

Hispanic Population at Coastal Carolina University: an Analysis of Challenges and Adversity in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This research pursues the analysis of the Hispanic Population at Coastal Carolina University. It seeks to explain the factors that shaped their journey to secondary education whether it be through intrinsic motivation or generational guilt; while also seeking to understand the hardships that come with being the first generational student to attend an American University. Through previously conducted research by scholars such as Consuelo Arbona, Amaury Nora, Laura Perna, and Claudia Kouyoumdjian, along with a series of interviews amongst self-identifying Hispanic university-goers at Coastal Carolina; the study comes to find the disparities amongst the previously grouped category of “Hispanics at Coastal” based on upbringing, parent/guardian’s highest level of education and other crucial demographics that make or break the rationale behind university attendance and overall experience. It is essential to highlight the adversity that must be overcome in the pursuit of white-collar positions, the socioeconomic advancement of an ethnic category, and expose the resources currently being offered to these groups for better or worse.

OBJECTIVES

- Present findings from a variety of sources to ensure an objective perspective on the Hispanic Population’s experience in the University, with an emphasis on Coastal Carolina, to hopefully mimic the outcome of a more generalized population.
- Identify faults in the higher education system through the feedback of actual students and thus promote change through the incrementation of conversations and awareness regarding these topics.
- Foster an environment that promotes the growth towards opportunities for these student’s socioeconomic mobility as time progresses.

KEY TERMS OF STUDY

ADVERSITY: difficulties/ obstacles

SOCIAL CAPITAL: values and resources to achieve a purpose

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT: first in family to achieve a four-year degree

FIRST GENERATION AMERICAN: born to immigrant parents

SOCIOECONOMIC MOBILITY: the ability to move up or down in social and economic classes.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

For the presentation, I have opted to utilize a hybrid of interviews

Who was involved in the interviews?:

My research group featured a series of surveys followed up by interviews conducted on Coastal Carolina students between the ages of 20 and 23.

The first set of research questions was sent to the students via Google Forms and then email, through which they were briefed on the purpose of the study, but also were made aware that by answering the questions they were acknowledging their lending of the rights of the findings to be presented in this project.

In this disclaimer they were also guaranteed the permanence of their anonymous state throughout the presentation.

Key Research Questions:

<https://forms.gle/XdPPKheeQpjevAV76>

- Along with that, the findings of a series of scholars in fields that specialize in the knowledge of this ethnic group with a focus on higher education. Some of these scholars include Consuelo Arbona, Amaury Nora, Laura Perna, Claudia Kouyoumdjian, and Coastal Carolina’s own Dr. Yvonne Friedman



RESULTS

A study done by Nora and associates found external factors that pulled this demographic of students off-campus, like work commitments, the commute, and family responsibilities to be crucial factors in the experience in secondary education. This study also looked to prejudice and discrimination as a factor that kept students away, academic performance hindered them when it came to the “bounce back” since they felt like there were not a lot of resources they could access, an arbitrary definition instilled regarding what “good” grades consist of, financial struggles, etc....

INTERVIEWS/SURVEYS

The overall findings of the interview concluded that while Hispanic students who commuted tended to have higher grade point averages, they seemed to feel a disconnect to the school and the community they were involved in. Coastal Carolina seemed to provide a more welcoming experience due to its outreach to students through events such as on-campus jobs which allowed students to feel more involved and therefore feel more apt to tackle harder projects since they had connections to Professors and other resources. Students have however expressed that through events of profiling, racist comments, and other forms of harassment and discrimination based on their physical appearance, they felt unsafe at school, and found it harder to focus on schoolwork.

DR. YVONNE FRIEDMAN

In a recent interview with Dr. Friedman, she tackled the topic of first-generation student expectations. Her family immigrated from Mexico with nothing more than a high school diploma each. As a professional in the field (current Vice President) regarding on campus student engagement and student affairs, she expressed that adversity starts at the application process. She describes the concept of “social capital” as the means of understanding the process. Without the knowledge of the system, passed down through generations, it can be hard to understand the resources offered, and can define what their free time is occupied by. Anyone who comes from a lower socioeconomic status, regardless of the demographic, can find themselves preoccupied with financial concerns. In her case, the attainment of the degree was pitched to her as the “means of securing a job”, and less of a path to finding passion. Extrinsic motivation motivated her to pursue a Bachelor’s degree, but the purpose she had to do something bigger drove her through the rest of her education.

She discussed macro and micro aggressions as part of the adversity students may face that can influence their feelings toward school, along with how home life throughout grade school and the values students have instilled in them at a young age that shape how they tackle these obstacles.

NOTABLE QUOTES FROM RESEARCH

The number for second generation students is increasing in this ethnic group, however the quantity of first-generation students continues to be less than that. “The figure is lower both for the first generation, 26 percent, and for all those with U.S.-born parents the third generation and higher-36 percent.” (p.6, Fry 2002)

“Based on her qualitative study of educational attainment among African American and Mexican American valedictorians, Arnold (1993) concluded that racial, class, and gendered social structures and cultural norms restrict educational attainment for minority student” (p. 120 Perna 2000)

CONCLUSIONS

According to this research, students seemed to express that the obstacles that seem to have the most direct effect on their school life comes from semi hostile encounters if they applied to them. However, the factors that seemed to affect the greatest number of students were those that inhibit students from being able to participate in on campus activities and life. While this is a general finding, Coastal students also seem to find themselves in similar situations. Hispanic students appear to find the most satisfaction with their university when they find connection to the campus in a social aspect. Those that work on campus or became involved, felt joy in coming to school and attained grades less through societal and parental pressure, but more through their own motivation for success and passion over the matter. It also makes them more inclined to seek external resources, since in comparison to those who did not have connections on campus (who expressed a lack of accessibility when it came to the resources offered), it felt less out of reach. Those that found community felt that despite their time-consuming commute, they felt satisfaction with their college experience and were more inclined to treat college like a chore and more like an experience.

While most of the participants in the study were inclined to staying at home with their family rather than moving onto campus, the commute was not what made or broke the experience, but rather how they spent their time when they got on campus. Students who worked on campus expressed more pleasant experiences on campus than other students and even then, some of their previous schooling experiences. There did seem to be mixed reviews on whether there was a lack of resources, however many did express the need to increase availability to them, regardless of how they connected. The resources are near useless if not everyone knows how to maximize their potential, therefore there should be more awareness and reaching out from the educational facility to the students to ensure all students are aware of their opportunities. There are many students who driven by the internal desire to bring pride to the parents that sacrificed so much for them to get to this point in their education but lack the external factor of social capital to pursue this knowledge with all they can. They crave to build off of the backs of their ancestors and deserve every opportunity. As of now services such as the tutoring center, campus support groups, fraternities and sororities for Latinx and Hispanics exist, conversation tables like Club N, honor societies for this demographic, exist. However, there is still room for growth.

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