships between individual and institutional characteristics will be examined in the context of a private urban college in the Northeast that serves a substantial student of color population. On the student experience level, questions regarding what are viewed as pressures and supports (and for whom) will be investigated through qualitative methodology. On an institutional level, this study will ask how institutions can also employ border skills/mestiza consciousness through bridging and critical engagement in the classrooms. A participatory research design,

doubling as a creative action intervention, will also be employed to understand these issues.

**CHAPTER II**  
**METHODOLOGY**

## Overview of methods

To address the research questions, a participatory research design was employed whereby three student co-researchers conducted data collection. Ten students and ten staff were interviewed using semi-structured interview protocols. Observations of five classrooms from mathematics, the natural sciences, the social sciences and humanities were conducted. Participant observations made through my work at Faith College were also incorporated. Archived material, such as college newsletters and magazines, online material, statistical and other reports were obtained (though not all were collected in a systematic fashion).

Information on three cohorts of freshmen entering in the 2000-2001 (n=536), 2001-2002 (n=498) and 2002-2003 (n=444) academic years, were obtained from the college student information database. The total number of students comes to 1,478. This database contains information on students' pre-college scores (SAT, high school GPA), admission status, college performance indicators (cumulative GPA, number of credits attained), social variables (commuter/resident status, athletic status) and some demographic information (gender, race/ethnicity). Descriptive statistics were conducted and are reported as part of the chapter that describes characteristics of Faith College.

### Participatory research as method and intervention

A limited participatory design was implemented for this study. It was limited in the sense that only students were invited as co-researchers and their involvement generally consisted of interviewing other students. They were not asked to interview staff or observe faculty classrooms. Although a broader level of participation was considered for the student researchers, who probably would have been interested in these other data

collection activities, I ultimately decided to conduct the staff interviews and classroom observations myself. I decided this because of issues of power and authenticity. Namely, I assumed that staff and faculty would be less likely to respond sincerely and fully (if at all) if student researchers were interviewing them, than if a fellow staff person were to do so. There are moments and examples that staff and faculty may not feel free or deem appropriate to share with a student because of what it may reveal about the institution. Their positionality as students in this institution precludes their ability to access certain types of information. Students were thus, limited to interviewing other students and in lieu of the other activities, were asked to conduct field observations of open, public student spaces.

Other members of the college community were not asked to be co-researchers because the study focused on student experiences. As such, it made most sense to enlist other students in the project. I worked under the assumption that students would be most open with other students when discussing issues. My role at the college also posed some ethical concerns; therefore, I did not conduct any student interviews. Given the small size of the college and my relationships with staff, selecting certain staff members as co-researchers over others would have proven problematic.

The participatory research process for the students was intended to double as a creative action intervention, as students in the support and success program serving as the research team were enacting a pedagogy of engagement. The student researchers were encouraged to develop their own “take” on the data collected, and devise a creative product based on their learning—in this way, they had ownership of the project. They were expected to apply writing, interviewing and critical thinking skills, and translate

their insights into creative and informative products (Fine, 2001; Fine et al., 2004). The recognition of students' work throughout the research process, particularly the distribution/dissemination of their products to the college community was also thought to serve as a way of validating/legitimizing their skills, talents and experiences. What ensued was not the experience I had hoped for, in terms of benefiting the students. I will reflect on this process a bit later in the paper.

Students who took part in a support and success program were sent flyers describing the researcher position, among other work-study opportunities related to the program, via electronic and regular mail. Those that responded were interviewed and six were selected; however, only two female (Paulette and Malan) and one male student (Damien) accepted and followed through with the position. Two of the three student researchers identify as African-American and one identifies as Haitian-American. Each had at least one family member who attended or graduated from a college.

Two of the three earned college credit for this work. The third eventually opted not to receive credit because of complications with her schedule and credit load. The work student researchers engaged in consisted of the following: Weekly meetings whereby the goal and general theme of the project were discussed, students were trained in interviewing and issues of informed consent, and group reflections on the process and content of interviewing (see Appendix A for outline of work) took place. Using an existing framework of questions, the students revised and added questions to develop a uniform interview protocol with probes (see Appendix B). Students devised the questions about outside obligations, inspiring teachers, and race/financial status as it affects students in college. Malan also asked students if they felt their culture was

respected at the college (drawn from the Opportunity Gap survey, Fine et al, 2001) and if students felt that the college should do more to help students persist in college. The student co-researchers were asked to conduct between five and ten interviews each, conduct one ethnographic observation, take photographs that address the interview protocol or general theme of the project, maintain a journal, take on a theme or individual question to further develop and explore, and work collaboratively towards putting together a survival pamphlet for incoming students.

All three co-researchers conducted between six and thirteen interviews (although two students reported that some data were lost). After collecting the interviews, writing a poem and a few journal entries, Paulette withdrew from the study so as to better focus on her other demanding courses. Malan and Damien took photographs and wrote several journal entries. At the time of this writing, Malan and Damian are continuing to work on their final projects and typed versions of all their material, including their journal entries and reflections on the pictures.

At first, the student co-researchers' only data collection activity was to interview other students. However, after discussing the interviewing process as well as sharing some of the content, some of the student researchers suspected that their participants were painting too rosy a picture of the racial/ethnic dynamics of the campus. Paulette said in one meeting "maybe there really isn't anything unfair going on at this school, but I don't know, I kind of find that hard to believe." Malan commented that after the interview, some of the participants through casual conversation referred to this question, pointing out live examples. Malan wondered why they did not share these thoughts and observations with her during the interview. Based on these comments, I suggested

observation and photographs as other methods that could be used to capture what was not being spoken. Once this was decided, I typed an outline of the data collection responsibilities and distributed it among the group members.

I learned from this experience the importance of better structuring our work together, and not making it seem “like school.” For example, our most productive meetings took place in my office, rather than sitting in a circle in a classroom as had been our practice. When I pointed this out to the group, the co-researchers noted that it felt more like a meeting and less “like school” this way. Meeting in an office location presented an image of colleagues working on a collaborative project. This image contrasts with that of meeting in a classroom, which is associated with the hierarchy of the student/teacher relationship, where I hand down assignments for them to complete. I could see how this process appeared quite one-sided. For example, due to ethical/power issues, I felt uncomfortable sharing with the student co-researchers the transcripts of the interviews I had conducted with staff. Not conducting student interviews myself, I therefore did not contribute “data” to the group discussions. In future participatory projects, where possible, I would perhaps need to model the collaborative nature of this work by collecting and sharing the data and my interpretation of it.

#### Student interviews

Student researchers conducted all student interviews. They selected potential participants through their own friendship networks and through approaching students unknown to them in the cafeteria during lunch hours. A total of twenty-one student interviews were collected between the three over the course of one semester. Sixty-seven

percent of those interviewed were college women and 57% identified as either African-American or Caribbean.

Table 1. Race/ethnicity and gender breakdown of students interviewed.

	African-American	Caribbean	Latino/a	White	Filipino	Pakistani
Female	3	4	3	2	1	1
Male	4		1	2		

#### Staff interviews

I interviewed ten front-line staff from various departments throughout the college. Departments and areas included food service, security, various office secretaries, and administrators in the registration and financial areas. All respondents, except one, were women, fairly evenly distributed between African American, White and Latina ethnicities.

Table 2. Race/ethnicity and gender breakdown of staff interviewed.

	African American	White	Latina
Female	3	3	3
Male		1	

Staff were interviewed about what they viewed as pressures and supports students face, why they believe some students persist/perform better in college than others and what they have learned from students (see Appendix C).

#### Observations

Five classrooms from the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences and mathematics departments, identified as academic spaces where students have found

success, were selected to investigate the elements that make these classrooms successful. The principal investigator approached each professor individually to request permission. The observation protocol (found in Appendix D) included items such as classroom strategy, instructor approaches, student engagement and what happens immediately before/after class. All professors whose classroom was observed were White, and three of the five were men. Ethnographic observations of events, meetings, and informal discussions/interactions with students, staff and faculty, were also made over the course of one year. Observations were documented in a word processing file.

#### Reflections on insidership

Quite a bit has been written about the costs and benefits of insidership in research. Being inside a particular context can offer literal as well as symbolic and cultural access. Insiders are more likely to know where to look and who to ask. Let me emphasize the knowing part, because the choice how/to act on this insider knowledge is a different story altogether. Less energy is spent establishing trust, but more is spent with the weight of the responsibility associated with that trust. Here come the fears. Fear of the consequences of critique, fear of betraying those on whom you depend for daily functioning, fear of not asking or looking where you know you should, to avoid conflict. The issue of responsibility to participants moves beyond the intellectual domain of ethical debate—there is no choice but to confront these issues since they will surely be confronting the researcher on a daily basis. When the choice of exit is precluded, it is a different fear than that involved with approaching strangers.

I was an insider to this research context, as an administrator coordinating a support and success program for special admit students. Because of the relatively small

size of the college, I got to meet, interact and collaborate with many staff, students and faculty, developing relationships and a sense of belongingness to this community. My role evolved over the course of the year of study, sometimes complicating aspects of data collection. Asking staff for interviews and faculty for observations proved to be complicated over time. I struggled with recruiting staff participants for this study, and worried that, given the sometimes tense climate at the campus; they might feel I was evaluating their job performance. I expressly communicated that I would maintain strict confidentiality and that this was not an evaluation of their individual performance to be shared with supervisors. One of the participants reinforced my initial concerns as I reviewed the potential risks portion of the consent form process, by commenting “the worst that could happen is that I get fired.” Of course, she added that she always felt free to speak her mind nonetheless. Despite her reassurance to me that she felt free to speak her mind anyway, I was struck by the extent of the risk, real or perceived, on the part of the staff person, the degree of trust they were extending to me and the level of responsibility I had to them as researcher and coworker. I also felt somewhat awkward observing and “analyzing” my fellow colleagues and coworkers. My awkwardness was assuaged somewhat by the willingness and openness of the participants during the interview phase, but a tension resurfaced during the writing process.

As I wrote, I had a constant balancing and rebalancing of perspectives floating in the analysis. I worried about presenting the college in an unfairly negative light, a college that has welcomed and provided me with the physical, intellectual, ethical space in which to conduct my research. I worked at balancing and contextualizing the experiences of this college community to convey an understanding of the complexity,

challenge, caring and possibility of this place. There are many things I have observed as an insider to this context that I deeply disagree with and would often consult with my “power core” network of colleagues. In this paper, I critique the corporatization that occurs, but know that I am complicit in its expanding role at the college. Always the silent witness or behind the scenes actor, I sat at some of those meetings that invited more and more aspects of corporatization and sat with an uncomfortable silence. This was in part, because I initially felt uncertain about my opposition to some of the initiatives. In my gut I was opposed, but felt unable or perhaps afraid to articulate an inarticulate explanation of why some of these directions were not in the best interest of the spirit of the college. I witnessed how these corporate models offering simplistic solutions could lull us into a settled complacency; how a hard sell can make an easy buy in the absence of a critical mass of interruptions. “It’s what other colleges are doing,” it is the direction of the zeitgeist, it could mean the difference between making it or not. I know that when this piece is complete and I have fulfilled the requirements of my dissertation, I have a responsibility to share findings that could help the college. I wonder, however, how my observations and analysis could help the college without the requisite changes in the larger structures in which it is situated. I wonder as well if the many sparkling examples of intellectual and emotional beauty in the college community will also get heard.

### Analysis

Analyzing these data was, typical of qualitative research, a non-linear process involving multiple readings of transcripts and field notes, frequent library visits, coding, writing, and discussions with students and other colleagues (not necessarily in this order). I began with certain codes drawn from the literature, such as border skills, mestiza

consciousness and bridging, most of which survived as themes in the dissertation. Rereading the literature and saturating myself with the data, I first used these categories to understand student experiences. I then examined how these categories “worked” or did not, across levels. But a number of concepts emerged from, and were grounded in the data. To create these codes, I created columns with certain topics/codes as headings, and filled in quotes that fit under the categories. I would determine that a category did not work if I was unable to fit under it a substantive amount of data. As I looked across student and staff interviews, what emerged from the data, outside the scope of my original theorizing, were themes of corporatization, class, and parallel processes.

Participant insights often prompted me to investigate other avenues of data collection and/or analysis, as was the case for the theme of corporatization. One staff person discussed at length his perception of the college’s shift from a “family model” of functioning to a more “corporate model,” and the rippling effects of this shift. His theorizing directed me to further investigate the issue of corporatization as it was represented in the literature, in other staff and student interviews and in institutional documents and policies. As it turns out, this became a very productive line of analysis, and helped pave the way to a ‘parallel process’ analysis of institutional and individual dynamics (see next chapter).

The participatory research was more dynamic than initially anticipated. Rather than a stand-alone component, as I originally thought, the material was integrated into the full analysis. Data that student co-researchers collected documenting student beliefs and perceptions were essential to this project. Discussions on the early stages of data collection also informed subsequent analyses; in particular, reflections about the

conditions under which the potential of participatory research as method and intervention could be realized.

Throughout the dissertation process, I moved between coding, writing, discussing, reading, collecting more data, reading and writing again. As an example of the non-linear nature of the analysis, I will detail the steps I undertook in analyzing/writing the section on class stories. Upon reading the student transcripts, I noted that money repeatedly arose as an issue related to persistence/retention. I read through the staff transcripts and noticed the same trend, as it related to student experiences. In a word processing document, I copy-and-pasted or retyped mentionings made by staff and students, of money. I noted commonalities among the descriptions of the impact of money and began writing my observations. I discussed my observations with colleagues, and, based on feedback, realized that I needed to consult more of the literature on class and higher education. After a trip or two to the library, I summarized key concepts from, as well as gaps in, the literature and added it to the word processing document with the quotes. With the insights I gathered from discussions and literature searches, I better organized the quotes into conceptual categories and began writing the section again. As I wrote, I noticed that I left out one quote from a student who mentioned that “it sucks not getting my report card because I got a hold.” After further thinking about this student’s assertion, I was prompted to examine the policy/structural issues associated with financial holds, went back through all the interviews and field notes and continued writing. I superimposed another layer of analysis as I applied the concepts derived from student experiences to broader levels. Specifically, I examined the multifaceted concept of class

as it manifested itself in the language and experiences of staff and the policies and practices of the institution.

As can be noted from the above description, writing was used as an analytic tool (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994), as was participants' theorizing to the extent that it prompted further investigation and analysis. Both the writing and analysis occurred in layers and across levels, reflecting a method of *mestizaje*— an analytic method that works from a position of multiplicity and (contested) interconnections (Anzaldúa, 1987). This analytic framework also reveals connections and disjunctures between the individual and the institution.

CHAPTER III  
AN INTRODUCTION TO FAITH COLLEGE

### Overview: A Portrait of Faith College

This study took place within the context of a small (in the 2,000 – 5,000 range), four-year, private liberal arts college in the Northeast. A Catholic college situated in an urban setting, the college's mission is to provide a holistic education, providing a spiritual, service-oriented and lifespan approach to education. The primary target of their mission is the surrounding urban community. Boasting a relatively long, proud history and tradition of overcoming adversity, the college had to shut its doors twice due to historical events, to later reemerge back into the higher education scene. Once enjoying the status of a flourishing, "reputable" institution, the past few years have seen dipping retention and enrollment rates as compared to years past. Financial problems and some negative local press were also affecting the college at the time of this study. The events of September 11<sup>th</sup> and its impact on the overall economy also had an impact on the college. Staff and faculty did not receive raises for three years and there was talk at one point of layoffs. This contributed to a somewhat tense climate. There was a large number of staff and administrator "attrition" in key areas of the college. Most recently, however, enrollment numbers have been strengthening as have the freshmen to sophomore persistence rates. Staff have received raises, and the college is beginning to experience a renewed optimism.

### A virtual walking tour of the campus

I now invite the reader on a virtual walking tour of the campus, to get more of a concrete sense of the setting. It is a weekday and I am riding the train that takes me to Faith College. My eyes scan the advertisements dotting the train car. A couple of these advertisements feature a multiracial mix of smiling faces placed between bold letters that

spell out “Faith College,” promoting its association with success. The screeching sounds of the train signal that this is the stop. When I emerge from this underground transport, I see a wide block, filled with people, with a fountain on one side. People at each corner hand out free newspapers, or sit on the railings singing their requests for some change. A set of temporary stands sell fruits and vegetables. It is about a ten minute walk from this urban center to the college campus. A chorus of different languages can be heard on the street. On my way to the campus, I pass through a row of clothing stores, pharmacies, pizzerias, and bodegas. I keep walking down the curved main street, clogged with vehicles beeping at each other, and notice some churches. One of the larger ones has a flea market in the parking lot. Some shops have English and Arabic language signs. “Halal food sold here.” Now I am walking through mostly residential buildings and older homes. An occasional tree peeks through the cement just as I walk over the occasional spill of trash on the sidewalk.

I look up and see the makings of a walkway and some brightly colored flags<sup>6</sup> — we have arrived at Faith College. It is an intimate campus. I decide to go to the right hand side first. On this side, there are two buildings on each corner of the main street. I walk into the campus with ease and, in fact, am struck by this ease. There are no bars on any windows, no security guards posted in the classroom buildings demanding students to show their identification, no gates or physical barriers clearly marking where the community ends and the college begins. This is symbolic of the promise of Faith College, as a college for the community.

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<sup>6</sup> This walkway was the topic of much debate and frustration over the years. As of the fall of 2004, this walkway became fully operational and conveniently connects both sides of campus. Equipped with an elevator, it now makes another building wheelchair accessible. Also in the fall of 2004, new signage and more prominent flags have been placed on this block.

The building to my left has large windows, inviting me to look inside. This is what is known as the commuter cafeteria. There are many students; some are sitting on couches by themselves looking deep inside their books while munching on some food. Others are sitting in clusters around rectangular tables eating, talking, playing card games. One group, made up of one African American/Latina student, two White students and one international student, seems to be studying for a common class. They have their textbooks and notebooks open and are loudly discussing the material. The African American/Latina student is showing her classmate how to tackle a particular homework problem and gives him a friendly smack in the back of the head when he says he wants to give up. I look over at the line forming at the cash register, and see one of the women step aside with a student who seems upset.

Back outside, in the space between these front two buildings, I see a group of young men talking and laughing. One spontaneously begins a rhyme of spoken word as the others listen, bopping their heads. A professor passes them by and some of the students yell out, "Hey Professor..." This professor gets in the middle of the group and begins to joke with them, asking one about his assignment, quietly complimenting another about the great insight he shared in class. As the professor moves on from this group, he calls out to another student he recognizes and comments on her performance on the last athletic game, as she reminds him that her team plays again the following evening.

Walking past these two buildings leads me to an open space nestled between the remaining five buildings on this block. Each of these buildings is not more than three to four floors high. In this brick-floored open space, there are a few trees, a number of

benches, and a religious statue in a bed of grass and flowers pushed up alongside one of the buildings. Diagonal to the statue, pressed against one of the other buildings, is a bulletin board covered with flyers announcing events. One group is sponsoring a hunger awareness program, another group announces the on-campus viewing of a recent movie, a third promises to teach students yoga, others advertise academic skills workshops, still others invite students to learn how to dance salsa and practice their skills at an upcoming party. A couple of security guards, “walkie talkies” in hand, walk past and, recognizing me, wave hello.

It is a warm day around noon, and this open space now floods with a multiethnic mosaic of students just coming out of class: White, Latino/a, African-American, Caribbean, Middle Eastern, Pakistani, Indian, Filipino, and a myriad of their combinations. This is a diverse college: Close to thirty-percent are Latina/o, near twenty percent are African American, forty percent are White and seven percent are Asian/Pacific Islander. Over forty percent are considered low income (as measured by PELL eligibility and family incomes of \$45,000 or less) and seventy-five percent are first generation students.

Some students are hanging out in multi-ethnic groups, while others are in groups with similarly-situated others. I see some students sitting on the benches with a cell phone attached to their ear, a group of young women—some with scarves covering their heads, others without— walking together and laughing, a few couples holding hands or exchanging a quick kiss before heading off to their respective classes. Throughout this scene, there are some administrators and professors in the mix of students. This is one of the college-designated free periods, structured such that no classes are scheduled to

afford students the opportunity to participate in the various student organizations and service options. This time is loud and bustling with students, but within about ten minutes, students disperse to attend their respective club meetings, to eat in the cafeteria, take a quick nap in their dorm rooms, or to leave for their places of work. In the background, you can hear the occasional siren wailing past.

Straight ahead is a building no one can miss because of its unique shape and color. To walk inside this building, you need to show identification. The gyms, training room, pool, tennis courts and athletic offices are located here. In the small training room, you may find professors working out alongside students. In the evening, this is the place where professors and staff cheer for students as they participate in athletic games. It is a good opportunity for professors or staff to engage students who happen to be attending the game in some informal advising.

Across from this cluster of buildings is a narrow street, with cars packed tightly on either side. There are a few houses or small apartment building types owned by the college here. Sitting right beside residential apartment buildings, these offices offer an array of services to students. These buildings are so similar that sometimes students accidentally walk up to the wrong one. At the end of this block are the apartment-style dorms for upperclassmen. Students here often complain, informally and in public forums, about the conditions of these particular dorms. Although they are highly coveted as a sign of maturity and independent living among the resident students, these buildings are fairly old and require extensive maintenance.<sup>7</sup>

Retracing my steps, I now am on the other side of the main street, where three large residence halls stand. The first one houses the chapel, a conference room and

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<sup>7</sup> In the fall of 2004, repairs, upgrades and updates were made to address student concerns.

several offices. On the other side of this building is the security office-- the gatekeepers to the residential part of this building and the main security center for the campus. The other two buildings are newer, built within the last five to ten years to accommodate a growing dorm population,<sup>8</sup> and generally house the first and second year students. Between these buildings is a grassy, open space where you can find students throwing around a ball, standing outside the building cigarettes in hand, or simply standing in groups talking. Students sometimes complain about the strictness of these residence halls with their imposed curfews, and occasionally get into verbal spats with security officers when they forget their identification cards or misplace keys.

Walking further down the street, it becomes less clear that this is part of the Faith College campus. There are a number of college owned apartment buildings and homes that look like urban residential dwellings. To see professors in their offices, students walk into lived in looking apartment buildings. Many of the faculty offices are in these older buildings, as are many of the clergy's residences. This is another example of the blurring boundary between community and academy. A small alleyway between these buildings takes me to one of the parking lots and behind one of the dorms. Further down the street, past the offices, and reaching the busy street that runs parallel to the main street, the campus ends. Here, students find a string of businesses, a popular pizzeria, Latin bakery, and a sandwich store.

Now that we have a sense of the campus' external layout, let us take a tour of some of the classrooms. In the newer buildings, the classrooms are relatively small, seating no more than forty students, generally. The rooms are bright with large, white

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<sup>8</sup> Faith College was largely considered a commuter college, but there is a growing residential population. They find that more young men reside on campus than young women. The college is hoping to increase its resident population, particularly its female students.

dry-erase boards, and modern, comfortable chairs with flip-up desktops. Several of these classrooms are equipped with technology enhancements, facilitating the use of DVDs, PowerPoint, BlackBoard and other online activities. The older buildings have some classrooms with fixed rows and seats (again not more than about forty) slanting upwards, accommodating a lecture-style class, and chalk boards along the front of the room. There are only a couple of lecture halls and one auditorium on this campus. These rooms are used primarily for invited speakers and other such large scale events. For example, the yearly ceremony recognizing and awarding students' academic achievement, where faculty and staff walk in formal procession dressed in graduation garb, is held in the largest of these spaces. Many of these buildings have rows of lockers between classrooms. Only two classroom buildings have elevators, making it a challenge for students who require mobility assistance.

Inside the classrooms sit students arranged in rows or in a circle, with professors expressing their different pedagogical approaches. Students alternate between half-shut eyes and shouts of participation and engagement. The professors, unlike the students they are teaching, are mostly White; there are few faculty of color. Some faculty (like many staff) are actually graduates of Faith College. Only about 11% are clergy. You can find professors standing in front of the class lecturing, sitting atop the desk facilitating a dialogue, or walking up and down rows of students, calling them out by name. Each classroom seems to reflect a different style, as some professors present their points using technology, hand-write inspirational quotes on the board each day, passionately discuss an issue, or engage students in dramatic reenactments of the material. The activities range from students forming small groups to dissect arguments

put forth by Descartes, simulations on the nature and transmission of certain viruses, playing card games to understand theories of probability, in class debates on the merits of different political systems, essay-writing that analyzes a cultural “custom” they as individual students have, filling out inventories to understand how learning styles are measured and used in education. All these classes are relatively small, ranging from about eight students (depending upon the class) to occasionally forty students (though registration limits classroom sizes to about thirty-two students per section). According to published material, the student-faculty ratio is approximately 16:1. At times between classes, faculty informally meet each other in the hallway and discuss how students they may share are faring. It is this small size and intimate environment that lure many students, and may lead others to believe the college seems more like high school.

Touring more of the inner depths and trends of the college, you find the curriculum is liberal arts at its core, with an emphasis on faith and values, philosophy and theology. A social justice concentration, Latin American Studies program, and Philippine language course offerings, are among the more recent curricular additions. Students are required to take a common set of classes in each of the major liberal arts disciplines. Career-oriented majors are among the most popular here; for example, the business majors, criminal justice and teacher-training/education departments have perhaps the most students participating. More recently, a health professions arm of the college’s science department is gaining strength and popularity. Among faculty and administrators, there are debates about whether the college is/should be moving away from its liberal arts tradition.

During informal lunchtime conversations, or at the regular invited lunches with the college president, faculty discuss the joys and challenges of teaching such a diverse group of students—diverse in terms of ethnicity, religious affiliation, social class, geography and preparation. There are many discussions about the potential impact of rising entrance standards, enrollment numbers and persistence rates. The next few paragraphs will examine some of these trends at Faith College, and investigate the profile of students who attend.

The average SAT score for entering freshmen is rising; in 2000, the mean score was 880 and by 2002, it rose to 950. In these same three years, entering student high school grade point averages were essentially the same, with an average 2.95. A sizable number of students are admitted to Faith College under “special admissions” criteria. Students who enter Faith College through these “special admissions” are considered potentially “at risk” by virtue of a combination of lower SATs and high school grade point averages. African American and Latino/a students tend to be overrepresented in this category. Many students who fit these criteria are eligible to participate in enrichment, preparation and support programs offered by the college.

In their first year of college, Faith freshmen, on average, earn twenty-four credits and a 2.51 cumulative grade point average.<sup>9</sup> Relative to other colleges that share these overall admissions criteria, Faith College generally has favorable freshmen to sophomore persistence rates. Between the years of 1998 and 2003, the rates of student persistence have ranged from 71.2% to 75.5%, rising and dipping slightly within this time period. The highest rate was in the year 1999 and the lowest was in 2002, despite the higher

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<sup>9</sup> Based on the combined performance of three freshmen cohorts of 2000/2001 (2.47), 2001/2002 (2.5) and 2002/2003 (2.56).

average SAT score (by fifty points) in the latter year. These rates differ according to gender and race/ethnicity. For example, overall, the male college freshmen at Faith have lower persistence rates than Faith College women (67% versus 77%). This is across racial and ethnic groups, but the largest difference is between White men (68% return rate) and women (83%). Women also tend to have somewhat higher grade point averages and earned credits after their first year, even though they enter Faith College with lower average SAT scores. Among the women, Latina and African American students had lower persistence rates. Among the men, race/ethnicity did not really make a difference in terms of who stayed at Faith College and who left, though Latinos had the lowest persistence rates. For more detailed statistical information and data tables see Appendix E.

In 2003, the overall persistence rate rose to 73.2% and the college anticipates that further increases in standards/SAT scores will correspond to increases in persistence rates. Faith College measures its own success against that of other private institutions who generally serve a more academically and financially privileged community of students. Therefore, a priority of the college is to improve upon these rates.

Now that we have an understanding of the place of Faith College, a portrait of its students and general persistence trends, let us examine its more inner workings as expressed through narratives and observations.

**CHAPTER IV**  
**FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS**

## Overview

Multiple methods and an analytic framework of mestizaje were used to address the research questions about the border skills, pressures and supports migrants to the academy bring to/experience in college. Rather than simply reporting results as if separate from the existent literature, each reported theme or finding is written in conversation with the relevant scholarly literature. I use the overarching concepts of parallel process, mestiza consciousness and bridging to understand these findings. All three concepts involve multiplicity in some form. I use parallel processes to describe similarities between systems or units of analysis (individual and institution), and how they can affect one another. With bridging, I refer to the act of connecting social worlds by structures (or people). Mestiza consciousness can be described as a psychology of multiplicity; it is the intellectual, emotional, spiritual state of hybridity characterized by movement between realities. The main findings in this study are outlined in the following bulleted points:

- There are parallels in the struggles that “migrant” students and the college as an institution experiences.
- Students offer the gift of “inspiration work,” for their families, home communities and members of the college campus; however, at times these gifts can be scenes of academic struggle.
- Social class as material reality, psychology, relationship, and capital/corporate consciousness is important in understanding student experiences of college.

- Students described not only the material conditions associated with low income status, but also the psychological factors, the stress and worry, associated with it.
- Punitive finance-related college policies (such as financial blocks) can unwittingly serve to alienate lower income students from college resources and potentially act as persistence dis-incentives.
- Such policies coupled with current economic trends can erode relationships between staff and students.
- A discourse of capital and corporatization is prevalent in student, institution, and system understandings of higher education.
- Students are eager for intellectual stimulation within holding environments of support, and mutual transformative processes. Students felt the best teachers were those who validated (Rendon, 1993, 2001) them as students and provided holding environments (Powell Pruitt, 2004) for their learning.

Weaving data with scholarly literature throughout, this results section opens with the idea of parallel process. It is both a finding, and a lens with which to understand the subsequent material. Once I “found” parallel processes in one place, I “saw” it everywhere else. It became difficult to separate the finding from the lens. I therefore decided to blur the distinctions between what I saw and how I saw it, and present it as both a finding in the study, and a framework from which to understand the remaining material.

I draw from ethnographic observations, institutional documents and interviews with staff to document parallels between the migrant student struggles and the

institution's struggles —this is what I mean by parallel process. Borrowing from social reproduction and organizational behavior/dynamics theories, I argue that the tensions occurring at the institutional level are also reflected at the staff and student level.

Subsequent sections on 1) gifts and struggles 2) how class operates and 3) teaching and learning will be understood through this theoretical lens of parallel processes. These sections are organized according to themes in the data, rather than method or unit of analysis (student versus staff versus institution), again to better capture the parallels and intersections across levels.

The sections will move between units of analysis to examine the depth of these constructs and their interconnections across levels. In keeping with the analytic method of *mestizaje*, of multiplicities, the movement between levels will be reflected in the analysis but also in the writing, as writing stories will be interspersed with more traditional forms of academic writing. For example, representations of the concept of bridging will take shape in the content and writing method of the results section. Specifically, between major sections, a “bridging” story will act as theoretical and literary bridges connecting the various sections. A brief roadmap to these results now follows.

First, I discuss the concept of parallel process, as finding and framework. Then, I examine the theme of gifts and struggles students experience. A “bridge story” will follow, as a kind of punctuation mark between this and the following section (Powell, 2004, personal communication). Next, I explore the mechanisms through which class operates. Finally, after another bridge story, I delve into aspects of teaching and learning students find crucial.

Looking within to see across: Parallels between the individual and the institution

How do we look within to see across? How do student struggles reflect institutional dramas? In this section, as these questions are addressed, a finding and conceptual framework is introduced to understand the ways in which student gifts and pressures, social class enactments, and teaching and learning operate to impact student persistence. We learn that as we look within the lives and experiences of students, we can see across institutional strengths and vulnerabilities.

As we seek to understand the border skills students demonstrate, the struggles they face, the impact of challenge and learning within environments of support, it is important to examine the structures in which these are situated. To help us move between levels, we turn to the literature on higher educational processes. In his discussion of student persistence, Berger (2000) connects the social/contextual processes of the individual with that of the institution—linking macro and micro level forces to explain group patterns of behavior. When he theorizes about the importance of the interaction between individual and institutional capital, he broadly applies a deficit model to both entities. By doing so, he reveals vulnerabilities that are not simply located within the bodies of individual students but in institutions as well. Understanding persistence, then, means scrutinizing both institutional and individual processes as they interact or run separate tracks. Exploring this idea further, one finding in this study is that there are identifiable, parallel processes between the host college's struggles and the students' struggles (Opotow, 1990).

Such institutional/individual parallel processes have been described in the organizational psychology literature. Parallel processes have been defined as occurring

“when two or more systems—whether these consist of individuals, groups or organizations—have significant relationships with one another, they tend to develop similar affects, cognition and behaviors.” (Smith, Simmons and Thames, 1989, p.13). Smith and colleagues (1989) published a case study introducing and applying the idea of organizational/individual parallel processes to an organization to which they were consultants. Although the consulting/research group was contacted specifically to “fix the women” in this particular division, upon investigating the “women’s problem” the authors uncovered deep tensions throughout the unit. Outward tensions between the women were a conduit through which deeper conflicts among the organization’s leadership were expressed. The women’s fighting was essentially a public performance or rendering of the private struggles between the more powerful members of the organization. Even as the men in the unit helped propagate the tensions between the women so that they had an “outlet for venting their own tensions” (p.20) and competitiveness, they were able to maintain an image of appropriateness and professionalism by not directly acting out their own conflicts. In this way, they were positioned as voyeurs, outside the spectacle of conflict, and by extension, outside the scope of responsibility for the outcomes of the unit. An intervention that addressed these multiple layers of tension was devised, with favorable outcomes.

Smith and colleagues’ (1989) work demonstrates more concretely the importance of examining both individual and institutional level functioning to understand certain behaviors and dynamics. Specifically, an understanding of what occurs “on top” can facilitate understanding of how processes play out “on the ground,” and vice versa. Perhaps as we as researchers explore the issue of persistence, we too adopt an approach

of “fixing the students,” leaving the dynamics of the organization or institution outside the scope of scrutiny or responsibility.

Applying the parallel process lens to the institution under study, I see that student struggles and opportunities are a sort of microcosm of the institutional level politics. The link made in this paper between institution and individual is more abstract than that found in previous parallel process studies, which usually identifies tangible linkages between systems. Institutional level tensions here are reflected across multiple layers, including the level of the staff, that of the students exiting or remaining, and the level of the institution in relation to other institutions in the community of higher education. Although the parallel process model suggests a linear dripping of tension from top to bottom, the tensions I discuss more likely feed into and reinforce each layer.

The parallels drawn here are between the individual students navigating the college landscape and the institution trying to stay afloat amid nation-wide waves of higher education corporatization (Aronowitz, 2000). Placed within Opatow’s (1990) moral exclusion/inclusion theoretical framework, students’ struggle for inclusion in the moral community of Faith College runs parallel to the college’s struggle for inclusion in the broader moral community of Higher Education. Both the college and its students are trying to survive and dare to flourish within (relative) limited resources. Part of the border work students are undertaking in the academy involves balancing home, roots, culture, with the institution of college, which does not always acknowledge the gifts they bring and the difficult choices they carry. More often, these gifts are read as deficits, as the story below, drawn from a field note, illustrates.

*Maritza approached her counselor with a dilemma. Her class had a strict attendance policy and she was almost at the allowable limit of absences. She often had to accompany her mother to the hospital to get treatments, not only for emotional support but for instrumental support—she had to translate what the various doctors and technicians were saying. The hospital scheduled another treatment during Maritza's class and she now had to choose between going with her mother to the hospital or missing class, risking a failing grade. She used the counselor's phone to try to get an aunt or anyone else to help. Graduating college was important to her: "I want to graduate college so that I can be somebody and help my family." Confused, she asked her counselor what she should do.*

Like the migrants into the academy, this particular institution is engaging in identity/border work as it tries to hold onto its identity as a college committed to providing a holistic education for working class students, while constrained by the reality of having success and sustainability measured in terms of its ability to attract and hold onto elite students. One of the gifts this college offers is the rich diversity of its students and social justice commitments towards educating traditionally marginalized students. But again, in part because of how reputation and success are measured in the higher education market, these strengths are often interpreted as deficiencies—ones which ultimately translate to financial deficits. A stark example of this is documented in the field note below:

*Upon discussing an earlier version of this chapter, one high level official shared with me that, although he did not agree with this, he found that diversity was not valued by all elements within the higher education market. The college had retained the services*

*of a consulting firm whose purpose was to improve the image of the college. This college official allowed me to take a peek at the report, laid out in PowerPoint, with its recommendations. Printed in neat bullet points within nicely decorated panels, research that found diversity is only advantageous to homogenous groups, and that African Americans value diversity as an asset for college but that Caucasian students do not, was cited. Diversity tended to be a coded message for middle-class White parents that standards, reputation, prestige are lower. Situated in the diverse urban center as it was, the report concluded that parents may feel the campus is "too diverse," and that the college should focus its efforts on de-emphasizing its diversity in order to successfully improve its image.*

Written within months of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Brown vs. Board of Education, the report I took a glimpse at explicitly tells Faith College that its diversity, read higher than average percentages of students of color, is more of a liability than a strength. The implication is that Faith College needs to attract and retain middle-class White students in order to remain a viable, reputable institution. To achieve this goal, they are being told in a coldly compelling fashion by representatives of the corporate Higher Education market, to change its image. Similar to a bicultural student who is asked to assimilate into the mainstream, play down his/her roots to be successful (Fordham, 1988), Faith College is asked to play down an important part of its identity in order to achieve its own upward mobility.

Holding on to their vision, then, becomes more difficult as the fusion of education and economics, where labor market changes mold education in its own image, produce trends characterized by an increasingly vocationalized curriculum (Aronowitz, 2000) and

corporate climate. The college is desperately trying to “move up” alongside other private institutions by following these trends. Some advertising campaigns illustrate this point. One large billboard sign, for example, strategically located in the heart of the city, boldly declares “At Faith College, We Mean Business.” Faith College’s mission is not as prominently displayed in its public self.<sup>10</sup> The college has also been recently seeking to increase its admissions standards, defined as recruiting higher capital (higher SAT scoring) students.

Attracting higher capital students brings a certain reputation and prestige to the college, thereby increasing its own institutional capital and status, at the risk of betraying its roots. At the expense of these efforts to increase enrollment are the support programs often needed to keep and educate those from the local community—the target of their mission. For example, in recent years programs and services geared specifically towards English language learners have been terminated due to its diminishing need and effectiveness.

These institutional tensions are felt across multiple levels, seeping into staff perceptions and interactions. As the governing bodies of the institution grapple with how to project its image and live its identity, some staff take notice of the perceived change in priorities. One administrative assistant notes:

Respondent: They want retention but they don’t help students of color. I think they’re trying to pull more students of color out and get more Caucasian students here, anyway, but that’s just me.

Interviewer: What gives you that impression?

Respondent: When you go to Ohio to find students or Nebraska or wherever the heck they be getting them from. And we don’t reach out to the students right here... I just watch how they, to me, go above and beyond for (some) students ...

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<sup>10</sup> Recently, a large-scale advertising campaign, informed by these consultants, has changed the look of these advertisements. The emphasis is now on its intimate learning environment.

and they don't put that same effort in my opinion in the students that come from right here.

This college prides itself in providing to the college community a service/social justice oriented learning experience and caring, family-like atmosphere. However, to keep up with the trends of higher education, characterized by higher efficiency, higher standards, hier/archy, there has been a slow and steady shift away from the family model of operating to a more corporate model. The identity work here involves coming to terms with these models and deciding which of the two the institution really wants or can afford to be. An example of how institutional tensions play out in staff perceptions and interactions is the shift in language among staff, evident in the interviews. Some had compared the functioning of this college to that of other commercial enterprises; for example, in reference to the frustration expressed by students about services rendered at the college, one staff member compared "What if they went to Best Buy, they can't give you a product if it's not in stock." Jobs were compartmentalized, "I'm not trained to handle that...It's the Dean's role to guide the student," and students were described as "customers."

Many who have been around this college for some time, feel a deep sense of loss with this shifting model. Among these long-standing staff, there is a hope and a longing for a return to a family model of functioning, where administrators, faculty, staff and students were treated as an extended family. The language they use to describe the college and its relationships has an abundance of family imagery, using words like feeling loved, feeling at home, feeling a community spirit, and personal fulfillment (in the absence of fulfilling monetary compensation). These images get contrasted with those of

a corporate environment with the language of distance, coldness, capital (money) and betrayal.

In the past, [there were] more relationship between faculty and students. Faculty was more, got more involved with students. They used to talk after classes. I haven't seen that the last two or three years. Now sometimes the students feel that the professors don't care about if they understand. Before it used to be more community spirit. Like always all employees say that we care more about each other and now it's more like they come and they leave. Whoever came to work [here] used to be like 'that is my home.' But now it's only like a business. Before it's more educational institution, catholic institution and that together was you know caring for each other. Men and women for others. Now it's just for some people it's just a job. A job that is giving low income but... Administrators don't like to get involved with students for liabilities and that kind of problem. But before the [Deans] used to go to New York [with students] or to retreats the Vice Presidents. Now you see the VP in and out in and out. Two years and they leave. If you don't like, you leave. It's like a corporation. Educational institution for me is... *en espanol dicen que educacion es majestria*, like a ministry, *y pedagogia* the science to study education. But people is dedicated to teach but not the personal touch.

This sentiment is echoed by another staff person who felt that the root of the problem of persistence at this college is the shifting models of functioning.

I like it here, I want to see it succeed and you've got to get to the root of the problem. We're losing that family connection here, it *pains* me. [The college] used to operate like a family. A family takes care of each other. The college used to be a family and at some point we became a corporation. You are here and we pay you to be here and because of that you get the benefits, but loyalty changes. In a corporation if you get paid \$90,000 a year and work 50 hours a week shut up and do your job because you're getting paid to take the crap, I'm going to deliver. Work you like a dog but you get paid for it. Now here's the problem. You're not getting compensated but treated like the business. Before when you would get asked 'can you do this for me?' 'Do it for the family' - 'yes, Father, of course.' But now people are being asked [and they think to themselves] you don't treat me like family, I'm not being paid, I'm getting more work, now I can't rationalize it anymore. It's not balancing out anymore. I feel like a corporate employee without the paycheck. If you can't compensate your employees, treat them like gold. [Make them feel] they are appreciated, loved, so that if a child is sick and an employee needs to take extra time off - don't worry its ok. Just a reminder, hey thanks for coming in and helping out. I saw that you're with that student for awhile, thanks. Doesn't work otherwise. When is the last time you see anyone

smile at [NAME] department? Very U.S. very capitalist, which I am totally, but it comes at a price and the price is loyalty.

These staff members perhaps echo the sentiments of many long-time employees at the college. They feel a deep commitment to the ideals and theorize on what it takes to work and flourish in under resourced settings. The eventual shift to a corporate model, underscoring cost-efficiency over loyalty, increasing expectations and responsibilities while decreasing gratitude, compensation, promises for a secure future, is marking a time of increasing staff frustration and turnover at the college. Who begins to fall out when the fabric of the institution starts to fray (Fine, personal communication)? Who are the most vulnerable? These effects may reach down to the student, who feels these contested images as part of their own transitioning. As many staff persons note, "If we're underpaid and underappreciated working ten hours straight, we're not as likely to be oh so nice."

But there are remnants of the family model (or perhaps a reinvention of it); it has not completely evaporated in the winds of corporate transitions. There is a dwindling but powerful core of committed people, both long-time and new(er), but particularly among some committed staff who have witnessed the vision of how it could be. They are usually found in unexpected places, describing students as their "kids," themselves as "campus mothers/parents," and their roles as multiple.

Financial aid counselor: I know the grandma, I know the mom, I know the whole family and that's just the way I like it. Because when I went through school I didn't have that relationship with any of the faculty and I thought that was really a shame, and I felt and I feel that me being in the position that I'm in, I will be there for each and every student that I come in contact with. Making it feel like home...

Administrative Assistant: ... I said OK, cause I'm tired of sending my kids back, sending my children. [The students say] 'that's why we love you', and I said 'why?' 'Because you act like we belong to you.' 'You do; somebody gotta look after you.' 'Don't mess with my kids.'

Professional tutoring: We don't take cookie cutter students here with 1250 SATs. Have a couple of moles, dents, not quite normal, all a little strange. Get a nice montage, mosaic of personalities, makes it like a family. Everybody has a crazy uncle in the family. That's OK because you belong here.

Food service staff: I think I'm just one of these like, what people consider the on campus mother. Yeah I have a lot of children here. You can't not love them. You can't because they'll open up their hearts to you... I like the campus community itself. You know I wouldn't change that aspect and I'll never make a lot of money here, I'll never even make enough to pay my own bills here but I never want to have to leave because I like being within the community itself at the college. It's a good place to be. It's sometimes like you feel everybody's hands wrapped like around you in a big hug.

Those who make up this power core, link students to this vision of a college community, in and out of the classroom, in compelling ways. Their deep caring, even love, for students are sincere and heartfelt. Together with other structural conditions, they help make college a welcoming place to learn, facilitating a vision of college as another home instead of a place of distancing and alienation. Family (at least in its idealized image) can challenge, push, sometimes scold a person into keeping his or her priorities in check— in the interest of bettering the person, in the context of caring. However, with shifting institutional priorities and corresponding national economic and political trends, these links become further stretched. With increasing pressures, they can eventually snap. Most recently, one of the treasured “campus mothers” has had to exit the college due to illness. There is often a toll.

Carefully examining the lives of their students, their strengths and struggles, can offer the college insight into itself as an institution. The college can learn from its

migrant students how to adopt border skills and develop a mestiza consciousness. For example, as students learn how to code-switch (or frame-switch) between different languages and cultural frameworks, the institution could learn how become versed in multiple modalities and patterns of functioning. At the moment, the college is engaged in the identity work of struggling between competing images and identities. The hopeful part is that it is an ongoing struggle and not yet a conclusion.

### Gifts and struggles

In conceptualizing this section, I began with the idea of organizing it around the theme of gifts students bring to the academy, within the framework of border skills and supports. There were many that emerged throughout the data. However, it was difficult to detail the gifts that students bring, the border skills, the supports they enjoyed that kept them going in college, without discussing the ways in which these same strengths/supports were also often scenes of academic struggle. Perhaps this is not surprising when thinking through what borderlands are and what a mestiza consciousness encompasses, as conceptualized by Gloria Anzaldua (1987).

Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, la mestiza undergoes a struggle of the flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war...The new mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures...Not only does she sustain the contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else..." (p. 101).

Anzaldua writes about how this multiplicity of consciousness born out of the borderlands, both houses and transforms conflict, ambivalence. Because of the "clash of voices" representing disparate (but at times overlapping) cultural frameworks, it is not always a harmonious multiplicity. It is a multiplicity that can be contradictory even

uncomfortable, because of the forces that try to splinter it, and stratify the pieces according to dominant power relationships (Moraga and Anzaldua, 1981). Juggling identities, commitments, responsibilities with two hands but many eyes can sometimes bring about “*un choque*” a collision of cultural frameworks living within one body. *Un choque* whose consequences vary depending upon the context, since the different cultural frameworks are also differently valued in society’s power structure. In this way, areas that offer the mestiza the strength to thrive can also pose difficulties, just as the ways in which she engages the struggles can build up her strengths. Living with all these contradictions, she develops flexibility, a “tolerance for ambiguity,” and an understanding that the sometimes conflicting messages, stances, frameworks are what make up the whole of her (mestiza) consciousness. Though based on the experiences of border Chicana women, the complexity of supports and obstacles “migrant” students in college face may be understood using this framework.

Students spoke of the multiple commitments they had outside of college, from family/caregiving responsibilities, to housework, to holding down two or three jobs, to church and community service, to participation in college activities. They were active contributors to their extended families and communities. This sense of commitment to a larger whole, a sense that enables them to connect with and impact others in the college community, this capacity for others is one of the greatest gifts students offer. Students’ “endurance labor,” taking on multiple commitments and striving against the odds (Cuadraz and Pierce, 1994), can be described as “inspiration work.” Inspiration work, because their strengths can act as catalysts for change and sources of inspiration to others in their community. Some students recognize this as a skill, a strength they possess, like

Danisha, an African American student, who described one of her strengths: “I think I’m a good listener at times. And I think I can offer help to people who are in need. I think I offer support and comfort to, you know, people I interact with.” Others simply name it as part of a laundry list of responsibilities they tend to while also completing their college work.

I have a family...I have to pay rent. I keep a pretty good image in the neighborhood you know. I sing, I dance, I write poetry, I write stories, I model. Sometimes act. -- Tracey, Caribbean student

I work, I tutor outside of school, I’m involved in male mentor program. I sometimes help my brother and sister with their homework.—Derek, African-American student

I work, do community service, cook, clean and take care of my brother. — Mariana, Latina student

Students are a resource to one another, and many did recognize each other as such. One Pakistani freshman described how students were a source of motivation for her, and how they are a great asset to the college:

I like it, I really like it. I like this school, I like the students. The students are friendly... they help each other, that’s why I like it. Students really impressed me in this college because I was totally nervous...but I’m glad I met with the students, they really impressed me. And I got like more interest in this college. Other colleges no...

The reach of students’ inspiration work extends beyond their college-based peer groups. They position themselves, or find themselves positioned, as role models in their families and in their neighborhoods. Several students, for instance, indicated that they aspired to attend and ultimately graduate from college in order to “get a good job” and “help the family.”

### Family/community as resource and responsibility

Many of the students interviewed, particularly the students of color, articulated directly and indirectly the importance of family and community in their lives and academic work. Students indicated that family motivated them to remain in college and do well. From family, they received the encouragement to go to college, and continue once there. With pride and sometimes frustration, they articulated their responsibilities to the family financially, through their present and presumed future contributions as a result of their education, and emotionally, through their inspiration work as role models for the younger generations. This support/responsibility is what “kept them going” during some of the difficult moments they experienced in college. Clarissa, a Latina college junior, describes her commitment to others, and herself, as the force that propels her to continue with college despite the challenges:

What really kept me going is that I can't let the people that gave me my scholarship down. I can't let myself down. I can't let my sister down, because I'm her role model.

Clarissa, like other similarly situated students, feels that her accomplishments in college are not only for herself, but for others. It is a matter of personal fulfillment, as she explains “I can't let myself down,” but one that is embedded within a larger context of family and community fulfillment. This sentiment is echoed by a Greek student, Andrea

I didn't know what to expect (in college). I didn't know how college students were supposed to act, what they were supposed to do, where they were supposed to go. My first semester so far [was the one where] I really wanted to stop...Plus, because my family is working class background, we had to basically better our lives ourselves. No one else helped us. So that was another point that I had to take into consideration, that I had to help better my family's lives, and we don't want to worry about money or rent or things like that...

For Desiree, a twenty-year-old African-American student, college was a financial, physical, academic, social, spiritual struggle from the time she entered the college from out of state. She confronted numerous obstacles, including health-related problems that affected her attendance in class during her first year, a subsequent drop in grades resulting in academic probationary standing, (which in turn jeopardized her right to live on campus), and difficulty paying for tuition and books. She works “constantly” to pay for college and chose a demanding major. Practically every summer, she was confronted with the reality that she may have to drop out, or not be permitted to register, due to lack of payment. What kept her going was her sense of support from and responsibility to her family, specifically, her mother:

College is hard everyday. I feel like quitting everyday but I could never do it. It's difficult to balance time for work with eating and sleeping. I work almost constantly—I have a work study job plus I work at [a local] mall. Trying to get good grades and work gives me stress. [but] It's all worth it in the end. My mother and the values she instilled in me keep me going. I feel that I need to stay in college so I don't have to live paycheck to paycheck and my mom wants me to do better than she did.

Cuadraz (1989) would probably characterize Desiree, and the other students described here as “hurdle-jumpers,” because the path towards persistence in college was not cleared of obstacles, the way it is structured for more privileged students. Supportive cushions were often homemade, fashioned out of their family or local community's love and support. A family and sometimes community's hopes and dreams of possibility are often inscribed onto these students, like Desiree's mother, who desperately wants her daughter to get an education in order to “do better than she did,” or like Clarissa, who cannot drop out because it would be a let-down for her younger sister and community. Thus, the responsibility of “role model” or “first in the family to” was a charge of honor, but one

that also carried added pressures. When asked what it was like to be the first in her family to attend college, Hypnotique responded:

It gives me bragging rights. [But] its so stressful. Like everybody looking up to me like they'll say to become the first doctor and stuff. So I feel like my accomplishment is not only for myself but my entire family. Like I owe them something, when I don't.

Whereas privileged youth are asked to follow in their family or community's footsteps, many of these youth are asked to mark the first imprints for others to follow. This is a treasured responsibility, offering students "bragging rights," but also represents pressures, and can be "so stressful." In this way, just as students referenced the important role of family and community in their journey through college, when asked about difficult times, students sometimes articulated the very things that motivated them to succeed. The sources of their motivation at some moments were at others the cause of some of their difficulties. One African-American student, Jason, explained that his reason for leaving home to live on campus was a deliberate effort to escape from some of the responsibilities he had:

I've got a family. I've got a mother and a brother. I've got to take care of them at times. As much as I love them, sometimes it's hard to live with them. That's why I live on campus sometimes. Right now, sorry. I'm on campus now. I mean, yeah, they're an obligation, but I got to take care of where I'm at right now, okay?

Julio, another male student who described college as essential in "helping me get a better paying job to help my family," also described his caregiving responsibilities as a reason he sometimes considers dropping out. As he explains, "It's frustrating having to take care of my brother." Although many of the female students also described home and caregiving responsibilities, few had explicitly listed these as a liability in the ways that these young men articulated. This is not to suggest that family responsibilities were not

also a source of academic struggle for the young women, however. In my participant observations, there were numerous examples of the specific ways such responsibilities could also translate to academic struggles.

*Joanne came before a hearing for academic dismissal, where she tearfully pleaded that she be given another chance to remain at the college. She had attended another college where she was performing well and felt very satisfied, but transferred to this college where she was having difficulty adjusting. Throughout the interview she had tried to maintain her composure, but when it came time to describe the underlying reason for her abysmal academic performance, words mixed with tears flowed. She transferred here to be closer to her mother, who was very ill. Between studying and working, she needed to care for her mother as she underwent chemotherapy.*

This is one of the more stark examples of student responsibilities directly relating to academic performance and persistence. Others are more of a day-to-day, gradual accumulation of struggles. Tracey, an older Caribbean student, for example, listed “keeping a good image in the neighborhood” as one of her many responsibilities/supports. She felt committed to her neighborhood, particularly the children growing up in it, and saw herself as role model for them and others in the community. The support of her neighborhood, having members “stand by me,” was an important motivator for her. But again, when recounting the barriers to her own success, she referred to some of her supports:

*What gets in the way would be maybe I’m not doing so good in a class, you know, might need to work a little harder and I might not have that time... [and] residency, where I live. I’m not in the best neighborhood right now. It’s a little hard you’re hearing a lot of noise outside when you’re trying to study, concentrate. Little hardships outside you know conflict with how much you could really put yourself into your schoolwork.*

From students who needed to stop out for a semester to care for an ailing relative, to others who simply feel they do not have the resource of time or adequate space in which to complete the required course assignments, areas that offer the best support can also be the source of the greatest challenge (Delgado Bernal, 2001).

#### Gifts to the college community

Interviewing faculty and staff, I heard stories of how the students impact their lives in subtle and profound ways. Working with students, committed faculty and staff often feel changed by them. It made waking up in the morning to come to work desirable, despite other challenges they faced. Maggie, one staff member, related a story of how the students have impacted her, both at work and in life. The catalyst for this learning was a spiritual retreat, where she volunteered to serve as a mentor and speak to the students about the challenges and opportunities in her life:

I think they [students] taught me a lot about myself. I went [on a spiritual retreat with students] I tattooed it [the name of the retreat] on my arm. Yeah. ...I don't think anything in my life has ever impressed me that much. The director said "Tell a little bit about your life ...the ups and downs of your life..." and I don't think I could do this, I'm not used to talking about myself especially to people I don't even know. Then I had to be the first speaker up when we got there that night and I could remember feeling like really sick and thinking there's no way in hell I could do this. Look at me, there's twenty some odd kids, thirty-two kids something like that and they can look at you these kids... what the hell are they gonna thinka me you know. And before it was done everybody besides me was cryin' you know, everybody was sobbing. I'm trying to run out of the room and I've got like twenty million kids following me trying to hug me and it taught me a lot about myself. I was just amazed by it. Cause there's things I wouldn't even tell my closest friends and I was telling a room full of teenagers. I was like whoa. So they taught me a lot about me too. I thought I learned a lot.

Experiences such as these with students, offset some of the other challenges she saw in her work. She best described this sentiment when she shared:

You know when I feel beaten down by not getting a decent raise or not getting appreciated by my boss or whatever um I come upstairs [where I interact with students] and I learn that all that changes once I'm up here. You know, 'cause I feel respected and I feel loved and uh, that's what makes it worthwhile you know. It's just something they give you ...

The "something they give you" Maggie describes is one of the gifts students offer that do not often get recognized in retention efforts, in policy-making, in educational/psychological research literatures. It is the type of inspiration work that gives colleges the opportunity to be spaces of mutual exchange and transformation.

Another staff member shared how she felt inspired by the dedication she saw in the students she worked with, and simultaneously supported by them as she reached for her own personal academic/career goals:

I've learned [from students] how to persevere. Because when I was taking classes, and the students would come and tell me things and I said "Look, I'm taking classes too and this is not no joke because I'm not twenty anymore" and they laugh and they say to me "Oh, you could do it, you could do it because we know you could do it, you'll graduate." And it was nice when I graduated with [one of my students]. "So you're gonna graduate with me?" "Yeah, I'm gonna graduate with you." And it was so, it was nice, it was just cool cause you know I walked and they were like [yelling my name] and it made me feel really good. I'm learning to be grateful for all things because I ain't getting that money. They're cool. Students are cool. I think that's why I stuck it out so long [at this job]. I like the students, cause you get to meet different kinds of people from different places and you could talk to them, and they talk to you, and they're going places like [one student] she went to Chile for a summer to study. And they come back and bring you things and ...she learned how to speak Spanish better and [was teaching] me words, "Oh, you gotta learn this word it's a good word." And just sharing their experience with you. It's nice, it's a nice thing to share somebody's life.

Here, Tammy powerfully narrates how students inspired her, taught her how to persevere in her own life. She describes the multiple ways she learns from students as being inspired by them, feeling supported by them, and sharing lives and lessons with them. Like Maggie, and other committed (to students) staff and faculty, interactions with

students were a resource and a reward in a setting where they felt they may not be compensated otherwise. Graduating (an institutional benefit) alongside some of the students she worked with, learning some words in Spanish by a student who studied abroad for a summer, partaking in cathartic spirit-work along with students, and generally interpreting these experiences as ones of mutual learning and respect is in itself an act of dismantling hierarchies. Using/living this understanding disrupts the hierarchies and dichotomies associated with the learner/student and facilitator/teacher roles, allowing for a deeper, relational, situated knowing. These interactions suggest an openness to personal change and transformation on the part of staff/faculty that can elicit the best inspiration and community building work on the part of the students. It also seems no coincidence that the most committed faculty and staff are the ones who described feeling changed by them, who narrated tales of learning from them. Perhaps it is the openness in staff/faculty to be changed by students that inspires them to be so committed to the students. This openness or receptivity to mutual exchange/transformation on the part of students, staff, faculty, even though it occurs in small waves of interaction, can be characteristic of an expanding mestiza consciousness.

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TRANSNATIONAL BRIDGES: FEATURING  
FAITH COLLEGE'S MUSLIM CULTURE CLUB<sup>11</sup>

RASHIDA DID NOT SEE HERSELF AS A LEADER. SHE WAS SOMEWHAT SHY, QUIET, RESERVED AT FIRST. TRANSITIONING INTO FAITH COLLEGE THROUGH A SUMMER BRIDGE PROGRAM FOR LOW INCOME STUDENTS, SHE FELT FORTUNATE TO HAVE A COMMUNITY OF PEERS FROM HER OLD HIGH SCHOOL WELCOME HER ARRIVAL. A YOUNG MUSLIM WOMAN IN THE MIDST OF A CATHOLIC COLLEGE, SHE SEARCHED FOR A WAY TO FORGE SPACES OF HOME WITHIN THE COLLEGE. ONE CLASSROOM, ONE PROFESSOR, HELPED INSTIGATE THIS PROGRESSION.

THROUGH HIS EFFORTS IN AND OUT OF CLASS, PROFESSOR LELAND OFFERED THE CLASSROOM AS A SPACE FOR THE FREE EXCHANGE OF THOUGHTS, IDEAS, FEELINGS AS WELL AS INTELLECTUAL RIGOR. AFTER CLASS ONE DAY, PROFESSOR LELAND AND RASHIDA WERE DISCUSSING HOW TO IMPROVE THE WRITING OF ONE OF HER PAPERS. THE CONVERSATION TURNED TO EVENTS RELATED TO THE CONTENT OF HER PAPER AND RASHIDA TALKED ABOUT HER PARTICIPATION IN THE CAMPUS MUSLIM CULTURE CLUB. RASHIDA SHARES IN JEST:

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<sup>11</sup> The dialogue/exchanges portrayed here reflect student accounts of campus occurrences during informal conversations.

RASHIDA: I WISH THERE WAS MORE COMMUNITY WITH THE MUSLIMS IN THIS SCHOOL, YOU KNOW. TOO BAD I'M NOT PRESIDENT OF THE CLUB. *(Laughs)*.

PROFESSOR: *(Seriously)* WELL, WHY DON'T YOU BECOME PRESIDENT? I THINK YOU COULD DO IT AND REALLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

RASHIDA: ME? NO, I WAS JUST KIDDING.

PROFESSOR: I'M NOT. I'M SERIOUS, RASHIDA. YOU SHOULD BECOME PRESIDENT AND DO THINGS TO, LIKE YOU SAID, BRING COMMUNITY TO MUSLIM STUDENTS HERE ON CAMPUS. YOU KNOW, YOU AT LEAST KNEW SOME PEOPLE FROM YOUR HIGH SCHOOL WHEN YOU GOT HERE BUT OTHER KIDS THAT MIGHT COME MAY NOT'VE HAD THAT. THEY MAY NOT GET TO MEET UP WITH OTHER MUSLIM STUDENTS AND FEEL KINDA ISOLATED. YOU SHOULD DO IT. AND IF YOU NEED ANY HELP WITH IT, JUST LET ME KNOW.

SLOWLY MOVING INTO LEADERSHIP POSITIONS WITHIN THE CAMPUS ORGANIZATION, RASHIDA EVENTUALLY BECAME PRESIDENT OF THE CLUB HER SENIOR YEAR IN COLLEGE, WITH PROFESSOR LELAND AS THE CLUB'S FACULTY ADVISOR. THAT YEAR, THE MUSLIM CULTURE CLUB WAS VOTED MOST PRODUCTIVE OF ALL THE STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS.

#### ACT TWO:

MEMBERS OF THE MUSLIM CULTURE CLUB WERE FAIRLY CLOSE, STUDYING IN THE LIBRARY TOGETHER, EVENTUALLY WORKING IN THE LIBRARY TOGETHER, AS WELL AS COORDINATING CLUB EVENTS. AS SOME CLUB MEMBERS WERE MORE VERSED IN THE HISTORY AND TENETS OF ISLAM THAN OTHERS, AND WOULD ADHERE TO THE

FAITH IN DIFFERENT FORMS, THEY WOULD OFTEN DISCUSS AND SHARE THEIR LEARNINGS, INTERPRETATIONS AND EXPERIENCES WITH ONE ANOTHER. AMONG THE DEVASTATING EFFECTS OF EVENTS OF SEPTEMBER 11<sup>TH</sup>, WAS THE FEAR MANY MIDDLE-EASTERN AND MUSLIM STUDENTS HAD FOR THEIR SAFETY IN THE COMMUNITY, AND IN THE COLLEGE. IN THE DAY OF THE ATTACKS, AND SHORTLY AFTERWARDS, IT WAS RUMORED THAT SOME MUSLIM STUDENTS WERE VERBALLY HARASSED, AND OTHERS WERE MADE TO FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE BECAUSE OF THEIR REAL OR IMAGINED RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION. IN GENERAL, THEY FELT SAFE AND SUPPORTED ON CAMPUS, BUT THERE WERE SOME INSTANCES..

FATIMA IS SITTING IN A CLASSROOM FILLED WITH STUDENTS TAKING NOTES, OCCASIONAL HANDS RAISING. IT IS SHORTLY AFTER SEPTEMBER 11<sup>TH</sup>. PROFESSOR WILKINS ADDRESSES THE CLASS, AND ENGAGES FATIMA, AN OUTSPOKEN AND CONSCIENTIOUS STUDENT, IN A CONVERSATION:

PROFESSOR WILKINS: SO FATIMA, WHAT'S YOUR BACKGROUND? WHERE ARE YOU FROM?

FATIMA: I'M FROM PAKISTAN.

PROFESSOR WILKINS: OH REALLY? WHERE IN PAKISTAN?

FATIMA: *(Thinks to herself, Wow, this professor is really interested in learning about my culture. More professors should be like this).*  
I'M FROM THE NORTHWESTERN PART.

PROFESSOR: OH. THAT'S THE PART THAT SUPPORTS THE TALIBAN.

FATIMA: (*Mortified that he would say this in front of the entire class, aghast at the insinuation that she supported the Taliban and by extension, the terrorist attacks, Fatima knows she needs to respond immediately and forcefully to this implied accusation*).

NO! MAYBE SOME PEOPLE THERE DID BUT NOT WHERE I WAS FROM. I HAD NEVER EVEN HEARD OF THE TALIBAN UNTIL THIS HAPPENED.

FATIMA SHARED THIS EVENT WITH HER FELLOW CLUB MEMBERS, WHO ADMIRERD HER COURAGE IN SPEAKING OUT AGAINST THE PROFESSOR TO DEFEND HERSELF. ALTHOUGH CLUB MEMBERS DID NOT, IN GENERAL, FEEL THREATENED OR HARASSED BY OTHER STUDENTS AND STAFF AT FAITH COLLEGE, THEY NEVERTHELESS RECOGNIZED THE POTENTIAL FOR THESE NEGATIVE ASSOCIATIONS. MEDIA ONLY OFFERED VISIONS OF ISLAM IN ITS EXTREMIST AND MOST MILITANT FORMS, RATHER THAN ALSO PORTRAY THOSE ASPECTS OF THE RELIGION THE STUDENTS CHERISHED. THE CLUB RENEWERD ITS COMMITMENT TO CREATE COMMUNITY AND MUTUAL CULTURAL UNDERSTANDINGS AMONG ALL CAMPUS CONSTITUENTS. FATIMA AND OTHER MEMBERS OF THE CLUB, VISITED CLASSROOMS AND SPOKE OUT AT THE VARIOUS PANELS AND EVENTS OFFERED BY THE CAMPUS. FACULTY MEMBERS CREATED SPACES FOR SUCH DISCUSSION. THE COLLEGE INSISTED THAT THE COMMUNITY JOIN IN PRAYER AGAINST THE ATTACKS, IN SUPPORT OF THE AFFECTED FAMILIES AND IN SUPPORT OF MUSLIM

AND ARAB MEMBERS OF ITS OWN COLLEGE COMMUNITY WHO ARE UNFAIRLY TARGETED IN THE LARGER SOCIETY.

### ACT THREE

RASHIDA AND HER TEAM OF CLUB MEMBERS WERE DETERMINED TO PROMOTE AWARENESS AND CREATE A BROADER SENSE OF COMMUNITY WITHIN THE COLLEGE. WITH SOME GUIDANCE FROM PROFESSOR LELAND, THE MUSLIM CULTURE CLUB STRETCHED ACROSS THE BORDERS OF CULTURE-THEMED CLUB AND CRITICAL/ACADEMIC SPACE, OF STUDENT AND STAFF/FACULTY PARTICIPATION, OF CULTURAL EXCLUSIVITY AND CROSS COMMUNITY BUILDING. THE MUSLIM CULTURE CLUB FORMALLY REINTRODUCED ITSELF TO THE CAMPUS COMMUNITY. OUTSIDE THE NORM OF STUDENT CLUB CONDUCT, THEY ISSUED A FORMAL INVITATION TO ALL FACULTY TO COME AND ENGAGE IN A MUTUAL LEARNING EXPERIENCE WITH THEM BY JOINING THE CLUB AND INVITING THEIR STUDENTS TO DO SO AS WELL.

DURING RAMADAN, THE CLUB INVITED FACULTY AND STUDENTS TO BREAK FAST WITH THEM (IFTAR). AT THESE TIMES, CLUB MEMBERS WOULD SHARE WITH FACULTY AND STUDENTS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS EVENT. IN THIS SPACE, FACULTY WERE SITUATED AS THE LEARNERS AND THE STUDENTS WERE THE CULTURAL LEADERS AND TEACHERS. SOME MEMBERS OF THE LOCAL

COMMUNITY WOULD ALSO PARTICIPATE, INCLUDING GRADUATE STUDENTS AND EVENING STUDENTS.

AT THE TIME RASHIDA BECAME PRESIDENT OF THE MUSLIM CULTURE CLUB, ALL OF THE LEADERSHIP POSITIONS WERE OCCUPIED BY WOMEN. THE CLUB HAD ORGANIZED VARIOUS EVENTS, INCLUDING FUND-RAISING PARTIES. EXPANDING THE DIMENSIONS ALONG WHICH COMMUNITIES WERE FORGED, THE CLUB DECIDED TO ORGANIZE THE COLLEGE'S FIRST WOMEN'S RALLY. WITH THE SUPPORT OF PROFESSOR LELAND, RASHIDA PERSONALLY INVITED SEVERAL PROMINENT FEMALE FACULTY AND STAFF COLLEGE MEMBERS TO SPEAK AT THE EVENT. IT WAS AN EVENING WHERE MULTIPLICITIES OF IDENTITIES AND EXPERIENCES WERE ENGAGED ACROSS BORDERS, AS THE MUSLIM CULTURE CLUB CLAIMED ITS OWN SPACE OF FEMINISM. IT WAS AN EVENING WHERE RACISM WAS RECOGNIZED ALONGSIDE SEXISM AND PATRIARCHY, AS PART OF THE SAME FAMILY OF OPPRESSIONS. WITH THIS EVENT, THE CLUB REACHED OUT TO FORGE CONNECTIONS, TO FORM A SPACE OF HOME AND COMMUNITY WITH OTHER WOMEN ON CAMPUS.

THERE WAS AN AFTER-EVENT DISCUSSION BETWEEN THE ORGANIZERS OF THIS EVENT, INCLUDING THE ONE WHITE MALE MEMBER, AND A FEW STAFF AND FACULTY MEMBERS. DURING THIS DISCUSSION, MIAH MADE EXPLICIT THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN RACISM AND SEXISM AS SHE TAKES THE MEMBERS BACK TWO YEARS,

TO A FAITH COLLEGE CLASSROOM. MIAH IS SITTING IN HER CLASS WHILE HER PROFESSOR DISCUSSES THE NATURE OF THE JOB MARKET. HE MAKES AN OFFHANDED COMMENT:

PROFESSOR ANON-YMOUS: IF YOU WOMEN THINK YOU'LL GRADUATE AND GET A GOOD JOB AND HAVE A CAREER THEN YOU ARE WRONG.

STUDENT: WHY YOU WOULD SAY THAT!

PROFESSOR: BECAUSE, LETS FACE IT, EVEN IF WOMEN GRADUATE, GET A DEGREE OR GET A JOB, THEY'LL END UP LEAVING THAT JOB. WHY? BECAUSE WOMEN WILL EVENTUALLY STAY HOME TO RAISE KIDS OR BECOME HOUSE WIVES.

MIAH DID NOT RESPOND TO THE PROFESSOR, BUT SPOKE OF A TIME LATER WHEN SHE DID.

PROFESSOR ANON-YMOUS: ... ISLAM IS A RELATIVELY NEW RELIGION; THAT'S WHY YOU'RE MORE LIKELY TO SEE MORE TERRORISTS AMONG THEM.

MIAH: (Raises her hand). EXCUSE ME, PROFESSOR.

PROFESSOR ANON-YMOUS: YES MIAH.

MIAH: DO I LOOK LIKE A TERRORIST TO YOU?

PROFESSOR ANON-YMOUS: WELL, NO, OF COURSE NOT.

MIAH: BECAUSE I'M MUSLIM AND YOU JUST SAID THAT ALL MUSLIM PEOPLE ARE TERRORISTS, SO YOU MUST THINK THAT I'M ONE.

PROFESSOR ANON-YMOUS: OH, NO, THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEANT...

STUDENT: (Interrupts) PROFESSOR ANON-YMOUS, GETTING BACK TO WHAT WE WERE TALKING ABOUT EARLIER, COULD YOU EXPLAIN... .

MIAH CONTINUES TALKING ABOUT HOW THIS PROFESSOR ALSO TARGETED GAY MEN AND WOMEN, AND HOW ALL OF THESE EXPERIENCES EXEMPLIFIED EFFORTS AT SPLINTERING COMMUNITIES. THE STAFF MEMBERS PRESSED MIAH TO DIVULGE THE NAME OF THE PROFESSOR, BUT SHE ADAMANTLY REFUSED. HER VISION OF THIS EVENT WAS TO PRY OPEN ANOTHER LAYER OF CONNECTION AND DIALOGUE AMONG CAMPUS MEMBERS, IT WAS ABOUT EMBRACING COMMUNITY.

#### ACT IV

A LONG TIME CONVERSATION AMONG CLUB MEMBERS WAS THE STRUGGLE TO PRAY ACCORDING TO THEIR FAITH YET ATTEND CLASSES IN THE MANNER EXPECTED BY THEIR PROFESSORS. A CONVERSATION WHICH TRANSFORMED INTO ACTION THROUGH THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF A PROFESSOR WHO SIMPLY ASKED THEM, "WHY NOT DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT?" OFFERING TOOLS OF ENCOURAGEMENT AND DECONSTRUCTION OF THE INSTITUTION'S CULTURAL ACCESS CODES, PROFESSOR LELAND PROVIDED A ROADMAP THROUGH THE PROCESS OF A CREATING AN ON-CAMPUS MUSLIM AND HINDU PRAYER ROOM. BEGINNING A TWO-YEAR PROCESS, THE CLUB STARTED BY FORMING COALITIONS. ESTABLISHING THE POROUS NATURE OF THEIR COMMUNITY BORDERS, RASHIDA REACHED OUT TO THE CATHOLIC REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CAMPUS. IN THE WELCOMING COUCHES

OF THE CATHOLIC MINISTRY ROOM, RASHIDA SPEAKS TO THE DIRECTOR. THEY HAVE MET BEFORE DURING INTER-FAITH ACTIVITIES.

RASHIDA: HELLO DIRECTOR.

DIRECTOR: HI RASHIDA. GOOD TO SEE YOU. HOW IS EVERYTHING?

RASHIDA: OH IT'S VERY GOOD. YEAH. I WANTED TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT SOMETHING. PROFESSOR LELAND SAID I COULD TALK TO YOU. I THINK WE SHOULD HAVE A MUSLIM PRAYER ROOM YOU KNOW, BECAUSE IT'S HARD FOR US TO FIND A PLACE TO PRAY BETWEEN CLASSES FIVE TIMES A DAY. AND WE REALLY NEED TO PRAY, ESPECIALLY DURING RAMADAN. IT'S VERY HOLY FOR US.

DIRECTOR: (Pauses). WELL, THAT'S GONNA BE HARD. BECAUSE FIRST OF ALL, WE CAN'T JUST HAVE A PRAYER SPACE FOR MUSLIM STUDENTS BECAUSE THAT LEAVES OUT OTHER PEOPLE. THEN WE'LL NEED A SEPARATE PRAYER SPACE FOR JEWISH STUDENTS AND HINDU STUDENTS AND OTHERS TOO. YOU'LL NEED TO RAISE MONEY FOR IT BECAUSE I KNOW FAITH COLLEGE WON'T FUND IT... ALSO, THIS IS A CATHOLIC COLLEGE SO IT MIGHT BE HARD TO DO THAT. BUT, LET'S THINK ABOUT IT, OKAY. WHY DON'T YOU START BY DOING A PETITION AND WE'LL SEE WHAT WE CAN DO...

RASHIDA SET OUT TO ADDRESS THESE OBSTACLES BY JOINING FORCES WITH THE CATHOLIC SOCIAL JUSTICE CLUB. THE ACTIVIST CLUB SUPPORTED THEIR EFFORTS, WORKING WITH THEM ON DEVELOPING SUCCESSFUL FUND-RAISING CAMPAIGNS AND DEVELOPING PETITIONS. IT BECAME A JOINT LIBERATORY PROJECT. PETITION NAMES WERE ACQUIRED, A SPACE WAS NEGOTIATED, FUNDS WERE RAISED, ALL WITH COMBINED EFFORTS OF THE MUSLIM CULTURE CLUB, THE ACTIVIST CLUB, PROFESSOR LELAND

LATER JOINED BY OTHER STAFF MEMBERS. THE STAFF/FACULTY INTERVENED TO ADVOCATE FOR THE PRAYER SPACE TO THE COLLEGE LEADERSHIP—THEIR COMBINED EFFORTS RESULTED IN THE COLLEGE'S FIRST EVER MUSLIM/HINDU PRAYER SPACE.

NOT ONLY WAS THIS PRAYER SPACE APPROVED, IT WAS LEGITIMIZED AS A CAMPUS-WIDE SYMBOL OF COMMUNITY GROWTH. A CATHOLIC MASS PRESIDED OVER BY THE COLLEGE PRESIDENT HONORED THIS ACCOMPLISHMENT, THE TIME SPLIT BETWEEN PRAYER IN THE CHAPEL AND THE NEWLY APPOINTED MUSLIM/HINDU PRAYER SPACE. THE CULTURAL LEADERS INITIATING THIS TRANSFORMATION SHARED THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SPACE AND THE STRENGTHENED SENSE OF COMMUNITY IT MARKED FOR THE COLLEGE.

#### CLOSING INTERNAL MONOLOGUE

THE BRIDGES CONSTRUCTED OUT OF STRUGGLES AND HOPES, ENDURANCE LABOR AND HURDLE JUMPING, BORDER SKILLS AND COALITION BUILDING, OPENED UP TRANSNATIONAL SPACES. TRANSNATIONAL SPACES BECAUSE THE BORDERS BETWEEN SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL TERRITORIES OF CULTURE, GENDER, RELIGION, ACADEMY, STUDENT, TEACHER, WERE OPENED UP INVITING MULTIPLE MEMBERSHIP. STUDENTS ACTIVATED THEIR MESTIZA CONSCIOUSNESS, WITH THE SUPPORT OF CODE-BREAKER STAFF, AND IN DOING SO INSPIRED AN AWAKENING OF AN INSTITUTIONAL

MESTIZA CONSCIOUSNESS. AS THE COLLEGE INSPIRED THE TRANSFORMATION OF ITS STUDENTS THROUGH THE POWER OF ITS FACULTY, IT ALLOWED ITSELF IN THIS INSTANCE TO BE TRANSFORMED BY THE STUDENTS AS WELL.

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## Class Stories

Yes, I like it, I really like it. I like this school, I like the students...Some people they have too much tuition, some college have too much tuition. They can't afford so they leave they go to job ... then after they get some money and then they continue their studies. [Scholarships and financial aid] help not a lot but a little bit, I still have to pay too much. I don't want to quit this college but I had a really hard time about my tuition. The tuition is too much so. I can't afford the tuition, so. Mehek, first-year college student.

In a place where 40% of all students are low income and approximately eighty-four percent of freshmen receive some form of need-based aid, the issue of cost and financial burden frequently came up in interviews with staff and students. Although students varied in their views on how race, ethnicity or gender impacts success in college, almost all felt that financial status had profound effects. Low income was constantly seen as a barrier to persistence in college. Specifically, finances, in the form not being able to keep up with increasing tuition, were seen as the primary reason why students left the college. Like Mehek, who despite "really liking" the college felt that the tuition was too much of a burden on students. Although she was speaking in general terms, describing student stop-out and drop-out decisions, she also alluded to her own family's struggle to pay for the tuition. She explained that she did not want to leave college, but repeated throughout the interview that tuition costs were a formidable obstacle-- "I still have to pay too much... I don't want to quit but, I had a really hard time [with] tuition, the tuition is too much so, I can't afford the tuition, so." Without explicitly telling us what the consequences were, what exactly came after the "buts" and the "sos," she revealed what the outcome of this financial struggle would ultimately be. I later learned that she did, in fact, withdraw from the college during her second semester.

It is well known that social class is a critical part of access to and persistence in college. Generally speaking, there are two strands of research making these links, both offering important insights. There are those documenting the material conditions of class, in particular, the role of finances and college costs as access points and persistence pressures. Relying upon quantitative studies often using logistic regression or structural equation modeling techniques, research on the material conditions of class has investigated the “class based patterns of participation” in college (public vs. private, two-year vs. four year, selective vs. non-selective, etc.), the impact of financial aid on student persistence, and the shifts in funding patterns from grants to loans (Paulsen, St. John, 2002). Compelling arguments have been made directly linking lower income with lower persistence, although results on the benefits of financial aid have been mixed in the literature. While these studies examine the direct quantitative links between financial indicators and college access, choice and persistence, the social and psychological experiences of class, in the context of higher education, remain relatively undocumented.

A few studies have discussed the relationship between finances and social outcomes thought related to persistence, such as integration and commitment to college. Cabrera and colleagues (1992), for instance, found that the effects of financial aid on student persistence have “tangible and intangible” components. The intangible components include student perceptions of their financial need, anxieties, and the distribution of psychological, physical and intellectual energies. Taking into account both attitudinal (the degree to which students were satisfied with the aid they received) and financial (the actual awarding of aid) data, Cabrera et al, suggest that

Students concerns with finances along with other external factors to the institution can affect their academic integration by increasing anxieties associated with the

need of securing resources to finance their college education and by limiting the amount of time and energy spent on academically related activities. (p. 578). Satisfaction with overall financial support may reduce concerns about finances allowing the student to allocate more energies and efforts to academic and intellectual endeavors related to classroom behaviors and academically oriented interactions with faculty. Results appear to suggest that financial aid and its concomitant attitude is important not only because it equalizes opportunities between affluent and low-income students but also because it facilitates the integration of the student into the academic and social components of the institution as well as by influencing his/her commitment to stay in college. (p. 590).

Though premised on Tinto's theory of student persistence, studies such as these point to the other college "costs" that lower income students confront—the psychological, academic and motivational costs associated with finances. This is where the second strand of research emerges.

A promising psychology of class literature examines the cognitive, attitudinal and emotional aspects of these material conditions. Often, the experiences of working-class students in the context of an elite college, or more broadly "class dissonant settings," (Fine and Burns, 2003) are examined. Studies about class also tend to focus on White working class individuals, so as to avoid the confluence between issues of race and class. An important recent volume of the Journal of Social Issues explores the psychological meanings of social class, describing constructs such as class-based desires for "belonging" and "wanting," experiences of alienation, shame and exclusion, class awareness and contradiction (Ostrove and Cole, 2003). Such research on the psychological understandings of class in the context of higher education warrants further study, keeping in mind Fine and Burns (2003) warning:

...without a detailed fine grained look at the *intersections* of economic, social and psychological conditions across class positions, we may skew our understandings of class toward the psychological alone, misrepresenting class as if it were largely

carried around in the heads of youth and therefore transformed simply by a change in attitude... (p.845).

Taken together, what we can learn from these literatures is that class, fitting into notions of mestiza consciousness, is a “mixed breed” of material, psychological, and socio-cultural conditions. One of the interlocking threads in the web of oppression, class notions tie together economic strings with personal stirrings. The economic strings are the material conditions, such as shifts in funding patterns. The personal stirrings are the psychology of class, such as the worries and fantasies. More than a background within which lives are lived, more than a trap of dichotomies caught inside heads, class presents itself in this research as a relationship, a dynamic, and a discourse. It is a shifting set of power relationships between student and staff, staff and institution, institution and the higher education marketplace, higher education and the state—and all their combinations. It is a dynamic that reaches across a national consciousness and deep into the minds, bodies, and spirits of students and their families. It is a “drip fed” (Bourdieu, 1998) discourse of capital, cost-benefit analysis, and corporatization. It “is lived, reproduced, sustained and challenged through social and historical relations, ideologies, and institutional structures of privilege, power, and inequality.” (Fine and Burns, 2003; p.848). This section will explore these class processes as narrated by students and staff.

Between fantasy and worry: Class as evidence of distraction or engagement

With financial stability, it also plays into it in how much, you know, worrying how to like pay for school. When you’re financially stable and go to school, you know there’s no problem. There’s nothing holding you back. That’s another stress that’s not on your head. – Justin, African-American freshman

Instead of worrying about studying, they will worry about “Oh, I need to pay my tuition. I did all of these hours and I might not get the credits because I can’t afford it.” It has a big role into success. – Cathy, Latina sophomore

Using almost the same language, these two students articulate their view of inadequate finances as worry and fantasy. Specifically, they note the stress and worry associated with lower income status and how class has constrained their success in college in comparison to an assumed other who has no worry. These two students discuss their view that financial stability is an asset for the students who enjoy it because it frees up their intellectual energies. For those who struggle with money, financial instability is an added stress. In addition to “worrying about studying,” these students have the “stress” of paying for college and related expenses “on their head.” It contributes to “holding a student back” from fully participating and succeeding in college. Consistent with Cabrera’s quantitative models which point to the worries and anxieties associated with financial status, these narratives further explain the connections. Cherlise, a non-traditional age international student from the Caribbean, for instance, elaborates on just how inadequate finances can also be a psychological barrier:

Most races other than Black, Black children, usually have things passed on to them, an inheritance and certain rights. Being born a certain color you already born with certain rights and privileges. Being born as a minority, you don’t have some of those privileges so we, WE, have a money problem. They don’t. So they’re able to concentrate better on their schoolwork than the minority. The minority usually while he’s trying to figure out the derivative to the exponential growth model, you know while we have to think about that we also in the back of our head have to think about “OK, better call Jacobs Meyers because I need to get that check ready by the end of the week. Better call Johnson because he owe me that one dollar from last month.” While the other kids, they um, the only thing they have to concentrate on is finding the derivative for the exponential function...I’m assuming this...

Connecting issues of class with race, this student explains one way in which financial status differently impacts students’ ability to fully engage in the intellectual work of college. Her analysis not only highlights the barriers present for low-income students,

but acknowledges another dimension of advantage she believes more privileged students enjoy in academia. The comparison with assumed others can represent what Fine and Burns (2003) have termed class fantasies. Spending some of their intellectual energies worrying about their own economic situations and how to overcome them, the above quotes also illustrate the fantasies of “the other side.” Each burden is presented with an alternative reality: “We have money problems, they don’t; they are born with privilege, we don’t have some of those privileges; they can concentrate, while we have to also...; having the stress on your head, being held back versus there’s no problem.” Images of “other” free of the burdens of inadequate financial resources are contrasted with images of self as shouldering a disproportionate load, the weight of both imaginings pressing into their consciousness.

Perhaps students who are “freed up” from financial worries and fantasies, have more opportunity to engage in the coursework and participate in college life. Being able to afford not to work can represent advantage—the opportunity to be more connected and visible around campus. Students then benefit from the increased opportunities for outside-of-class interactions with faculty and staff. Further, these students are seen as committed to the college and motivated to succeed. This is one reason why Tinto’s model fails to adequately capture the persistence factors of some low income students—measures of commitment and integration believed to characterize persisters can almost by default exclude low income students. This is consistent with works by Rendon (1993) and her colleagues Jalomo and Terenzini (2000) who found that college involvement, defined as it currently is as participation in clubs and activities outside of class, is difficult for many nontraditional students. Often, they found, involvement opportunities

on college campuses are structured more for traditional, read White and middle class, students who are presumed “ready, willing and able” to get involved without outreach efforts (Rendon, 2000, p.145). Rendon (2000) instead proposes validation as a critical factor in persistence for the nontraditional student.

Class privilege and punishment: The cumulative social effects of class

“Sorry, I can’t help you. You have a financial hold...”

At times in their college experiences, students who struggle with finances find themselves facing added bureaucratic blocks and dis-incentives. Common financial policies and practices within higher education often feel like another layer of punishment for low income status. From these experiences with the college beurocracy, low income students learn how money acts as a powerful gatekeeper for financial and academic college resources.

Financial holds are a customary practice in higher education. Students who owe the college money, because of loans that were not approved, state aid that has not yet come through, personal payments that are missed, checks that are waiting to be cleared, can be blocked from many important resources on campus. One interpretation of this is that some of the financially needier students are, as a policy, routinely prevented from accessing certain resources because of the conditions associated with their social class. Students struggling with finances, tuition and otherwise, once enrolled may find themselves devoting substantial energies worrying about payments and the financial holds associated with them. They dread hearing the words at the opening of this section “sorry, I can’t help you -- you have a financial hold.” These financial holds are semi-public markers of social class in college, signaled to any advisor, faculty member or

college administrator who attempts to enter a student's academic record, because they literally and visibly block students from accessing resources. For example, enrolled students who have difficulty paying their tuition at a given semester can find themselves unable to access their grades—thereby restricting access to assessing their progress. As Willy, a college sophomore puts it, “It sucks sometimes when you can't get your report card because you got a balance on your bill. The money thing can be an issue sometimes.” This could be a hardship for students whose persistence decisions, as well as housing status, scholarship award, schedule, academic standing, standing within the major, and graduation status, could hinge upon this knowledge.

Students can have their term registrations delayed or even dropped until payment is completed. They are thereby restricted in their chances of getting a favorable schedule that accounts for their work hours as well as their course requirements. In effect, dropped or delayed registrations came to represent persistence dis-incentives to low income students. Once schedules are made, these restrictions can prevent them from making changes in their schedule—which for struggling students who may find themselves needing to drop a class, can have disastrous consequences. For example, a student registers for a full load of courses during the semester while working full time. He later realizes that he is not able to keep up with one of his courses and attempts to fill out the paperwork to drop the class. He submits the paperwork but is told that he will not be able to drop the class until his financial hold is cleared. By the time this occurs, the final date for withdrawing for the class has passed and he is left with an F on his transcript. I have observed this happen to more than one student, and it often means I see their names appear on the probation lists by the end of the term. Given the numerous financial holds

placed on student accounts, administrators, taking notice of the potential impact on retention, have recently changed policy such that students, regardless of financial hold, would be permitted to devise a schedule with their advisors though it would not be entered until the hold is lifted.

Even students with considerable merit and need based aid can experience stress associated with finances and college financial policies and feel punished because of their class position. There are many aspects of financing college that are not clear to students, particularly with changing practices in determining and awarding aid. One staff member, Tammy, expressed her frustration at the college's more recent trend of "pulling back" aid from needy students. She describes the experiences of some low-income students who come in with scholarships.

I know a student here for a fact, [who came in with a relatively prestigious merit and need based scholarship] and Faith College pulled his money back and his mother doesn't make over \$15,000 a year so it's a hardship, you understand. But he's here, but it's still a hardship because they didn't have to pull the money back. My thing is, if that's the case, when you're filling out the form for him, cause he came here to get the forms filled out, then don't put the [promised Faith College need] money in it so that the scholarship people could give him the money to compensate for the money that you're not giving back, which is like \$2600. It might not sound like a lot but it's a lot cause he was crying to me ... I was like "baby I can't do nothing" I told him what to do, "write a letter to the president telling him if you knew that before you came you would have not come here. Tell him just like that." [Another student with the same problem] came crying to me "They took it and I need that and I can't buy my books. How am I gonna get money for my books?" And you should not have to worry about that when you're coming to school. It's not fair. How can you study and be the best that you can be when you have that kind of pressure "how am I gonna get the book? I got one book, I need another book, I don't have the money to get the other book. But I need both books for my class." I don't think that's fair to the student it causes stress on the family.

Here, Tammy explains how aspects of financial aid packaging can be stressful for the students and their families. Describing moments of students "crying to her" with

financial concerns, she describes the worries of low-income students who are thought of as not needing to worry about financing their education because of the substantial aid already awarded through merit and need. They still have to contend with the stress of deciphering the intricacies of financing an education with limited means and within changing policies. The examples Tammy was discussing here were of academically strong students who received a relatively prestigious academic scholarship targeting low income students of color. Even with the substantial aid these students were awarded, any unmet need still represented a hardship. With the help of code-breaker administrators like Tammy, some students learned how to counteract this practice, by writing letters to the outside scholarship requesting a greater scholarship amount to compensate for the aid taken away, or corresponding with the college president explaining how the current practices were hurting their chances at persevering at this college. It is additional work low income students on scholarship have to contend with, continually having to describe and at times defend the nature and extent of their economic hardship.

Tammy is describing another relatively common practice in higher education, of readjusting need-based aid awarded by the college if outside scholarships are earned. For instance, a student who was initially awarded a certain amount of need based aid applied for a scholarship and got it. She assumed that this additional money would pay for the remaining amount of tuition not covered by other forms of aid. Instead, her need was reassessed such that the scholarship amount awarded, in effect, was deducted from the need-based aid previously given by the college. In other words, even though she earned a new scholarship, her out-of-pocket tuition expense remained the same. Students in this situation then stay with the perception that the college “took my money.” They

seemingly get “punished” for demonstrating the initiative of applying for and earning an outside scholarship. It provides another dis-incentive for low income students who are actively trying to overcome financial obstacles by pursuing alternate funding opportunities.

In summary, financial holds and other punitive finance-related policies act as disincentives for low-income students to persist in college. They can serve to further publicly mark and differentiate lower and higher income students at the academic and administrative levels. Low income students can thus be further alienated from the college’s resources. In contrast, higher income students can benefit by having a clearer path, unfettered (or at least relatively so) by administrative obstacles related to financial status. It is one of the everyday unseen privileges associated with middle or upper class status.

#### Eroding connections

Practices such as these were implemented in response to the college’s own growing financial need in the face of diminishing tuition revenue, declining private donations and eroding state support. The push and pulls between the financial needs of the college and those of the students often left staff and faculty caught between competing allegiances and left with increasing frustration. On the one hand, staff are encouraged to assist students, make sure they are “satisfied customers” the college could retain. It is in keeping with the mission of the college to tend to a student’s needs in a holistic fashion, and most staff lovingly enforced this mission. It is also implicitly understood that larger freshmen class sizes, greater retention, better savings, could translate to staff raises (which at the time, they had not seen in over two years) and

budget restoration. On the other hand, the economic realities of the times, the trends in financial policies, the growing number of students who require high amounts of aid in order to persist, at times represented stresses and challenges for staff and their relationships with students. Staff understood that the precarious financial condition of the college warranted certain measures, but it often made their jobs more difficult. Increasing departmental budget cuts meant fewer material resources with which to carry out their daily functioning, fewer personnel to shoulder greater levels of responsibilities, and no pay increases to match the increasing demands. As most staff members, excluding perhaps faculty, are from working class backgrounds themselves, they felt their own economic tugs. Many staff members understood that the college needed money and therefore implemented these types of punitive policies in order to help compensate, but felt frustrated because it made assisting students a choice between fulfilling their needs or that of the college's. This often lead to internal and relationship-level (between staff and students, staff and their superiors) conflicts.

Tammy's earlier narrative describes the conflict she feels between her commitment to the students and the reality of financial constraints and college policies she believes are unfair. Advocating for her students, she also learned, sometimes puts her at odds with the administration:

I was just so angry with this school and it's hard to work here when you see injustices done like that... I'm telling you it happened to me when I first came and I was just undone. I said [to the student] but I can't do anything for you I have no power... I was just freaked out. I don't have power, I don't really have a voice whereas [the administration's] thing is I'm complaining all the time. When in actuality, you should take what I'm saying into consideration because you might have better retention. I might not say it the way you want to hear it but you shouldn't ignore me because it's not coming out the way you think it should come out.

Trying to assist students in the tradition of the college's mission meant that Tammy rigorously advocated for her students, yet this work simultaneously positioned her as a trouble maker who is "complaining all the time." She describes feeling ignored and at times powerless to help students through the difficulties they faced; mirroring the affect and perception of these students. The conflict manifests itself in her inner struggles and in her struggles with the administration. However, she learned from students that sometimes just listening and "being on their side" proved to make a difference in their lives.

Anita's job in part deals with student accounts. Like Tammy, she expresses her frustration and feeling of increasing helplessness in the face of student financial struggles. After describing a time when she felt she helped a student, she explained,

But that's like rare. I used to feel better before but nowadays a lot of these students can't afford our school and most of the times lately I felt like I really can't help them. Before I felt more of the highs as you put it, I don't know how else to describe like, oh yeah, I'm helping them out not only with tuition but with other things I try to guide them with but now lately its been like more downside because lately a lot of them really, *really* can't afford it here. I see more sad cases than happy cases on tuition payments.

She went on to describe one case that stayed with her, an undocumented Latino student she advocated for who found it near impossible to pay for tuition even with some of the scholarship money he received:

..He has a really high SAT, he was really smart and I told him to write a letter [to appeal the aid amount] but the money is tight. And I'm like what's the point of having [the appeal process as an option] if you're gonna say no. This is a prime example of why you want to give this kid a scholarship. He's smart, he has grades from high school and all... [His family] said they're gonna pay out of pocket, they did this payment plan that's \$700 a month or something like that and I don't see that happening. I don't think they could afford to pay it to be honest. But again you got to hold your tongue and you can't, you say okay these are your options and this is what you need to pay. I could tell from their eyes that they really can't afford it. It's sad to see that. What's the point, we have all these

other kids on scholarship with a 3.0 average which I'm not saying that's bad, hey that's my average too but it's not as high as a 4.0 or 3.5 but I guess that was their decision. You know, they gave them something but it wasn't full which is what he needed. The school can't afford it. So what's gonna happen is I know he's not gonna pay that and in the end he's not going to be able to register for the spring 'cause he's gonna owe money for the fall.

Earlier, Tammy framed what she observed within a framework of justice. She described what happened to the students she was working with as a class/race specific injustice. Witnessing the embodiment of class, as she "tells from their eyes that they really can't afford it," Anita understands it as a situation of sadness. Floating atop sadness are feelings of helplessness. It is in cases such as these that some staff, who feel at times helpless, more "sad" or "angry" than rewarded in working with students, may respond by further distancing themselves from the students or from "the administration" as in Tammy's case. Both have consequences in the larger scale functioning of the institutions.

Psychological distancing from students, misread as burnout, can occur as a result of staff's feeling of powerlessness (Fine, personal communication). Although she was able to recall a time when she enjoyed working with students and was able to "achieve that high" counseling them in multiple areas, Anita felt that those cases "rarely" happened anymore because students "really, really" could not afford to pay. Her sense of efficacy and fulfillment was no longer tied to assisting students, as was narrated by other staff members, and would have been a story she might have been able to tell some time ago. Throughout the interview, Anita emphasized that her current role in working with students was limited to what she was trained for and that it was the Dean or advisor's role to guide the students within a maze she knows will choke students out of Faith College.

Sherry, another staff member, poured out all of her frustrations across the interview table, switching between student and institutional struggles. She describes feeling pressured by the demands of her supervisors and those of the students. I juxtapose the following quotes, one from Sherry describing her experiences, and one from Tammy relating student experiences, to illustrate their differently positioned perceptions.

<p>Sometimes, like with financial aid paperwork, they do it and omit sections, or don't fill it out right, then they feel like they're getting the runaround, saying "Nobody can help me." Students don't seem to understand. Tuition is X amount and the students will stand there and argue with you. "How am I supposed to pay all that?" "There's loans and financial aid," "but I still can't pay" and you don't know what to tell them. It's terrible to say but you reach a point where you wanna say "I don't know, go rob a bank, I don't know what to tell you." I know what my circumstances are and what I can afford. I know that I wouldn't have been able to come here if not for scholarships.</p> <p>--Sherry</p>	<p>When they don't take those things into consideration and when you go to [name of office] and you ask them they say "what you want me to do?" and I say "Help me." "I don't have the money I can't give it to you, if I had it I'd give it to you," that's what I tell them "but I don't have it." So you have to go there and be a pain in their ass until they help you.</p> <p>-- Tammy (as she describes student experiences)</p>
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Students can feel the distancing efforts on the part of the staff and interpret their behavior as cold and uncaring. In a student satisfaction survey, students reported "getting the runaround" as an issue of concern particularly in offices that deal with student finances. In response to this widely-held perception, students adopt their own survival strategies to

get their needs met, like having to “go there and be a pain in their ass” until they receive the desired assistance.

Sherry lays out her annoyance with and distancing from the students who would go see her. The utter frustration she felt was palpable throughout the interview. She asks that students also take responsibility for learning the proper procedures in completing the financial aid paperwork, and whispers her screams of frustration at students who demand her assistance when she feels powerless to help. She also compares her working class experience to those of some of the other students, judging what class appropriate behavior should entail.

One thing I don't understand is how they can say they have no money for tuition but damn are they dressed to the nine. With the Mac makeup and things that I can only afford now as a luxury, never when I was a student. I don't see students dressed in sweats like when I went here. But...this is a fraction of the population.

Although Sherry relates to the experience of low-income status in her own life, she distances herself from the class performance of some of the students. She sees students as wanting her to jump through hoops, and indirectly draws a parallel with the “hoops” she believes her office asks her to jump through.

You're not always appreciated to think for yourself or to take the initiative. They just want followers sometimes. If you choose 'A' you're damned if you choose 'B' you're damned as well. So I feel stuck in the middle. Sometimes its like “just tell me what do you want me to say.”

Fearing “getting yelled at” by students or her supervisors, Sherry describes feeling “stuck in the middle” at the juncture between student and staff interactions.

Class then is experienced as a dynamic, a relationship of power between differently positioned entities, people and institutions in a broadly political economy. The psychological and material conditions of class can be reproduced in the relationships

between members of the college community. Trends and policies that foster a growing sense of powerlessness among some staff, survival strategies of distancing employed by staff, survival strategies of confrontation that (persisting?) students employ, feelings of sadness, anger, frustration, alienation, can erode the important connections between students and staff. Worse, it can place them in adversarial positions, caught between commitments and economic realities.

### The student discourse of capital

We are changing education into a commodity to be purchased. The very meaning of democracy now is consumption practices. What was once a political concept and practice, one based on collective dialogue and negotiation is now a wholly economic concept. This is a major transformation in the way we think of ourselves. The general sociological and economic movement that redefines democracy and citizenship into being a set of consumptive practices and in which the world is seen as a vast supermarket, is having a major effect on education. (Apple in Shaughnessy, Peca and Siegel, 2001, p. xii)

Across the level of students, staff and institution, there emerged a discourse of cost and affordability. Some students measured their college experiences in terms of capital. The promise of a college education's power in securing a better economic future to its graduates is often a motivator to attend and persist in college. Because of the numerous obstacles, many low-income students have to work harder and be more driven in order to persist and succeed academically. Some students, who realize that the financial promise may not be fulfilled in the way they expected, leave for financial reasons, questioning if college is worth the costs. Others are forced to leave or stop out, despite their desires to persist through graduation.

Students recognize the value colleges place on economic capital as an access point to its resources. It is proven to them through punitive financial/administrative practices

such as “holds” on their access to resources. They understand the close relationship between cost and completion. They are subtly aware of the place of a college education within a capitalist system. All three cognitions were reflected in the language they used to describe their college experiences, reflecting a discourse of capital. It permeated their language: “individualism,” “competition,” “making it” and “bottom lines.” College was understood by many students as a consumer venture. Financial and personal labor inputs result in academic credentialing and presumably higher-paying employment outputs. They understood that this relatively high tuition college (in comparison to state colleges) was ultimately a business, and students often measured its success as an institution in these terms.

In one of the student interviews, Danara discussed her family’s struggles to pay for her tuition. With nods of agreement and “I hear that...” from the co-researchers, she then describes her dissatisfaction with one of her professors this way:

One of my teachers, he talks too much sometimes. He wants to explain something and like he tells you a story that happened to him. And then from that story he jumps to another story and then by the end of the class we really haven’t done anything but just listen to him talk about his crap. So that makes me mad ‘cause *I’m paying, you know, for the class to learn something but he just talking.*

Danara equates her disappointment with a loss of money and a wasted opportunity for learning. Using Apple’s terminology, the goods she purchased in the Higher Education supermarket, were not of the expected quality she paid for. Several students described their experiences in a similar fashion. When describing the purpose of a college education, many students were honest about its value in securing a better future, in their words “getting a bigger check because of [their] degree” or “making money and making more money-- the roots of my own evil.”

Discussions on the use of campus resources, such as going for tutoring or asking a professor for help, also elicited a discourse of capital. Acknowledging shame as a psychological barrier for obtaining academic assistance, several reframed its acceptability in terms of its relationship to consumptive practices. Diamond, for example, confidently tells us,

Yes, I do (go for help) and I'm not afraid to admit it. I know some people that don't like to admit they need help with something. I think that is crazy because everyone can't know everything. You come to school to learn. Why else spend your money?

Similarly, when asked if he goes for help when he does not understand something, Jason, an African-American sophomore, responded

I do go for help. I mean, it's my money at work here, okay? So yeah. [Other students many not] go for help because they lack interest... You should do a hundred and ten percent okay. You're in college. This school gets way too much tuition not to.

Students were most likely to list shame as a barrier when explaining why other students do not seek assistance, as Diamond did in the previous quote. Other students speculated "they don't want to feel dumb" "they are probably embarrassed" or "they don't want to look like they don't know." This shame barrier was one that students speculated about others, though none had directly described it in reference to themselves. Perhaps this reflects the nature of the concept of shame, as it implies that a student's self-efficacy is vulnerable to the thoughts and behaviors of others. It may instead reflect the perception of a barrier. Shame can be an intangible barrier that may stem from stereotype-threat or gendered expectations. The stereotype threat of not being able to competently handle college-level work may be activated when students are in the position of needing to proactively seek assistance (Nelson, 1994).

Another category of reasons students suggested involved issues of resources and availability (i.e., time conflicts with professor/tutor schedules, not knowing about resources, etc.). When describing themselves, some students invoked this discourse of capital, but when describing the motivation of others, they implied shame, or listed individual student characteristics such as laziness (as Jason did), shyness, or a compelling individualistic drive that motivates them to find their own answers. Framed within a capital discourse, cost concerns can override issues of academic shame—"it's my money at work," "why else spend your money?" It also justifies placing considerable effort into coursework, such as when Jason noted "this school gets way too much tuition not to." Patricia echoes similar sentiments "Yeah, my parents are paying for this so you know I should not be screwing around that's what I think." Here, the discourse of capital is strategically used to displace discourses of academic shame associated with achievement, such as getting help, and showing effort.

A variant of the discourse of consumption would be used to justify separation from the college, as it did or did not measure up to their cost/benefit analysis. Theorizing on why some students leave Faith College, Cherlise also relates her own "stop-out" decisions of her past:

... They are still searching. Not sure. They think what's outside is where it's at, is where they need to be. School is a waste of time. I've heard them say so. I used to say so in high school actually. That's why I left. I was like, to heck with this, I'm losing time, I could be out there making money....I [ended up finishing] high school but I didn't go on to college because I thought it was a waste of time doing any more schooling.

Framing college as a waste of time, places decisions of separation and commitment into a language of consumption, in this case, the language of waste and loss as related to the resource of time. And the reality that the time and effort necessary to succeed in college

represents a loss of potential income, or at least a barrier in accessing college resources.

Students note, “It takes time and effort to actually seek help,” it takes “time to really talk to the teachers and let them know where you’re coming from.” Justin explains:

I would like to get help...I wanted to go to the tutoring center for more help, but the way my time schedule is going, it conflicts with whatever else I do that’s going on. I try to balance everything out and so right now its conflicting so I just get help from where I can.

Perhaps for students who are unsure of their place in the college environment (“still searching, not sure”), the consumerist language of waste and loss is strategically invoked to displace the language of the shame—the shame of being under prepared, under resourced, or in general, not ready for the life and work of college. Students did not use the term “shame” to describe the reasons they themselves may or may not seek assistance, but did use it to describe why other students do not do so. For example, when asked why they thought other students may not go for help with subjects they find difficult, students generally responded “they don’t want to feel stupid” or some variant of this response.

When learning is a commodity to be purchased, degrees are prerequisites for more secure financial futures, and the purchase price for such credentials is barely within reach, areas of dissatisfaction within the classroom or campus environment could translate to loss—financially, socially, psychologically—in the minds and experiences of students. A discourse of intellect is thus, subverted by discourse of capital. It is not that students do not intrinsically value learning and intellectual pursuits. These students do appreciate learning in and of itself, but see that it is situated in a capitalist system where quality education is intimately tied to capital. Being measured in different ways by their

possession (or lack thereof) of capital, students in turn use these same standards of measurement to assess the college they are investing so much of their resources into. Far from a trend living inside the minds of students, it reflects a national consciousness saturated with the language of capital and corporatization.

#### Institutional discourse of capital

Similarly, a language of capital/business appears in the interviews with staff, as the college drifts into more of a corporate model. Just as students have a subtle awareness of the value colleges place on economic capital as an access point to its resources through its policies, staff recognize the importance of money through their reward structures. One staff person, Todd, highlights the discrepancies that surface in the midst of changing models of Higher Education. He pressed the interviewer to examine what actions get rewarded by the college:

Find out where the reward is and you know what the organization is really about...If the top echelon says customer satisfaction is most important but gives bonuses to sales then the most important thing is sales—it gets the recognition, the money. But if you really think customer satisfaction is important then you reward the person who satisfied customer most. [At Faith College] If you say ...do whatever you can to take care of the body and soul of the students, then you can't make statements like that you see too many students... Can't say really want customer satisfaction up but then efforts are measured to different outcomes.

He refers to an administrator who was chastised for spending too much time with students to the detriment of his other administrative duties involving reports and paperwork. To further illustrate this point, he referred to a recent event. In a welcomed and deeply appreciated gesture, a high level official in the administration called for a gathering of staff to share words of inspiration and appreciation of the committed work they do for the college. One person received an award of recognition. Most felt she

richly deserved it because of her helpfulness and sincerity with students and staff. She was rewarded, however, for saving the college money. This is also evident, Todd believes, in the stress on enrollment. Community-wide discussions of “how big is the freshmen class?” are more frequent than “how can we provide a quality education?” Providing a quality education to a diverse group of learners, part of the college’s mission, involves additional staff attention, support and resources, yet the perception is that more of the funding goes towards recruiting. As Todd notes, staff take notice of the actions that get rewarded, and those that involve economic capital in some way, whether it involves helping the college save money or helping the college bring in more money, are the ones most prized. In the eyes of staff, this illustrates the college’s direction and commitment.

The trend towards corporatization is evident in the 1) Framing of students as “customers” even by critics like Tammy and Todd 2) High value placed on corporate representations of effective higher education management and functioning 3) Perceptions and everyday language of the staff. This is part of a larger trend at the college, where the student as customer framework is being adopted by the administration. Recently, in response to a student satisfaction survey indicating that many students often feel they get “the runaround,” administrators have arranged a series of “customer service trainings” for staff. Staff are reminded of the importance of customer satisfaction and the shared responsibility of retention, and are provided with various strategies in which to better serve the student clientele. Along similar lines, a voluntary name-tag program whereby all staff and faculty were asked to wear name-and-title badges, as is customary in the retail industry was implemented. These programs, devised to address the issue of

retention, also served to solidify the framing of students as customers and the college's standing as a business.

Increasingly, the college is relying on outside consultants to better fit the college into a marketable and sustainable business mold. Currently, financial aid packaging and enrollment formulas, developed by paid consultants, are being applied at the college. Believing these formulas have improved the internal functioning of the college in these areas, the college is expanding its reliance on consultants. It is considering, for example, enlisting the assistance of consultants to help the college improve its retention rates. Consultants have also recently been hired to help the college enhance and market its image. This careful construction of a marketable image is an interesting process for a college. Elements in the college environment deemed congruent with this projected image are selected and enhanced to conform to a "standardized uniqueness" that is palatable to a general audience. For example, staff chosen for advertisements have been deemed appropriate representatives of the institution, only to have their wardrobes carefully picked out for them by the image consultants.

In these ways, the college enlists the assistance of paid consultants, representatives of the business of education, to shape them into an institution that can compete in the Higher Education marketplace. But this is far from uncontested in the campus community. Recently, at a meeting attended by the majority (if not all) the college faculty, some voiced their dissatisfaction with the new advertising campaign, which was formally presented by the administration and open to discussion. Some members questioned the complete absence of the college's faith-based and social justice

identities in its public self. Did this marketing strategy signal a retreat from its core identity? This is a question visited by many colleges in the United States.

A capital consciousness within a system of education

To understand these processes as they occur on the ground with students, paralleled institutionally in Faith College, it is important to examine the broader context of the system of private, faith based education. Private, faith-based colleges pride themselves in maintaining a collective mission that prizes a holistic education through the lifespan, a learning atmosphere that incorporates values of faith and justice, and a tradition of liberal arts. Yet, as a collective, as a larger system, they are also vulnerable to the penetrating forces of capital and corporatization. Slipping into the spirits of the colleges—their mission and identity-- these forces, this discourse become evident in their debates and collective struggles. One recent publication clearly highlights this struggle between one particular system of private, faith-based education and the world of the secular, material and consumerist culture, as it asks the question “Can (and should) [Catholic] education be branded and sold?”

According to this magazine, within the past three years, a task force was created to investigate public perceptions among past and potential constituents of Catholic colleges compared to other colleges and how these perceptions could be enhanced towards “public understanding of the [Catholic] brand name.” In the past year, the presidents of the consortium approved a larger-scale funded study on the value of branding their mission, to be conducted by an outside firm. The articles in this publication debate this direction.

To illustrate the nature of this debate, two essays representing the more polarized positions will be discussed. Proponents of utilizing a branding approach to advertise the distinctiveness of a Catholic education, frame it as a necessary practice for sustainability within a competitive market of higher education. Making the argument for developing a strong brand identity to entice a viable “student market,” Laczniak, a Marketing Professor explains how, taken together, the elements of a Catholic education mission can

...provide an integrated and powerful philosophy of education that’s cosmopolitan, compelling and so different from the mass of higher education that in strategic terms [Catholic] education represents a sustainable competitive advantage. Just as the name IBM and its big blue motif are suggestive of reliable computing services at a fair price, supported by outstanding customer service, so too, [Catholic] education, if developed sufficiently as a brand, will evoke the fullness of its reputation. [In developing appropriately this brand identity, if successful] the price of [Catholic] education becomes more inelastic. In other words, [Catholic] colleges and universities can more easily increase their tuition [or offer less discount] than previously due to the enhanced educational value that students and potential future customers perceive in attaining a [Catholic] education... What now remains to be realized by [Catholic] university presidents ... is the inspired vision that enhancing [Catholic] brand equity provides enhanced long term value for each of their institutions as they labor together for the greater glory of God. (Laczniak, p. 3-10).

This author describes a process by which an institutional identity can be marketed to an audience of consumers—potential students. He helps the reader understand the business of education as being comparable to that of any other commercial enterprise, like IBM; therefore, strategies of success for the one business can be applied to the other. Values and faith are fitted into a corporate framework, where the terminology of capital and religion are used in support of each other— as when he touts “brand equity” as one tool that can be used “for the greater glory of God.” Making a sales pitch which invokes both a business-oriented sensibility and religious imagery, the ultimate benefit of these efforts is made clear—“colleges and universities can more easily increase their tuition.” He

quickly clarifies that raising tuition is not for the sole purpose of institutional profit, but has the more benevolent goal of freeing more of the college's money to fund poorer students of color instead of offering "discounts" to students who could afford to pay.

This last point demonstrates the ways in which the language, values, and educational mission of this faith tradition are co-opted by a discourse of corporatization. The arguments presented here are packaged in a way that most fittingly speaks to the "constituents." For example, for other types of institutions, just mentioning the potential for increased profit is in itself a benefit. No further explanation of the benefits of increased revenue is required. However, since this faith tradition is premised, in part, on challenging the excesses of material possession, its benefits needed to be presented in a more culturally responsive framework. Therefore, recognizing that pure materialist desires run counter to what these institutions stand for, the author makes the idea of potentially increasing tuition revenue more palatable by suggesting that the additional funds be used to fulfill its more altruistic motives.

Opponents like Hollwitz, a college vice president, decry this corporate model as a "profit driven manipulation" of a promise, as represented in the following text:

I am not anti-business, anti-capitalist or anti-advertising, but...Students are not our customers...it is an assumption inherent in branding and it defiles our mission. Branding is the process of reducing a complex judgmental process to simplistic terms in order to bypass reflection and to inspire consumer behavior. You brand to salve and save their souls or make them think that you're doing so, perception being more important than reality. The goal of Catholic higher education is to engage and challenge the premises and values of a secular and materialist culture. At its best branding celebrates materialism and seeks strategically to prevent conversation. The brand simplifies, avoids tough issues, frees us from the details, makes us comfortable and just like everyone else in higher education. Pop management evangelists (many of them conveniently available as paid consultants) now have a branding discipleship on our campuses. (Hollwitz, p. 12-15).

Hollwitz describes the incongruence between the goals of Catholic education and the practice of branding. Specifically, this system of education is meant to offer an alternative to an increasingly corporatized educational environment. In this case, a system of faith is used to justify the challenge to the system of capital within education. Faith systems seem to be positioned as generally acceptable (to the mainstream) challenges to corporate discourses and systems. This author, for instance, premises his discussion by pointing out that he is neither anti-capitalist nor anti-business. In doing so, he distances himself from left-leaning or Marxist interpretations of this issue— one of the other systems that challenge this corporate consciousness.

To add to an earlier thought, Hollwitz views this popular business practice as not only subverting a discourse of intellect (with its tendency to oversimplify and bypass reflection) but also a discourse of faith (which presumably denounces materialism and excess) and democracy (to the extent that it promotes complacency and prevents debate and conversation). Referring to “management evangelists” with “branding discipleships” on campuses, he makes explicit his belief that representatives of the corporate mainstream are co-opting the modes, styles or language of the faith-based community in order to facilitate “consumer behavior,” noting that they are “conveniently available as paid consultants.”

I selected the more polarized positions, to highlight the main points of contention. There are others who believe the idea of marketing the Catholic identity is worth further research, but express caution about the ways in which this marketing can be carried out. The reality is that without using these strategies, at least to some extent, some of these institutions may suffer greatly or not be able to continue operating.

For many, this is a deeply troubling conversation. The idea that a corporate consciousness can so easily invade even those places that were supposed to explicitly be the opposing forces, is of concern. If such spaces of purported opposition are so vulnerable to this influence, what does it mean for the future of such faith and justice based education? Of the larger system of higher education? In a recent book, Kirp (2003) examines this phenomenon through case studies of a varied number of colleges and universities. He found similar crises in identity experienced by colleges vying for a solid (profitable) place in the Higher Education marketplace. He notes that

Dollars have always greased the wheels of American higher education...what is new, and troubling, is the raw power that money directly exerts over so many aspects of higher education...American university has been busily reinventing itself in response to intensified competitive pressures. The new vocabulary of customers and stakeholders, niche marketing and branding and winner-take-all, embodies this shift in the higher education "industry." This is more than a matter of semantics and symbols, for the business vocabulary reinforces business-like ways of thinking. Each department is a "revenue center," each student a customer, each professor and entrepreneur, each party a "stakeholder," and each institution a seeker after profit, whether in money capital or intellectual capital. (pp. 3-4).

Reminding us that the debate over Higher Education as business is far from new, he proposes that the magnitude of the role of this business orientation is, in fact, fairly recent and troubling. He describes this discursive shift in higher education and understands it as one that also corresponds to shifts in thinking about higher education, and ultimately, in its practice and functioning. Kirk makes clear that he does not believe there is *no* place for business in education. When applied judiciously, it could lead to innovations, and benefits for institutions while keeping true to their missions. He summarizes this position by quoting economist Arthur Okun: "There's a place for the market—but the market must be kept in its place." (p.7).

In many ways, Faith College is following the trends set by the larger system of education in which it is situated, yet patches of resistance, stitched together with different-colored threads of faith, family, and social justice, appear in expected and unlikely corners of the campus.

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*Letter to a "campus madrina" (godmother)*

*Hey Myriam, ¿como estas? I'm good. Finishing up my dissertation—you remember, that big project I've been talking to you about all this time? The one I interviewed you for a few months back? Bueno, I would like to share with you some of the things I learned, especially from you.*

*You shared with me your commitment to students, and your insistence that we try to understand where they are coming from. Back then, you told me that everyone has a role in making sure students stay the course in college. You expressed concern that students were not cared about in some other offices. You told me:*

*I think that people don't take their time to help these kids. They don't care. The students are like kids, I have children so I know... Sometimes they're desperate they come in our office and make me mad 'cause they get fresh with me. But you have to understand why they get fresh and I have learned that... [Now] I can understand and I can sympathize with them because other offices, they don't really ask [students] what is it that they want and it's unfortunate so retention numbers are going to drop if we don't even ask can I help you? What is it that you need? If it's something I can't help you with, I will connect you with someone that can. Use your own resource, use your own mind, use your own expertise, use your own knowledge [to help the students].*

*I wanted to let you know that your approach does touch students' lives. I'm sure you could tell from the fan club of students that visit you on a daily basis. They ask you for advice, tell you about their lives or simply come to you a chismiar, to gossip a bit. Students who came through your office doors feeling lost were comforted by the homey environment you provide. Pictures of you and your family, or you with the students, and your children's artwork cover your office space. The guidance and advice you provide, even when you were sometimes told by your supervisors that it was not your place to do so. The familiar stories you share with them about your life and your family. The way you explain how things work in firm but nurturing ways. The assurance you give that they have someone in their corner. You once had an opportunity to "move up" to a higher paying position at the college—but that meant taking you away from the students. Ay, those students.*

*I admire the ways that you stand up for yourself, hold to what you believe in, and don't hold back from telling people how you feel. Like that time years ago when someone complained to your supervisor that you spoke too much Spanish over the phone. You let him know that you would be happy to discontinue using Spanish over the telephone, but reminded him of the consequences of this request "Fine, but don't ask me to translate for you all*

*those times a parent calls or comes in." People know better than to mess with you again. Maybe that's why you outlasted many of your bosses.*

*In my paper I talk about things like "bridging," "mestiza consciousness," "holding environments" and family models of functioning. I wanted to share with you that you are what I was talking about. Not just you, but people around campus that do the things you do. You are a bridge because of the ways you help the students and connect them with faculty and your administrator bosses. As a staff person you embody some of the qualities I talk about good teachers having. You hold students to high standards and tell them how it is and if you have to, "Don't get fresh with me!" Always con respeto and con confianza. You really listen to students, and respect their families. When mothers are searching for someone to listen to them, or fathers are looking for a fellow Spanish-speaker to help them find their way, you are there offering your counseling and code-breaker services. As the barrio woman that you are, you are especially sensitive to the needs of your fellow Latinos, love the ability to communicate with others in two languages, and gladly accept any phone calls or referrals from other departments who could not communicate with a Spanish-speaking parent. Even though this means more work for you. You welcomed the role*

*of cultural liaison, as one of the pedestrian bridges linking the community to the academy.*

*Remember Yumila and her mother? Yumila was attending another college and realized she made a mistake. She wanted desperately to attend Faith College but felt that she missed her opportunity, and could not bring herself to "inconvenience" the college by reactivating her application, financial aid paperwork, and scheduling process during the semester. Yumila's mother, sympathetic to her daughter's dilemma, ventured into the strange territory of the academy without the armaments of English language proficiency, or knowledge of the workings of the institution of college. As she walked around searching for a place to begin to advocate for her daughter, you noticed her exasperation and reached out. With a sigh of relief, she communicated with you about her daughter's dilemma and you intervened. Maintaining contact with the mother, you spoke to people in the Admissions office, the Deans office, and your friends in Financial Aid. You translated for Yumila's mother when she needed it. Because of your assistance and code-breaking skills, Yumila was admitted to the college and is now in her junior year as biology major. She participates in clubs and has established a network of peers, staff and faculty. She feels at home in this*

*college. Yumila and her mother are so thankful; they feel they owe her re-admittance to you. Do they still send you gifts during the holidays?*

*Just as you involve yourself in the lives of students through your stories, your photographs, your lending ear, other staff and faculty get the same energy from you. You would close the door and speak your mind, or listen to us as we spoke ours. Similar to students who may have felt lost, many faculty and staff, new and long-standing, found their way to you. Sometimes they approached you for procedural knowledge, others sought a roadmap of the political landscape of the college (which you kept tucked in the folds of your border knowledge), still others would go to share their frustrations, get advice about students, or simply exchange jokes and family stories. Sharing your perspectives, confident in the knowledge and skills you offer pertaining to and beyond what your administrative duties call for, you offer yourself as a bridge for faculty and staff.*

*You are one of the important pieces that keep the college true to its mission. Even as the college asks us to treat students like customers, you insist on considering them like family. Your involvements with the college are multiple and multigenerational, crossing academic, family, work and community borders. You bring your son everyday to the summer camp the*

*college offers, staffed by students. The students who seek out your assistance are also the mentors and teachers of your children. These are the reciprocal transformations I talk about in my dissertation. As you change our students, you let them change you; as you treat the students like family, they welcome you and yours as their familia. As one of the local flavors, you are uniquely Faith College, integral to the college barrio family. One of the beams in the bridge between, one of the hands that hold torn pieces together, one of the embracing arms. The title of secretary does not reflect the multiplicity of your roles, except in the borderlands, where you are also a counselor, advisor, and friend. The border skills you bring to the college help many students through, and many other staff better understand. You are what I mean when I talk about mestiza consciousness, bridging, holding environments, and code-breaker staff.*

\*\*\*\*

*A short time ago, you went to sleep and did not wake up. You were just thirty-nine years old. Shock, tears, disbelief, a profound sense of loss gripped our college familia, the one you helped hold together. Another campus madrina has left us. I wanted to share with you, though, that your funeral mass was a beautiful scene. I know you must have liked it. A bus and*

*several car pools full of staff, professors, priests, even students (who are not typically available in the summer), all came together, all united in mourning. We were welcomed with spiritual praise set to Caribbean rhythms. We heard for the first time that song that you performed and won second place for, "Su nombre es Jesus." It was beautiful. We didn't know that you sang for God when we weren't looking. But we did know you were loved by many, and we stood together, praying in our own ways, in English, in Spanish, in the unfamiliar and totally home. United in the spirit of the best of what the college could be. Students, staff, faculty embraced; their tears touching ours. The salt of our blended tears crystallized a bond between all, that in life you urged of us, and in passing you inspired in us. We were a community joined in prayer, however we defined it, and in sadness for the perforated parting—perforated because though you were torn from us, a piece of you remains bound to us. Like I said, you always had a way of being that bridge between, of helping dismantle the hierarchies and barriers we construct between each other, and open us to changing one another, even if for a moment. Staff to student, student to professor, professor and staff to each other. I wanted to share these things I learned from you, from our*

*work together, from the research I have been doing all this time. And to  
tell you how much we all miss you.*

*Cariñosamente, with much love,*

*Jennifer Ayala*

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### Teaching and learning

At the crux of the college experience is the teaching and learning that occurs within and beyond campus borders. Students interviewed spoke perhaps the most confidently about this area of the college experience, both when asked what teachers inspired them and when discussing what teachers and staff could learn from them as students. In praise or critique, students had very definite ideas about what they sought in their professors and in their learning experiences. Despite the encroachment of consumerist framings of learning in the language of many students, characteristics of good teaching and learning were still laced with humanistic longings. Students emphasized the importance not only of professors' firm grasp of the material, but of their interest in engaging and learning about them as students. They discussed their deep need to see professors feeling passionate about what they taught and "going beyond the material into life." Students commented both on what they saw and what they longed to see in their professors. Drawing from interviews, classroom observations and ethnographic field notes, the material on teaching and learning could be understood through two main concepts: "Validation" and "holding environments" (Powell, 2004; Rendon, 1993; 2000).

In contrast to established theories of student involvement (as predictive of persistence), Rendon's (1993) notion of validation is grounded in the experiences of "nontraditional students." Interviewing over one hundred and thirty first-year students at four different types of colleges, Rendon and her colleagues documented the ways in which validating experiences were critical to the learning and persistence of students of

color. She describes validation as a process in which student efforts are propped up by in-class and out-of-class agents. Rendon defines validation as

...an enabling, confirming and supportive process initiated by in- and out-of-class agents that fosters academic and interpersonal development. When validation is present, students feel capable of learning; they experience a feeling of self worth and feel that they and everything that they bring to the college experience is accepted and recognized as valuable...validation suggests a developmental process. It is not an end in itself. (p.16-17).

More relevant than involvement theories that presume students have the means, motive and opportunity to engage in extracurricular involvements in college, validation suggests that “involvement” should more directly implicate active *faculty* involvement or intervention in the lives of students. In other words, involvement need not simply entail a unidirectional process whereby students seek out opportunities to involve themselves in the academic life of the professors and the college. Staff and faculty must also take the initiative and involve themselves in the lives and intellectual development of students (Rendon, 1993; 2000). Rendon (1993) lists the various ways faculty can accomplish this, including in-class efforts, such as

- Demonstrate a genuine concern for teaching students;
- Are personable and approachable;
- Treat students equally;
- Structure learning experiences that allow students to experience themselves as capable of learning;
- Work individually with students who need extra help;
- Provide meaningful feedback to students. (p. 12)

Out-of-class active outreach efforts include participation in student events along with students and/or their families.

There were many examples of such promise in the data. All the points Rendon (1993) identifies as evidence of faculty efforts at validating students were represented in

the data. For example, Justin, an African American freshman, describes the characteristics of “one of the best” professors he has encountered at Faith College:

Well, I’m having a good experience in my class with Professor [NAME]. He’s one of the best. Every day going there is like we laugh, we talk about serious issues, and I’m really learning in that class...He’s one of my favorite teachers because you can learn at your own pace....it’s not so strict in the classroom and doesn’t make it seem like, oh, you’re the type of student that’s X or Y. He doesn’t stereotype you as a person.

In this quote, Justin touches on the importance of professor’s approachability (we laugh, it’s not so strict), equitable treatment of students (he doesn’t stereotype you as a person), support and concern for their learning (you can learn at your own pace). Justin and others describe the importance of such validating qualities in a professor, but also relate these characteristics to learning goals – not as an end in itself. Being able to laugh in the classroom was paired with talking about serious issues and “really learning.” Validation, therefore, includes an element of pressing students to realize their potential as learners, in addition to offering the support to reach them. Thus, faculty (and some staff) validated students by legitimizing students’ skills, experiences, and knowledges; recognizing, pushing and nurturing students’ desire to learn; and interrupting the student/teacher hierarchy.

#### Legitimizing student skills, experiences and knowledges

In their words and behaviors, professors and staff can validate their students’ potential by recognizing and the legitimizing the multiple skills, experiences and knowledge that students bring with them to the classroom. Rather than assume a transfer of knowledge, transmitted from professors into the minds of students, validating professors acknowledge the gifts students bring and build on these to enhance the

student's and community's learning. Simply recognizing their gifts in public forms can validate a student's sense of worth.

Diamond, a freshman Caribbean commuter student who had not participated in any college clubs or activities, described feeling validated when one of her professors nominated her to participate in a peer leadership program on campus. Because of this "outreach effort" on the part of the faculty member, Diamond was validated as a strong student that possessed leadership qualities. Knowing that this professor recommended her gave her a greater sense of commitment to this professor, increasing her engagement within the class. She was encouraged to participate in this after-school commitment, which she might not have done if this professor did not publicly express his faith in her. In the interview, Diamond named this professor when asked what professor inspired her, because he acknowledged the leadership potential she had and showed faith in her ability to apply these qualities in a setting outside the classroom.

Similarly, Tracey related this story, although it was not in reference to a Faith College professor:

There was a professor and she took me outside the classroom and she said, she had no reason to say this to me but um I had what it takes to become a child psychologist, to stick to it no matter what unfolds no matter what anybody says and I felt really good that she felt that way, you know, that I was special...she just pulled me aside and she told me that.

She describes how this side-conversation impacted her career decision, as she asserted her commitment to working with children throughout the interview. The encouragement to "stick to it no matter what unfolds" was a consistent theme in her interview as she expresses her determination despite the obstacles she may confront:

I wish [more professors] understood ... the genuineness of my seeking my career...I really love to work with children. And I really have a gift that I notice

teaching in other children in being able to get response from the child. And that I'm really dedicated for the rest of my life to do [this]...If I won't get a scholarship, I will take out loans and continue college. If I fail subjects, I will repeat them, I will go to summer school. I will stop at nothing.

Having had this validating experience come from what she perceived as a knowledgeable and sincere source, was a powerful motivator for this student to continue with her efforts. Verbalizing this potentiality allowed this student to articulate and own this quality as a gift that she possessed. Explaining that she wished more professors understood "the genuineness" of her determination towards reaching this goal, she expressed a desire for continued validation.

In both stories, students retrospectively acknowledged the impact of a professor's encouragement on their own academic, career and/or social trajectories. However, it is important to note that students can detect insincere praise. It is not helpful to have students simply feel better without being pushed to do their best.

#### Nurturing the desire to learn

He's one of the strict professors here and he kind of encourages me to strive more for perfection and things like that. Danisha, African-American student.

Professors and staff may sometimes think that students only search for the "easy way out." That because of all the invalidating experiences in their lives, what students desire are simply feel-good practices. Many of the students interviewed, however, articulated a deep desire for learning, where validating practices facilitate this learning. Mariana, a Latina student, describes good teachers as ones who "push their students to do better." Clarissa, another Latina student, echoes this sentiment when she describes the best teachers as ones who "challenge me to do my best in class." One Filipina sophomore spells out the connection between challenge and good teaching:

He was a great teacher. I mean, he was hard. He gave us a lot of work, but he did it because he wanted to challenge us. And that's more so because he felt that we had a lot to contribute in class. And that's why I enjoyed it, because he challenged the students and he made them work and made them think.

Push, challenge, think, enjoy, learn. These are some of the characteristics students seek in an inspiring teacher and learning environment. They desire and to some extent expect that professors play this active role, and have these high expectations. Classroom observations illustrate how one professor accomplishes this:

In this class of about twenty-one students, the professor employs a lot of group work and deep textual reading. He explains throughout the class what he expects of the students—"I may be nice but don't turn in crap to me." As students walk into the class, he approaches them, asking how they are doing. If they completed the assignments. Some small talk. During the class, in groups of about three, students are asked to discuss a section of the reading and work on answering questions about it. After a specified time, students then share with the whole group their responses and reactions. Picking one of the assertions the text makes, professor asks the class, emphasizing the question by writing it on the board, "Do you buy it?" Multiple hands rose, and students respond with their thoughts. The professor, using student names as he reacts "Excellent point," "I like that," "Keep going, very good just need a little bit more." Explains, "I know what you meant, I just wanted to draw it out more." At another time, the professor asks the students to ponder another assertion. There is silence, but one that seems comfortable, somewhat expected. Professor encourages thought "Keep thinking about it, it'll blow you away." One student responds, "I think I get it, but..." Professor relates assertion with a 1970s song, later with reference to a popular movie "that's why the Matrix is so cool..."

In this example, the professor spells out his expectations and encourages deep thinking in the class. He draws out students' "thinking work" in supportive ways, such as when he encourages them to "keep going, very good, just a little more." It is interesting to note how silence is used in this class. Silence in this context, offers students a space to really think about the material. It is indicative of student work, and not student disengagement. He also challenges students to critical thinking, by asking them not only to explain and identify the assertions made in the text, but to critique them, as when he asks "do you buy

it?” This is an important validating method, because it legitimizes students’ thoughts and contributions to the class.

Students do appreciate being encouraged to think deeper and learn more. One Greek student, Andrea, describes professors she admires as being “very easygoing and very accommodating” but that also “gives us, the class, more information on (the subject)” and that have “opened my mind to other points of view and other social and political events.” An African American freshman and Latina sophomore, both separately arranging their schedules with their respective advisors, indicated that they wanted to take a course with a specific professor. Their advisors inquired about the low grades each had received in the courses with the requested professors, “D” grades specifically. The Latina sophomore explained “oh, but I learned so much in that class!” She went on to describe the types of things she learned in this class, how this learning will help her in her future endeavors and how taking a class with an “easier teacher” will not help her reach her learning and career goals. The African American freshman, while not going into the same detail, also recognized that although he did not get the grade he had hoped for, he nonetheless enjoyed the course and in particular the instructor’s approach. It is clear that in these two examples, the students put a premium on learning and instructor approaches over the grades they ultimately received, with the hope and expectation that in future attempts, their grades will match their desires. Other students may feel discouraged by the grade and opt for courses that are not as risky to their averages. These examples are telling about both the professors and students in question. Professors effectively tapped into students learning desires, offering support and caring for their learning. What is also notable about these examples is that students do possess learning desires, contrary to

characterizations of first generation students and students of color that depict “getting by” as their primary goal. Studies that find first generation students and students of color as earning disproportionately lower cumulative grade point averages, may not be indicative of students’ lack of desire for learning. Perhaps these numbers include students who truly value learning, even to the detriment of their grade point averages, as well as students who are not willing to compromise their grades even if it means they may not learn as much. A problematic implication is that some students’ learning desires may not be captured by their grade point averages—almost universally used as measure of student success in college, the qualifier for scholarships, and access points to advanced degrees.

#### Disrupting hierarchies

In the advising office, two students, both African-American sophomores participating in college sports teams, are sitting with an advisor arranging their schedules. One asks the advisor, “Is this teacher good?” and the friend immediately interjects “Who, Professor [name]. Oh, yeah take him he’s really good. He comes to all the games.”  
—Field note.

Good teachers were recognized not only for what they did in the classroom, but for the commitment to student learning they demonstrated outside the classroom, as this field note illustrates. When professors attend student-driven activities, such as going to see their students play in an athletic game, or perform in a campus play, their actions are validating student knowledge and skills outside the classroom. Students recognize this as professors’ caring about the whole of their college experience as students, thereby enacting a holistic method of learning/teaching. It also represents an understanding of the educator role as straddling multiple borders: Race, class and culture borders, the borders between social distinctions of teacher and student, borders between teacher and

mentor/counselor/advisor roles, between personal and professional, between standards and supports, between intellect and spirit/emotion.

Professors who engage the work of multiplicities, both in terms of their personal roles and in acknowledging and involving those of their students, are demonstrating border skills working toward a mestiza consciousness. Engaging these multiplicities helps to facilitate a disruption in, among others, the teacher/learner dichotomy. An African American student judges the excellence of a professor by his or her willingness to understand their educator role as multiple. She describes one of her favorite professors as “very interesting and she’s also a good advisor and a good mentor and a good counselor...” The combination of effective teaching in the classroom (being very interesting), advising, mentoring and counseling outside the classroom, contributes to a holistic vision of what good professors do.

In another field note, I describe the interaction between Mehek, the Pakistani Muslim freshman I quoted earlier, and one of her favorite professors at a student-initiated religious/community activity:

It is Ramadan, and I was invited to another Iftar (breaking fast) by one of the Muslim student clubs. I noticed, as with the last one, that Mehek, a shy, enthusiastic Pakistani young woman, was there. Always smiling. Mehek found a connection with this student organization and has become pretty active this semester. She was sitting with her sociology professor and breaking fast with him. They were just having a conversation about the various foods being served when I came in and she started telling me how much she appreciates this professor... Later she tells me that he had been encouraging her to share her life experiences as part of a journal or to write about them in general to share with other students. This, she told me, inspired her to write something over the break and submit it to the school newspaper. “I will do it.” She seemed so genuinely pleased... I pointed out to the professor in question what she had shared, and he seemed surprised, not fully realizing the impact of his encouragement or her engagement. And that by coming to this event, his words in class were not seen as empty ones. By coming to this event, he reinforced his interest in her and her culture.

This scene exemplifies validation in several ways, as the professor legitimates her cultural knowledge and demonstrates caring for her as a student. The faculty member's actions, his participation in this event, reinforced the verbal cultural recognition he gave her in class. He demonstrates genuine interest in her cultural knowledge by encouraging her to write about her experiences and share them with others. The professor reinforces this interest as he shares in a spiritual/community event that is important, even sacred to her. Mehek interprets this as evidence that he cares about her and her learning in a holistic fashion. In this interaction, Mehek was acknowledged as possessing a legitimate form of knowledge, positioning herself in a teacher role and her professor in a learner role. As a professor, his openness to the interruption in the teacher/learner hierarchy, and as a student, her willingness to accept this power are both needed to create transformative learning environments that extend beyond the classroom (Jimenez, et al, in press).

#### The holding part of hold students to high standards

She's understanding. She doesn't give up on students. If they don't understand something she'll explain it over and over. She is also there for me to talk to if I need her. I always try to take [this teacher's] classes. Desiree, African-American junior.

At faculty workshops and staff/administrative meetings, personnel are often reminded of the importance of "holding students to high standards." Faculty are urged to do so in their respective classrooms, administrators and staff are urged to do so in the enforcement of college policies. Earlier examples illustrate that students' learning desires are compatible with this expectation. However, emphasis (among some administrators and faculty) is typically on the noun and not the verb, the standards rather than the

holding (Fine, personal communication). In this section, we will explore an alternative interpretation of the holding aspect of the demand to hold students to high standards.

Literature in education supports the assertion that high expectations and high standards are important to communicate to students and maintain for a quality learning experience. Offering the support to cushion students' efforts is critical in helping students reach those standards. The material presented in the previous section can attest to the ways in which students paired the importance of being "pushed" to learn with the support to help them get there. Rendon (1993) refers to this when she claims that validation is a powerful tool for the success of nontraditional students. Powell (2004) applies Winnicott's notion of a holding environment when she analyzes the dynamics of an innovative, "change-oriented" graduate student course. Along with experiential learning, parallel process and strategic use of theory, Powell identifies "holding environment" as an important attribute in working with adults towards systemic change in schools. She writes "with holding environment, individuals and groups need psychological support to experience and work through the predictable conflicts that arise during this kind of learning." (p. 237). Loosely applying this idea to holistic, validating models of teaching and learning, holding environments can represent emotional, psychological, and academic supports provided by faculty as well as institutions. Holding environments were established through structured support within class, after-class opportunities, and code-breaker activities.

Some professors offered distributive opportunities for help and support. They structured in-class supports in ways that did not separate students into categories of deficit, where some students are singled out and marked as needing help, and merit,

where students are positioned as smart and not needing additional help. One professor whose class I had observed assigned an informal quiz. These quizzes were just named as such so that students would take it seriously, but were not graded. It was an opportunity for students to practice working on these types of problems. As students worked on individual problems, the professor walked around the room and worked individually, through directed questioning, with students. In contrast to adopting an approach of asking who does not understand the material, this way, all students received the individual attention without feeling singled out. In tune with validation approaches, good professors were cognizant and sensitive to the needs of students. Students who take the risk of participating in class can feel discouraged by dismissive or belittling gestures and feedback. One professor encourages students to participate and offers respectful feedback in ways that turn into learning moments:

In this class of about twenty students, professor calls students by their names. He remembers what towns they are from and what some of their interests are, using this knowledge to encourage student participation....The professor asks a question and a student attempts a response. He, the student, has difficulty articulating a response, instead gesturing his answer by placing his hand towards the floor and lifting it upwards towards his neck. Professor reacts "yes, that's the right direction, now who can put that into words." ...The professor turns a "wrong answer" into an opportunity to find the "correct answer."

The professor in this example encourages the student by pointing out what is useful about his response, and asks a peer to build on it. He does this in the context of getting to know the students in his class.

Another feature of a holding environment, includes second chances. One professor, whose class I had not formally observed, structured second chances into the coursework. On exams and certain assignments, students would be given the opportunity to redo the assignment correctly and discuss in writing what he or she did differently to

reach the correct answer the second time. Others included drafts of assignments, so that learning was understood as a process and not simply an end product. In these ways, assistance was structured into classroom practice.

What happens immediately after class is at times as telling as what occurs within class. In my classroom observations of effective teachers, I noted that a number of students would feel comfortable enough to approach professors after class with questions and comments. These professors did not rush off to their offices after class, but remained with students answering questions, engaging in discussions, reminding them of upcoming assignments. They felt that professors wanted them to be successful students. After one classroom observation, as I waited to speak to the professor, I spoke with one of the students, Matt, a White working class male, who shared

I find [this subject] boring but if I were to take it I'd want it to be with her....Because she'll help you after class. I really find that important in a teacher because sometimes you get really lost.

Within the migrant framework, students who attend college for the first time, and even those who do not but feel particularly vulnerable with certain courses, can feel lost in unfamiliar academic territory. Professors who accept roles as active guides instead of undecipherable maps students must learn to read (without asking for directions), are appreciated by students who feel that their learning desire is being nurtured. Students benefit from the efforts of institutional agents to help them decipher the codes to college success.

Such code-breaker activities are important in assisting students' transitioning to college. It may not always be professors who directly provide this service. Often this is what college support programs offer students through workshops and other types of

programming. Cherlise offers an example of what such code-breaker activities could look like in a college classroom, as she humorously relates a story of her struggles transitioning to a college math course:

When I first started college the first day in the math class she said something about things being in parentheses and she continued talking and for the whole time I was like, parentheses? What the – is parentheses? And then I went home and I looked it up in the dictionary and then realized Jesus Christ... things in brackets. Couldn't she just have said, the things in the brackets? But that just goes to show that they're trying to take you to the other level but in doing so they have to tell you where they're taking you from and where they put you. In other words she has to say to me you know 'back in high school maybe you said brackets. But ladies and gentlemen you're now in college. We don't use that terminology no more. From now on you're gonna say parenthesis.' So that when you're talking to us at the end of semester one and you say alright – so what is in the parenthesis on the number five. I don't have to be lost. That's good teaching.

Cherlise tells us that as a student, she understands and expects to be “taken to another level,” but adds that “in doing so, they have to tell you where they're taking you from and where they put you.” Suggesting one way a professor can accomplish this, Cherlise makes an important point about providing students with trailmarkers—ways of marking their learning progression. Making explicit the changes in direction, shifts from high school to college modes of functioning, is a code-breaker activity that benefit migrants to the academy.

This assumes, however, that professors know where students are coming from. Although there are many positive, validating learning experiences students can draw from, there is still a discrepancy between the backgrounds of the majority of faculty and those of students. Specifically, a large proportion of students of color attend this college but a disappointingly small number of faculty of color teach in it. As such, there is a sense from some students that not all faculty understand where they are coming from.

Cherlise, who has described numerous positive learning experiences, nonetheless realizes the limitations of not having an equally diverse faculty:

Cause you're thinking, if the teacher is white she's able to relate to white kids. She know how they grow up cause she know how she grow up. While not knowing what its like in a Black environment she's not she might try but she don't necessarily have all the criteria to help them because they have a lot of issues that she probably don't even know about. You know. So to be able to work with them you know, a different way in terms of financial status...But she will try, they're here to try...they're trying.

Although Cherlise is the only student to have articulated this sentiment, the perception and reality of how privilege operates in the classroom and anticipation of being stereotyped, as Justin earlier referred to, are present in the minds of students of color and from working class backgrounds. That Justin identified earlier “not stereotyping” as characteristic of good teaching is telling of the structural (e.g., racism) and psychological (e.g., stereotype threat) barriers erected, even if in subtle ways, in the experiences of students of color.

Students recognized the efforts of “good teaching” as being important to their own learning process, and thus took note of the times when such practices were missing. In fact, when students were asked what they could teach professors, almost all offered examples of how to be better teachers. They advised professors to demonstrate passion for their work, be engaging and interactive, and take an interest in the students—taking note of what they are reading, what music they are listening to, what the latest jargon is—so as to better relate to them in the classroom.

Providing validation and holding environments can be framed as border skills that faculty, staff, the college as an institution can possess, working towards an institutional mestiza consciousness. Efforts to validate students and provide supportive environments,

often have as a consequence (or perhaps it is a precursor?) the interruption of established hierarchies in academia. It is important to note that such skills can be articulated when structural supports for both faculty and students are in place. For example, the kinds of learning environments described here are made possible in part because of the college's smaller size. The types of individual attention observed in the interviews and classroom observations could logistically only be accomplished with small class sizes. Validation and holding environments must be produced in the context of authentic learning, to support its fruition. Providing learning experiences couched in validation, within holding environments, can be transformative for the students as well as the college community they are enriching.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

Student experiences were the starting point of this study. Initially framed as “migrants” into the academy, students of color, working class students and first generation students were thought to be traversing an unknown and unwelcoming land. The literature supports this notion and documents powerfully the ways in which colleges and universities as a whole can sometimes marginalize “migrants.” One of the goals of this study was, in the vein of critical race theorizing, to document students’ border skills and multiplicities. In doing this work and adopting this approach, *institutional* strengths, vulnerabilities, and responsibilities were revealed.

In the tugs between gifts and struggles, class performances, and transformative teaching/learning spaces, there were some parallels between student and institution experiences. Students’ inspiration work at the college, for their families and/or communities, were at times bumping up against academic expectations at the college. Although engaging both aspects (the inspiration and academic work) is part of the college’s mission, on the ground they can sometimes feel like competing forces. Similarly, dedicated staff and faculty can sometimes feel discourses of standards, retention and engagement as competing forces. Working with students holistically necessarily takes time and resources; at times this effort bumps up against other administrative expectations. Those in authority then at times remind or chide students/staff for seeing too many students, taking on too many out of class responsibilities, not addressing the required work adequately. On an institutional level, the rich ethnic/racial and class diversity in the student body as well as the college’s social justice oriented mission are among this institution’s greatest gifts. Yet, there is no

diversity index or indicator that captures not only a college's diversity but a college's commitment to a social-justice oriented, equity-based, or intercultural (see Tanaka, 2003) campus environment. Instead, college rankings typically take into account indicators that highlight the various colleges' exclusivity, such as college application acceptance/rejection rates. A college or university that rejects many of its applicants would be considered an elite or desirable top-tier institution. Perhaps, it is time to demand that indicators of diversity, social justice and equity be constructed when college rankings are reported.

In the class performances, where class emerged as a dynamic relationship of power between differently positioned entities, scripts of corporatization were shared across student, staff and institutional levels. At times the class conscriptions seemingly pitted student and staff against one another, vying for college resources. The phenomenon of the higher education marketplace and the growing corporatization of the academy is a topic that is increasingly being explored. Recent books, including Aronowitz' The Knowledge Factory, Giroux's Take Back Higher Education, Kirps's Shakespeare, Einstein, and the Bottom Line: The Marketing of Higher Education, Bok's Universities in the Marketplace, among others, detail the different manifestations of corporatization in the context of higher education. In this study, it was not initially a construct of interest. Instead it emerged from the discourses of students and staff. Among the students, recognition of capital as an access code to college resources may be tied to their understanding of college as a consumer venture. This perception however, may be more tied to the mainstream cultural/capitalist values of bottom lines, cost/benefit analysis, individualism and mass consumption. Among staff, the impact of

corporatization was experienced in the perceived shift in college functioning. For some, it was a welcome change into modernity. For others, it was a sign of spirit-loss, as some staff expressed an almost romanticized longing for times past when the community operated under a family model. This reflects a larger trend of corporatization within the U.S. system of higher education and raises more profound questions about the future direction of the academy.

Lastly, with transformative learning spaces, students are eager for intellectual stimulation within holding environments of support, and mutual transformative processes. Evidence of this was found inside and outside the classrooms. Particularly of note was the disruption of hierarchies in the teacher/student relationship as students were positioned in some instances as cultural leaders and staff/professors as learners (see also Kenneth Gonzalez' work on students as "cultural workers"). In some ways this is a reframing of the issue of receptivity to institutional assistance (Nelson, 1994). When there is a perception that staff/faculty and the institution are themselves receptive to learning from students, to being changed by them, students themselves may be more receptive to academic assistance/transformation. Many of the students' most inspiring teachers were those who positioned themselves at times as learners, disrupting the teacher/student hierarchy. This characteristic of receptivity to mutual assistance and transformation can be applied across levels and be one of the precursors to a mestiza consciousness.

The parallels described in the preceding pages document those between the struggles and experiences of students and institutions. Of course, the magnitude of the

struggles relative to the individual's or institution's survival may differ. A question for future research is do these parallel processes also suggest parallel solutions?

From alien-nation to trans-nation-al

Initial conceptualizations of students of color, working class students and first generation students positioned them in a migration framework. With this framework, the student's journey through college was likened to the migrant moving to an unknown land. The image was one of an "uprooted migrant" getting lost in the unfamiliar territory, the "nation-state" of the academy. The academy as nation-state has its own rules, cultural norms, and access codes that migrant students need to assimilate in order to achieve success within its borders. More recent framings of the process of migration have challenged this "uprooted migrant" image in favor of transnational images (Glick-Schiller, 1995; Upegui, 2004). This new image depicts people

whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relationship to more than one nation-state... Transnational migration is the process by which immigrants forge and sustain simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement. (Glick-Schiller, p. 48).

Applying these re-conceptualizations to the experiences of students, one conclusion is that, more than migrants, successful students are transnationals. "Firmly rooted in their new country" (the halls of academia), like transnationals, students can also "maintain multiple linkages to home" (Glick-Schiller, p. 48). Moreover, they create multiple linkages between home and school. The layer of mestiza consciousness adds to this image the understanding that these multiple cultural, intellectual, psychological homes are not equally valued in society; they are situated within unequal relationships of power. Claiming cultural citizenship in more than one psychological home, some students

actively and collaboratively create spaces of home within the college. For example, the collaborative efforts of a coalition of student groups and staff/faculty allies lead to the creation of a Muslim and Hindi prayer space. The active transformative efforts of the students combined with the institution's receptivity to this transformation and its public recognition as *community* growth, awoke an institutional mestiza consciousness.

#### Mestiza consciousness as theory, method, analysis

In this study, I open up the concept of mestiza consciousness, applying it as a construct to understand the content of the data. Through mestizaje, I apply it as method and analytical tool. Finally, I enact a mestiza consciousness in the writing of this text, as I weave theory with story and analysis (Tanaka, 2003).

Mestiza consciousness as a construct is being pulled outside the bodies, minds and spirits of students of color. Not pulled out completely, but shared across levels. A concept originating from "below," I stretch it outward to understand a group level consciousness born out of border-crossing work. A mobile construct, I move it further out to an institutional understanding and legitimizing process. Cognizant of the theoretical, geographic, spiritual, feminist, anti-racist origins of the concept mestiza consciousness, the analysis presented here constitutes a cross-level theoretical sharing of the responsibilities and the joys of this consciousness, and the transformations that are created from their braided (Gonzalez, 2001) linkages.

"Mestiza consciousness" was part of the conceptual framework used to understand student and institutional experiences. As mestizaje, or hybridity, it was also used as method and analytic tool. Using multiple approaches to collect data and sharing an extent of power with students in the form of a participatory design, could be considered a

method of *mestizaje*. Moving back and forth across levels within particular themes, rather than segregating each unit into distinct conceptual territories, is an example of *mestizaje*. In this way, it can be construed as one analytic tool used to understand the data in this study, because of its layered nature.

In keeping with a writing method of *mestizaje*, Gloria Anzaldua expresses her theorizing in multiple languages and genres, moving between the voices of scholarly writing, poetry, and short stories. Within the higher education literature, Tanaka (2003) similarly applies a “polyphonic novelistic ethnography” (p. 17) approach. In essence, he presented his results in two columns, where one column represented novelistic storytelling and the other column discussed his theorizing of the stories. He moves between scholarly language and humanistic story writing to express his own observations and theorizing. These writings, and others, represent a growing recognition particularly in the social sciences of the importance of expressing multiplicity (in perspectives, in theorizing, in the spirit behind the words) through writing (Fine & Weis, 2000). In the writing of the current text, I also attempt to employ this writing method of *mestizaje*, particularly in the findings and interpretations chapter. In that chapter, I weave data with scholarly literature, and academic writing with story writing as analysis.

In some ways *mestiza* consciousness is the opposite of a corporate consciousness. Corporatization is a force that shapes masses into conformity, reduces complexity to its most basic parts, invokes images of bottom lines and rugged individualism, tailors identities to their most market-favorable faces. A *mestiza* consciousness, in contrast, houses ambiguity and complexity, hybridity and multiplicity, collaboration and conflict. Can working towards a *mestiza* consciousness work against a corporate consciousness?

A corporate consciousness does not allow space for alternative visions at a given point in time. However, a mestiza consciousness, grown from multiple alternative spaces, can allow for a voice of corporatization to inform and understand some aspects of reality. Many successful students exemplified this latter expression and this is something the college can learn from the students: Living a mestiza consciousness and allowing for voices of corporatization to emerge to understand it, use the parts that are most helpful, and fight against some of the oppressive realities it inspires. Alternatively, being stuck in the fog of corporatization lowers the visibility of the multiple alternative spaces and solutions to community issues.

#### Thank you notes

It seems clear that some of the students' strengths consist of how they inspire those around them, how they act as "hurdle-jumpers" and exhibit the "endurance labor" necessary to continue their education. The gifts students bring to the college are many times at best unrecognized and at worst at odds with the types of academic rewards they seek. Implicitly expected of students coming to college (in the traditional classroom), is that life must be cleared out, *como una gaveta regada* – like a cluttered drawer that needs to be cleaned out to make room for the new ideas being bought. Tending to these multiple commitments outside of college, or even in closeted spaces within the college, splitting their energies, then gets read as deficits or failures—deficits resulting from a lack of time management skills, lack of interest, failure to take college seriously, failure to correctly arrange their priorities.

Studies related to work and family responsibilities have generally concluded that they can have a detrimental effect if excessive, particularly among students of color, on

college persistence (Flores-Gonzalez, 1999; Nora, 1996). A few others discuss the ways in which these cultural resources are instead an asset (for example, Delgado Bernal, 2001). What I suggest here is that families and communities can simultaneously be strengths and struggles for students navigating the college landscape; they are not mutually exclusive categories (see also Belle, 1987). In simply dropping these resources into one side of the pro and con category, important strengths and challenges within can be missed.

Questions for institutions would involve how they could recognize and engage the depth of students' gifts, while also offering structural supports for the more instrumental aspects of their responsibilities. One of students' greatest gifts perhaps is their capacity for others. Their ability to see beyond themselves, the inspiration work they do, their willingness to help out instrumentally, the responsibility they feel to their families or communities. This capacity is often grounded in their sense of faith, spirit, and/or in their understanding of culture, community and justice. As a faith-based institution, the college's hope is that this capacity be fully expressed. Yet it needs to be recognized and fostered in culturally responsive ways. This capacity can be an even greater structural asset to the college because it could connect the campus in ways administrators and student affairs departments dream to. As Anzaldua reminds us, "it is the work that the soul performs" and this form of spirit work drafts a multiply versed consciousness. Institutions could also learn from the moves already taking place in quiet spaces within its borders, to develop a receptivity to mutual transformation, just as their more committed faculty and staff have learned to do.

### Contributions, Implications and Limitations

This study documents the trends, gifts, and struggles of a rather unique institution. Many studies in higher education detail the experiences of students of color within elite institutions where they are “one of few...,” or of students of color within large urban colleges (usually two-year). The college under study runs counter to typical categorizations of colleges, as it is a small, private, urban four-year college with a significant student of color population and with a stated commitment to serve the local community. Given the college’s unique characteristics, findings from this study cannot be generalized, in the traditional sense of the word, to other settings. However, if we understand generalizability in a broader sense, then the gifts, struggles and possibilities in this college community could resonate with other places (Fine, personal communication). Nevertheless, cross college comparisons would provide a fuller picture, particularly of some of the institutional level themes I discuss in this study.

The quantitative and qualitative aspects presented in this study could have been more usefully combined such that the quantitative information and analyses, obtained after the qualitative data were collected, could have informed the qualitative data collection process. For example, the trends found in the data could have been used as launching points for developing the interview questions. The main problem with that, however, was the issue of whether student co-researchers would be permitted to view these potentially sensitive documents. With the descriptive quantitative data, collecting information on more relevant variables, particularly with regard to financial status, would have provided a fuller picture. Collecting data on students who participate in opportunity programs, largely students of color in financial need could have shed light on some of the

findings. Anecdotally, I understand that students who participate in these types of programs have higher rates of persistence than the general population. Exploring the impact of these types of programs would have added to the discussion on transformative learning spaces. In terms of the qualitative data collection, as I discussed in an earlier section, the participatory design could have been better structured. A more diverse group of student researchers was the desired goal; specifically, including Latino/a co-researchers, given their significant representation in the overall student body, and more men, given both their numbers at the college and the descriptive statistical findings.

This study speaks back to an educational literature that describes experiences of students of color and first generation students in the context of college, almost exclusively in terms of their under preparation, lack of financial resources (relative to paying tuition) or cultural capital and their relationship to failure to persist. These characteristics are often viewed from the perspective of the institutions that, in losing students lose revenue, ask “why are these students dropping out?” Other work, largely in student services and counseling journals, has examined students’ experiences of discrimination and a few others in the critical race theory realm, have examined students’ strengths and contributions and institutional responsibilities. In this study, I have attempted to examine student experiences more holistically, as neither a portrait of deficit nor romanticism, but as an integral part of the college community dynamics. Additionally, I have investigated the “border knowledge” and “code-breaker services” of front-line staff at the college, a population who rarely get a voice in higher education research. The work in this study began on the ground, and moved up the institutional hierarchy; the words and experiences of students and staff lead me to better understand

(and further investigate) institutional opportunities and tensions. Institutional responsibility is thus implicated in student and college-wide outcomes, just as students contributions and responsibilities were highlighted.

This study also speaks back to a higher education literature that says little about pedagogical practices. The importance of teaching is well documented in the elementary and secondary grades, but under-examined in the context of college, as if college students are beyond the scaffolding provided by good teachers. Though far from addressing pedagogy in all its complexity, I offer more of an invitation to further research in this area.

#### Final thoughts

As I close this piece of research, reflecting on the work that has transpired, the lives I have come in contact with, the mutual learning, I find myself with a series of multi-sensory snapshots caught in my imaginings, replaying scenes I have visited in my dissertation. Images of advertisements touting our march towards a no-nonsense business orientation. The feeling of arms wrapped around a community spirit, embracing the promise and reality of a mission. Snapshots of words suspended in tight spaces of frustration, as students speak of their community brothers and sisters who have joined the military now that college has been driven outside their financial means. Pictures of stadium-style graduation ceremonies, where staff and students walk down together with smiles, hugs, tears, and “I knew you could do it” whispered in each other’s ears. Sounds of silent thinking work alternating between shouts of critical engagement within a classroom, extending outside its borders. Stings of invalidation for students and the

institution, from some professors, students, administrators, or from the State, the system of higher education, the expanding fog of corporate consciousness.

Between this succession of images, a muted mission flashes “a college community, committed to providing a holistic education; in the service of justice.” As these words fade to black, I see these snapshots foreshadowing the disjointed, sometimes competing images offered in response to “what is the work of the academy, of higher education?” Are we training students to participate in the corporate or working world? Are we inviting students to join us in critical questioning, engaging, bettering the world we live in? Are these necessarily mutually exclusive? What do students most desire, because they too are being told by a system of education, a corporate-controlled media, what is the right answer. Images of what constitutes an education for all students appear as superimposed/super-imposing layers. The layer of career or vocational preparation, reproduction of the corporate mainstream, a measuring stick held up for students to jump up and reach or fall hard trying, pockets of critical analysis and learning amidst contested spaces, holistic pluralistic learning extending beyond the classroom into the community-- images of education as social justice (or injustice). Images that may not form a coherent picture, but from the blurs and the smudges, those in-between spaces where students and their allies in college engage in action oriented inquiry, can emerge alternative interpretations.

## Appendix A

### Outline of Student Researcher Work

#### The research process

- The goals of this research project.
- Qualitative and quantitative research.
- Interviewing.
- Consent forms and confidentiality.
- Developing questions and probes.
- Weekly meetings. Discuss the interview process, what students are saying, products for the end of the semester, readings.

#### Assignments

- Journal entries. Two entries per week.
  - One entry should be about what your expectations were entering into this project.
  - Other entries must include what the interview experience was like for you, both the process and content of the interviews. After each interview, you should take notes on things like, for example, what surprised you about what this person said. What were you able to relate to? What did you disagree with or feel you could not relate to? Comment on how you felt about the interview, the vibe you got, etc. You could also compare/contrast what the different students interviewed said.
  - Feel free to write these entries in creative ways, such as poems, letters, etc.
- Data table. Keep a tally of the number and demographic characteristics of the students you interview.
- Article review. Look up an article on [nces.ed.gov](http://nces.ed.gov) that you find interesting. Write about it in your journal, why you chose it, what you find interesting about it, what you agree/disagree with, etc. Print it out and bring it to our meeting for discussion.
- Others readings related to the issues that come up in class, as assigned. Also feel free to introduce readings you may come across that you would like for us to read and share.
- Interviews.
  - Collaboratively develop interview questions.
  - Conduct between 5-10 student interviews. Collect consent forms from student participants and submit the forms along with the taped interviews or typed interview notes to Jennifer Ayala for transcription.
  - Write about the experience and process of the interviews in your journals.
- Photographs. Take photographs of scenes, images, people, things, representing responses to the questions developed and/or the overall theme of the project. For

example, in response to things that get in the way of college, perhaps a photograph of traffic on Kennedy Boulevard, or of the parking lots, etc.

- Observation. Using the interview questions and general theme of the project as a guide, choose a location on campus and observe (for about half an hour) students interacting with each other or with staff or professors. Take notes on what you see. Include this as a journal entry.
- Data analysis. Once transcriptions of interviews are available, share interviews with the group, review and discuss.

### Final Products

- For Professor [name], produce a descriptive paper whereby you focus on the process, experience, thoughts and feelings about the overall project.
- Take on a particular theme, finding, issue or question related to this project and expand on it for your final product. In addition to the descriptive paper due for Professor [name], this product should focus on one aspect of the overall project presented in a creative way. It could be a series of poems, a photoessay, a comic strip, an illustration or series of illustrations, pamphlet or brochure, website, mural plan, short story, video, etc. Along with this creative product, there should be an in depth, type-written explanation of what it is, why you selected it, what theme or issue it represents. This explanation could also overlap with the essay due for Professor [name].

Appendix B  
Student Interview Protocol

1. Why do you think some students stay in college and others leave?
2. Do you think all students have an equal shot at success?
3. How do you think race, financial status, gender, sexual orientation, etc., affects students in college?
4. Tell me about a time when you thought something unfair was happening at Faith College?
5. Tell me about a time when you found college was getting really hard or when you felt like quitting.
  - a. What made it hard?
  - b. What kept you going?
6. Outside of college, what are some of your obligations?
7. What teacher really inspires you?
8. What are some things you think you could teach a professor?
9. When you don't understand something in class, do you go for help?
  - a. If not, why?
  - b. If so, who do you go to?
  - c. Why do you think some people don't like to go for help?
10. What advice would you give to a freshman coming into college for the first time?

Other questions and probes:

- Do you feel like your culture is respected in this school? (Drawn from opportunity gap survey).
- Could you tell me more about that?
- What do you wish more professors understood about you?
- Are you the first person in your family to go to college? If so, what has that been like for you?

## Appendix C Staff Interview Protocol

I am doing a research project about race, class, gender and opportunity in college. Specifically, I would like to know what different groups of students do to survive (and succeed in) their first year of college, why some students stay in college and others leave, what are things that help and things that get in the way of doing well in college, and what are things colleges can do (or are doing) to better help students stay. As part of this project, I am interviewing different groups of students, staff and professors. You interact a lot with students on a daily basis as part of your work. I would like permission to interview you about your opinions on these issues.

1. Why do you think some students stay in college and others leave Faith College?
  - What do you think supports students?
  - What gets in the way of their doing well?
  - What do you see students complain a lot about?
  - Do you think all students have an equal chance at success in college?
2. Tell me about a time when you helped a student out and felt like you made a difference or maybe you tried and couldn't?
3. What is something you've learned from students?
4. Do you think some students are treated more unfairly than others? Tell me about a time when you heard a student talk about being treated unfairly.
5. What do you wish more people at the college understood about what you do here?

### Other probes:

- What do you think we as a college can do more of to improve students' situations?
- What do you think is a common misperception about students at Faith College?
- What are the main issues you see students dealing with here at Faith College?

Appendix D  
Observation Protocol

- Classroom arrangement (for e.g., in a circle, lecture style, etc.)
- Classroom strategy
  - Lecture
  - Discussion
  - Small group work
  - Interactive/project work
- Instructor approaches
  - Use of examples and Types of examples used – cultural relevance
  - Welcoming of questions
  - Validation of student experiences in class
  - Presentation of material
  - Use of technology
  - Use of humor
- Students engagement
  - Asking questions
  - Side conversations, sleeping, withdrawn
  - Note taking
  - Eye contact
  - Silence
- What happens after class
  - students stay after class to ask prof questions
  - students keep talking about class to other students

Misc.

- Interesting quotes
- Observations to follow-up on
- Possibilities for help/revision

## Appendix E Statistical Tables

Analyses conducted were largely descriptive in nature. A series of correlations and chi square analyses were conducted with the aforementioned variables to document demographic trends in first year (fall to fall) persistence. The purpose of these analyses is to provide some further statistical description of the population of students at the college and to note trends with respect to the relation of gender, race/ethnicity and persistence. These data are not intended to draw hard conclusions about causality, particularly since there are numerous other variables that, according to the literature, could better explain the variance in persistence.

Overall, first-year college persistence rates for the three combined years came to 71.65%. There were slight year-to-year variations in persistence, but these were not significant. In the correlations matrix, number of credits earned and college GPA were the most strongly related to first year, fall to fall persistence ( $r=0.57$ ,  $p<0.0001$ ;  $r=0.43$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). In a logistic regression analysis, these two variables also emerged as the best predictors of retention. High school grades ( $r=0.21$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and to a lesser extent gender ( $r=0.10$ ,  $p<0.0001$ ), SAT ( $r=0.09$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), admission status ( $r=0.088$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and race ( $r=-0.057$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) were also significantly related to persistence, but the magnitude of these relationship was quite small. In the regression analysis, these variables did not contribute much to the variance, particularly when college GPA and number of credits were taken into account. Even controlling for college GPA and number of credits earned in the first year, however, these categories did not account for much of the variance.

The finding that number of credits earned was so significant at first did not make conceptual sense. After discussing these results with colleagues, it was suggested that number of credits may reflect, for example, students who had withdrawn from classes, students who came in with AP credits and other special program credits (for example, equal opportunity programs that offer summer course credits), and/or students who were in multiple developmental (zero-credit) courses. The latter finding would be consistent with NCES reports that have found a relationship between number of remedial courses taken and lower retention/graduation rates. Chi square analyses were conducted within demographic categories to further investigate some of the trends found in the correlations matrix.

#### Gender, Race/Ethnicity and College Performance

There are 1329 students represented in the table below, which compares the persistence rates of first-time, full-time college men and women broken down by race/ethnicity. Students whose race/ethnicity was not recorded or who identified as “other,” were not included in this table. There appear to be some race by gender differences in students’ academic performance and persistence. Overall, college

Table 3. Gender, race/ethnicity and college performance.

	First-year College GPA			No. of Credits Earned			Persistence Rate (Percent returned)		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
<b>Asian/ Pacific Islander</b>	2.51	3.04	2.79	25.80	29.67	27.85	68.29	82.61	75.86
<b>Black</b>	2.15	2.34	2.24	22.78	24.10	23.36	68.18	72.46	70.06
<b>Latino/a</b>	2.23	2.53	2.39	21.63	24.02	22.89	64.77	71.89	68.54
<b>White</b>	2.56	2.98	2.72	24.21	27.66	25.58	68.27	83.01	74.13
<b>Totals</b>	2.38	2.67	2.51	23.17	25.58	24.27	67.31	76.61	71.65

women seem to have higher rates of persistence than college men (77% versus 67%), across racial/ethnic categories. Gender was also related to persistence in the correlational studies, as mentioned earlier, though the magnitude was small. The only gender difference that actually reached statistical significance in the chi square analysis, however, was between White men and White women (83% in contrast to 68%). The relationship between race/ethnicity and persistence was also significant in the correlations matrix when White and Asian groups were combined as one category and Latina and Black groupings were combined as the other category, but the magnitude was small. This is perhaps because of the differences in rates by gender. For men, race/ethnicity was not significantly related to persistence. All the men, White, Black, Asian, Latino, persisted at about the same rates, around 68%, though Latinos had slightly lower persistence rates (64%) compared to the other groups. For women, however, there were some differences that reached significance. Latina and Black women persisted at lower rates than their White and Asian counterparts (around 72% versus around 83%). Yet, though not statistically different, persistence rates for Latina and Black women were slightly higher than those of White and Asian men (72% vs 68%).

Are these trends also reflected in students' entering characteristics? Women come in with slightly higher grades from high school (3.05 versus 2.89). However, men come in with higher SAT scores than women, with a statistically significant ( $p < .0001$ ) difference of 37 points (941 versus 904).

Table 4. Gender, race/ethnicity and pre-college scores.

	Mean High School GPA	Mean SAT
Female	3.05	904
Male	2.89	941
Asian	3.21	924
Latino/a	2.91	893
White	3.06	982
African-American	2.74	861

Thus, it appears that women enter college with slightly higher high school grades and lower SAT scores. Yet once in college, they have higher persistence rates, higher grades and attain more credits in their first year.

#### Admission status

The correlations matrix indicated that admission status was related to persistence, but this relationship was not strong. When the categories were broken down further by race and gender, it becomes clearer why. There are two categories of admission status used in this study; what the college has termed “special admit” status and regularly admit status. Special admit students are those whom the college has marked potentially “at risk” by virtue of a combination of lower SATs and GPAs. There were significant differences in who got labeled “special admit.” In general, African American men and women, Latino/as and Asian women were more likely to be special admits than were

Table 5. Gender, race/ethnicity, admission status and persistence.

	Men			Women		
	Persistence Rate		Percent Special Admit	Persistence Rate		Percent Special Admit
	Special Admit	Regular		Special Admit	Regular	
Asian/Pacific Islander	61.54	71.43	31.71	74.07	94.74**	58.7
Latino/a	57.80	73.81*	56.48	67.69	78.16**	59.91
White	66.02	69.38	33.01	82.26	83.33	30.1
Black	68.25	68.14	64.20	71.28	75.00	68.12

White men and women and Asian men. In fact, more were accepted under special admit status than “regular” status. Special admit status did not relate to all racial/ethnic groups’ persistence the same way. For Black men and women, and White men and women, special admit students and non-special admit students both had comparable persistence rates. In contrast, Latino and Latina students who were “regular accepts” had higher persistence rates relative to their special admit counterparts (78.16 vs 67.69; 73.81 vs 57.80). Special admit Latinos had the lowest persistence rates. A similar trend was found among Asian students, though the contrast was most pronounced among the Asian women. It is important to note however, that the overall sample size for Asians is small.

#### Commuter/Resident and Athletic status

Although largely considered a commuter campus, the number of students residing on campus has increased greatly over the years. Men are somewhat more likely to live on campus than women. Black men and women are much more likely to live on campus than to commute. In fact, it appears that Black men, relative to their numbers, are the largest group to live on campus (76.14% are residents). With the exception of Black women, female college students are more likely to be commuters. The majority of White and Black men live on campus whereas the majority of Asian men and Latinos are commuters. Living on campus or commuting has different effects on persistence

Table 6. Gender, race/ethnicity, resident status and persistence.

	Men		Women	
	Persistence rate		Persistence rate	
	Resident	Commuter	Resident	Commuter
<b>Asian/Pacific Islander</b>	81.82	63.33	85.71	82.05
<b>Latino/a</b>	56.52	69.35**	75.32	70.00
<b>White</b>	63.01	74.82**	81.63	84.26
<b>Black</b>	66.42	73.81	71.11	75.00
	Men		Women	
	Persistence rate		Persistence rate	
	Resident	Commuter	Resident	Commuter
<b>Asian/Pacific Islander</b>	26.83	73.17	15.22	84.78
<b>Latino/a</b>	35.75	64.25	35.48	64.52
<b>White</b>	55.45	44.55	47.57	52.43
<b>Black</b>	76.14	23.86	65.22	34.78

according to race/ethnicity and gender. For example, among Latinos and Latinas, the effects differed. Latinos who commuted were more likely to persist ( $p < .10$ ), but for Latinas this effect was not found; in fact, they were somewhat less likely to persist if they commuted (though the difference was not statistically significant). Commuter/resident status was also significantly related ( $p < 0.10$ ) to the persistence of White men. Specifically, the commuters were more likely to persist than were the resident students (75% vs 63%). It was suggested that this trend may be related to athletic participation, as the majority of athletes must live on campus. The next table provides a glimpse into this characteristic.

Thirty-four percent of White men and thirty-seven percent of Black men are

Table 7. Race/ethnicity, gender, athletic status and persistence

	Men		Women	
	Persistence rate		Persistence rate	
	Athlete	Non-athlete	Athlete	Non-athlete
<b>Latino/a</b>	62.50	65.22	80.00	71.50
<b>White</b>	61.68	71.71**	86.67	81.99
<b>Black</b>	67.69	68.47	75.00	72.22

Note. Information on Asian students was not reported here because none had been identified as participating in one of the college sports teams.

involved in a college sports team. For White men, participating in a college sports team was related to lower persistence rates (athletes persisted at a rate of about 62% whereas non-athletes participated at a rate of 72%,  $p>0.10$ ). This trend was not apparent among Black athletes who had comparable persistence rates.

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