Non-Traditional Hispanic Women Students in Post-Secondary Education

Melanie C. Zollner

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NON-TRADITIONAL HISPANIC WOMEN STUDENTS IN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

by

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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DEDICATION

In memory of my loving dad Felipe L. Zollner Almonte and my cousin Kael Zollner Schöster. Papá amado sé que estarías orgulloso de mí. Te extraño cada día de mi vida.

A mis padres, Cecilia y Felipe, gracias por la vida y por su ejemplo, los llevo siempre en mi corazón. To my husband, Christopher for his unconditional love, support, and encouragement. To my daughters Nicole and Briana, and my grandson Westin. You inspire me to persevere! I am grateful for you all. You give meaning to my life.
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I would like to acknowledge all non-traditional women students who embark on the path to degree attainment, particularly the nine non-traditional Hispanic women students who participated in this phenomenological study. Attending post-secondary education while tending to the different roles you play is not easy. You might feel uncomfortable at times wearing the shoes of a student. You will face challenges. However, you made a wise choice; you are on the path to pursue your education.
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ABSTRACT

Today, the Hispanic population is the fastest growing minority in the United States. As a minority-majority Hispanic state, it is imperative that New Mexico addresses the needs of this population, particularly education, as it creates opportunities for growth. Historically, the Hispanic population experienced limited access to education, which impacted their access to income and occupation, making them expendable.

Throughout history, women have faced inequality. In the United States, women had to overcome several obstacles to have access to education and be allowed to enroll in post-secondary education (Hagedorn, Womack, Vogt, Westebbe, & Kealing, 2002). It must be noted that the first women to have access to education were White women from middle or upper-class backgrounds (Rury, 2009), not minorities, not Hispanic women.

The needs of non-traditional students differ from traditional students’ needs, such as family and work obligations. In addition, non-traditional women students face the challenge of returning or starting their post-secondary education in institutions that are designed to meet the needs of traditional students and not the needs of working adults who
play different roles and who are pursuing a post-secondary education. Non-traditional students enter post-secondary education with different levels of preparedness, life experiences, and responsibilities (Plageman & Sabina, 2010; Scobey, 2016). Unfortunately, in post-secondary education, non-traditional students demonstrate lower persistence rates than traditional students (Scobey, 2016; Stawinoga, 2017). This can be attributed to part-time enrollment and time constraints (Jacobs & Berkowitz King, 2002).

The purpose of this study was to understand factors that impact persistence to degree attainment of non-traditional Hispanic women students. A hermeneutic phenomenological approach illuminated understanding of the shared experiences of the nine non-traditional Hispanic women students who participated in this study.

The women expressed dealing with challenges related to family expectations ascribed by their Hispanic culture, social roles, and finances. For some, learning and dealing with new and established technology was seen as a challenge. For two of the participants, the English language represented a challenge. Receiving emotional support from family and friends and perceiving that faculty and staff demonstrate a sense of care help the women stay on the path to degree attainment. Feelings of self-assurance, expressing confidence in their abilities, and having goals for themselves also help the women stay on the path to degree attainment.

Recommendations are made to better respond to the needs of non-traditional students. Some of the recommendations include assessing student population composition, evaluating practices, goals, and objectives, evaluation of core curriculum, creating support programs, and assessing state policies related to higher education.
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Chapter 1

Introduction and Statement of the Problem

The United States is a melting pot of people from different countries a “multiethnic society” where “with the exception of American Indians and some Mexican Americans, all ethnic groups in the United States trace their origins to other societies” (Marger, 2009, p. 107). It is “a society whose population derives from virtually every region of the world, encompassing people of every imaginable culture, displaying equally varied physical characteristics” (Marger, 2009, p. 107). People have become a part of the United States society through different means: “conquest, annexation, and voluntary and involuntary immigration” (Marger, 2009, p.107). Although the story and access to education of all immigrants is fascinating and all have faced distinct challenges, the focus of this dissertation is on Hispanic women. I begin by looking at their ancestry.

The presence of Hispanic communities in the United States can be traced to the sixteenth century with the arrival of Spaniards in Florida with the founding of St. Augustine in 1565, the founding of New Mexico in 1598, and later its capital Santa Fe in 1610 (Eiseman, 1974; Guevara Urbina, & Rodriguez Wright, 2016; Kanellos, & Esteva-Fabregat, 1993). Kanellos and Esteva-Fabregat (1993) described:

The people coming from Spain and Mexico-Spaniards, criollos, mestizos and Indians-founded towns and villages along the present Southeast and the Great Southwest and marked these areas culturally and contributed an historical Hispanic American way of life, an amalgamated society known by the name “hispano.” (p. 11)
Hispanics’ presence in the United States can also be traced back to the Mexican-American War, when “Mexico lost half (55%) of its territory to the United States” with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 (Guevara Urbina, & Rodriguez Wright, 2016, p. 5). Mexicans were absorbed into the American society “originally as a conquered group” (Marger, 2009, p. 212). Over the years, other Hispanic populations became part of the American society as was the case of Puerto Ricans who “were given the status of American citizenship” in 1917 after Puerto Rico became a territory in 1898 following the Spanish-American War (Marger, 2009, p. 212). During the 1960s, Cuban immigrants entered the United States seeking political refuge (Marger, 2009). Cubans were forced to leave their land after the Cuban Revolution led by Fidel Castro (Marger, 2009). Other Hispanic groups from Central and South America and the Caribbean started entering the United States after World War II, in some cases due to political unrest in their homeland; in other cases, to seek better opportunities and the American Dream (Kanellos, & Esteva-Fabregat, 1993; Marger 2009).

Hispanics share the heritage culture and language of their Spanish colonizers (Guevara Urbina, & Rodriguez Wright, 2016; Kanellos, & Esteva-Fabregat, 1993; Marger, 2009). The Hispanic population has grown over time. Today, Hispanics are the largest and fastest growing minority group in the United States (Guevara Urbina, & Rodriguez Wright, 2016; Marger, 2009). As of 2015, the Hispanic population in the United States accounted for 56.6 million people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Although the Hispanic population is growing and has a strong presence in the United States, Hispanics have experienced “social ostracism” (Kanellos, & Esteva-Fabregat, 1993, p. 13), limiting their access to education, which is tied to occupation and earnings (Marger, 2009). Per the United States Census data
as of 2015, only 66.7 percent of Hispanics aged 25 and older had earned a high school diploma, unlike the 93.3 percent of non-Hispanic whites who had done so (Ryan, & Bauman, 2016).

**Hispanics’ Access to Education**

Rury (2009) described how historically ethnicity and culture impacted access and quality of education to certain groups. In the 19th century, the Hispanic population (as defined by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget, n.d.) was largely concentrated in the West, as the result of the 1846-1848 Mexican-American War (Rury, 2009, p. 99). The population was poor, and their culture was different than the Anglo-Saxon Protestant dominant group. Therefore, Hispanics were discriminated against (Rury, 2009, p. 99):

> Even though they were a majority in some places, and had lived there a century or more, these people generally were treated as colonial subjects. Their language and religion were denigrated, and schooling was sparse, much of it supplied by the Catholic Church or Protestant missionaries. When available, public schools usually were segregated, with inferior institutions for Spanish-speaking children.

Although Hispanics are no longer treated as colonial subjects and they have more access to education, they still struggle for equity. Despite the fact that the Hispanic population is growing, data show that “Hispanic Americans rank well below average on all measures of class: income, occupation, and education” (Marger, 2008, p. 304). Given that Hispanics constitute the fastest growing minority population, their educational ostracism should be concerning to all Americans.

Hispanics are the majority population in our state, New Mexico. The purpose of education in the United States and in New Mexico should be to help form the next
generation of civic-minded and morally responsible citizens, people who are caring, committed, dedicated, ethical, honest, hardworking, knowledgeable, and open-minded citizens of our democratic nation. In a democratic society in which power is exerted by the people through publicly elected officials, it is important that all citizens are knowledgeable of their rights and responsibilities as such. Education plays an important role in forming and supporting the growth of democratic New Mexico citizens and can be associated with social change (Rury, 2009, p. 100): “The ideal of education contributing to social success and integration into the larger society is a legacy that continues to be present.” As such, it is imperative that every citizen in the United States has the same access to education; particularly the minority and disenfranchised groups that have limited access to post-secondary education.

In the 1950s, people graduated from high school and were able to find a job and support their families (Putnam, 2015). A high school diploma was more valued in the job market in the past (Sernau, 2014, p. 215). Today, low levels of education make a person expendable. The business environment has also changed; we live in a knowledge-based economy. The United States has transformed from a manufacturing economy to a service-oriented economy. This change brings a need for a more skilled workforce. The reality is that the ones who suffer in such an economy are the semiskilled or unskilled workers, in this case, the large number of underprepared Hispanics.

It is important to think about education in terms of New Mexico, since this is our home. It is important to realize the influence education has on our economy. “In New Mexico, Hispanics make up 46.7% of the state’s population, the highest Hispanic population share among the 50 states and the District of Columbia” (Brown & Lopez,
2013, p. 2). Nationally, high school completion has increased for Hispanic students from “59 percent to 88 percent” between 1990 to 2015; however, graduation rates still “remained lower than the White rate for 2015” (U.S. Department of Education, 2017, p. iv). Although a person who has a high school diploma can find a job, he or she would not find much of one. Thus, a high school diploma alone is not enough to help a person be competitive in our knowledge-based economy. Low levels of education create negative implications for New Mexico.

**Hispanic Population - Income, Education, and Occupation**

In the past decades, the Hispanic population has dramatically grown across the United States, from 9.6 million in 1970 to 56.6 million in July of 2015 (Krogstad & Lopez, 2015; U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Today, the Hispanic population accounts for 17.6 percent of the total U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). The Hispanic population is projected to grow to approximately 119 million people by 2060 (Colby & Ortman, 2015; U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). That means that by 2060, 28.6 percent of the population in the United States will be of Hispanic ancestry.

As stated, “Hispanic Americans rank well below average on all measures of class: income, occupation, and education” (Marger, 2008, p. 304). In the United States as of 2015, the median household income for White, non-Hispanic was US $62,950 and the median household income for Hispanics was US $45,148 (Proctor, Semega, & Kollar, 2016). In 2015, 21.4 percent of the Hispanic population lived in poverty (Proctor et al., 2016), “down from 23.6 percent in 2014 (p. 14).

Although the poverty rate for Hispanics decreased by 2.2 percent, millions of Hispanics still live in poverty. Poverty can be associated with lower levels of educational
attainment. In 2015, “26.3 percent (6.2 million) of people aged 25 and older without a high school diploma were in poverty” (Proctor et al., 2016, p. 16). Conversely, higher levels of educational attainment increase the possibilities of better job opportunities with higher pay (Grewal & Levy, 2016) where “those who did not graduate from high school have an average weekly salary of $468, high schoolgrads earn $648, and those with a bachelor’s degree earn $1,216” (p. 90).

As of 2015, in the United States, the population aged 25 and older accounted for 212,132,000 million people. Of those, White not Hispanic people, about 140,638,000 million, had earned a high school diploma or more compared to 31 million Hispanics age 25 and older who had earned a high school diploma (Ryan, & Bauman, 2016; U.S. Census, 2016). Furthermore, the White not Hispanic group that earned a bachelor’s degree accounted for 36.2 percent; while only 15.5 percent of Hispanics earn a bachelor’s degree (Ryan, & Bauman, 2016; U.S. Census, 2016). Hispanics have the lowest percentage of educational attainment at all levels compared to White not Hispanic and other minority groups (Ryan, & Bauman, 2016).

Regarding occupation, in 2016, 26.8 million Hispanics participated in the U.S. labor force, accounting for 16.8 percent of the labor force (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017a). This demonstrates an increase in labor force participation for Hispanics from 9.0 million in 1988, 7.4 percent of the labor force (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017a). As described by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2017b), the Hispanic population age group 25 to 54 accounts for 70.0 percent of the total Hispanic labor force. The non-Hispanic labor force is more evenly distributed among the different age groups “25 to 34, 35 to 44, and 45 to 54” accounting for 63.1 percent of the non-Hispanic labor force (Bureau of Labor
Statistics, 2017b). Accounting for gender, “the proportion of Hispanic women who participated in the labor force – 55.8 percent in 2016 – was about 20 percentage points below that of Hispanic men” (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017b, p. 6). In addition, when comparing the labor force of Hispanic women and non-Hispanic women among all age groups, Hispanic women have lower rates of labor participation (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017b).

Furthermore, in terms of occupation, “Hispanics were [are] more likely to work in service occupations (25 percent versus 16 percent). Within service occupations, Hispanics were [are] more likely to work in building and grounds cleaning and maintenance occupations than non-Hispanics” and natural resources extraction and construction, which do not require high levels of education (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017b, p. 7). In term of management and professional occupations, Hispanics rate significantly lower than non-Hispanics, as this require higher levels of education. For example, by 2016, 43 percent of non-Hispanics occupied managerial and professional occupations, while only 22 percent of Hispanics occupied such positions (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017b). There is a relationship between occupation positions and jobs and educational attainment.

**Landscape of Colleges and Universities**

The landscape of colleges and universities has changed in the last several decades with the passing of the G. I. Bill in 1944, the National Defense Education Act of 1958, the Higher Education Act of 1965, and Pell Grants in 1972. The G. I. Bill provided “access to higher education for Americans who might not have considered further study” (Bean & Metzner, 1985, p. 487). The National Defense Act of 1958 and the Higher Education Act of 1965 “endorsed the political view that encouraging college attendance promoted the
The passage of these bills and acts encouraged a diverse student population to attend post-secondary institutions, including minorities, women, and adult learners/non-traditional students.

Today, there is pressure from federal and state governments on post-secondary education institutions through state funding formulas to increase college completion rates (Miller, 2014). Projections from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) demonstrate a growing number of non-traditional/adult learners in post-secondary institutions. The projection of jobs that will require American citizens to have post-secondary degrees has also increased (Chen, 2017). There is an economic need to provide access to post-secondary education to adult students (Ritt, 2008) because “employers are looking for lifelong learners with the ability to be resilient, think critically, solve problems, communicate effectively, manage technology, and adapt to the changing needs of the workplace” (p.13).

Providing access and support for non-traditional adult learners to post-secondary education will address the need of employers for better-prepared employees. By addressing people’s needs and supporting their growth, not only business organizations benefit but also individuals who otherwise would be marginalized, such as women.

**Enrollments in Post-Secondary Institutions.** Higher educational institutions are experiencing a decrease in enrollment of traditional students (Wyatt, 2011) and an increase in enrollment of non-traditional/adult learners and "growing part-time enrollment of young adult undergraduates" (Kasworm, 2014, p. 68). Kasworm (2014) challenges past
assumptions made by higher education leaders on persistence and "full-time collegiate participation" (p. 68). The number of non-traditional students in post-secondary education is increasing. Non-traditional students in post-secondary institutions enroll both part-time and full-time (Wyatt, 2011).

Undergraduate students’ enrollment in post-secondary education increased between 1970 and 1983 reaching 10.8 million students. By the fall of 2014, 20.2 million students were enrolled in colleges and universities (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2016). Traditionally, students entered college and universities upon completion of their high school degree. But, over the years, our nation saw an increase in enrollments of non-traditional students where “in 1976, students twenty-five years of age and older made up 24.3 percent of all undergraduate students. In 1989 that figure increased to 30.3 percent” (Tinto, 1993, p. 10). By 1999, the percentage of non-traditional students in post-secondary education had increased to 39 percent (Choy, 2002). The NCES (2015) projects that a larger percentage of students over the age of 25 will continue to enroll in colleges and universities in the next few years:

Between 2000 and 2012, the enrollment of students under age 25 and the enrollment of those age 25 and over both increased by 35 percent. From 2012 to 2023, however, NCES projects the rate of increase for students under age 25 to be 12 percent, compared with 20 percent for students age 25 and over. (p. 378)

Of the 19.8 million students that were expected to attended colleges and universities in the fall of 2016, “the majority (56 percent) of students in 2016 were females” (U.S. Department of Education, 2019, p. 379). Hispanic enrollment in post-secondary education has increased “from fall 1976 to 2016, … from 4 percent to 18
The findings clearly indicate that the number of women and Hispanic students enrolled in higher education institutions has increased and will continue to increase over the next few years. In addition, non-traditional women students face the challenge of returning or starting their post-secondary education in institutions that are designed to meet the needs of traditional college students, not the needs of working adults who are pursuing a post-secondary education. The needs of non-traditional college students who have family and work obligations differ from traditional college students’ needs. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the needs of non-traditional women students. The purpose of this study was to understand the factors that affect persistence to degree attainment of non-traditional Hispanic women students at a Hispanic Serving Institution, defined as having a total enrollment of Hispanic undergraduate and graduate students of at least twenty-five percent (Hispanic Association of Colleges & Universities [HACU], n.d.)

New Mexico

Historically, New Mexico has had a large Hispanic population owing to its modern political origins as first a Spanish colony and, later, a Mexican state, before becoming the 47th state in 1912 (Rury, 2009). For centuries, the Hispanic population struggled with social inequality, segregation, and limited schooling (Rury, 2009) and this was no different in New Mexico. Hispanic New Mexicans experienced a struggle for access to education, as public education was limited and offered in poor conditions (Donnelly, 1947; Vigil, 1993). Since Spanish colonial rule, efforts had been made to convert and assimilate through education the population in New Mexico (Donnelly, 1947; Roberts, 2001), first by Franciscan missionaries, later by Protestant missionaries with the American government
establishment (Donnelly, 1947; Roberts, 2001). But it was not until 1891, with the enactment of the “Public School Law which called for a comprehensive public-school system for the territory” (Vigil, 1993, p. 16) that New Mexico would start to see changes in public education (Donnelly, 1947). Consequently, change began with the “appointment of school superintendent of public instruction, the certificate of teachers, the construction of schoolhouses, and bonding of districts” (Vigil, 1993, p. 17). As the first superintendent, Amadeo Chavez was able to improve the conditions of education and recommend teacher training (Roberts, 2001; Vigil, 1993). Others, such as Charles F. Rudolph, San Miguel County School Superintendent, Hiram Hadley, President of the Territorial Agriculture College in Las Cruces, Felix Martinez, editor of La Voz del Pueblo (a Las Vegas, NM newspaper), John D. W. Veeder, Councilor for the Territorial Council (Senate), and Albert Fall, Republican legislator, all played an integral role in the passing of a normal school bill that led to the creation of the Las Vegas and Silver City normal schools (Fitzmaurice, 1997; Vigil, 1993).

**New Mexico Highlands University Origins**

New Mexico Highlands University was established as the New Mexico Normal School at Las Vegas in 1893. The mission of normal schools was to prepare teachers to serve the growing common schools; their “unofficial mission” was serving non-traditional students: women, students of low socioeconomics, working students by offering an excellent education (Ogren, 2003, p. 658). The promoters of the normal schools in New Mexico wanted to “address the problem of inadequate schools and inadequately trained teachers” (Vigil, 1993, p. 23). The purpose of creating the New Mexico Normal School at Las Vegas was to better prepare teachers academically (Donnelly, 1947).
New Mexico Normal School at Las Vegas, under the Presidency of Edgar Lee Hewett, opened its doors as a coeducational institution to the first enrolling class in October of 1898 (Ogren, 2003; Vigil, 1993). That first semester, the institution had just 92 students, and faculty, which included: Edgar Lee Hewett (as both President and faculty), Richard Powell, Wilmatte Porter, Inez Rice, James McNary, W. L. Edwards, Maggie Bucher, Mrs. W. B. Bunker, Flora Beschle, Jessie Himes, Caroline Brewster, and Minnie Holzman (Vigil, 1993). In 1899, the 33rd Territorial Legislature changed the name and scope of the institution to be more comprehensive: New Mexico Normal University would not only train future New Mexico teachers, but also develop new pedagogical theories (Vigil, 1993). The university offered different options, divided into different schools. The Normal School was charged with teacher training, both instructional and practical. The Graduate School offered a master of pedagogy. The Academy School offered a general high school education to the citizens of Las Vegas. The Manual Training School prepared students and teachers in manual skills. The Commercial School provided training in business and commercial professions (Vigil, 1993).

Over the years the university grew in student-body population and in infrastructure, including the construction of the “first women’s dormitory on campus” (Vigil, 1993, p. 36). At the time, although New Mexico Normal University acknowledged the state’s tri-cultural heritage, the student-body population consisted of a majority of Anglo-Saxon students and a small number of Spanish-American students, otherwise known as “Hispanics.” The faculty was also Anglo, with no Hispanic faculty until 1907, when Antonio Lucero and Henry M. López were hired to instruct Spanish and public speaking respectively (Vigil, 1993). Over the years, two female Hispanic faculty were hired, Louise Consuelo Jaramillo
and Aurora Lucero. However, by the 1930s only one Hispanic faculty member remained (Vigil, 1993).

Representation of Hispanics on the University’s Board of Regents was no different. In 1907, Octavio Larrazolo was the first Hispanic to serve on the university’s Board of Regents since its inception (Vigil, 1993). During that time, the university’s curriculum did not necessarily address the needs of Hispanic students. Overall, students who attended the university benefited from instruction, but no effort was made to attract Hispanic students until a later time.

Owing to the large number of veterans coming back from World War II seeking formal education, large numbers of normal schools started offering additional programs and “became state colleges” (Ogren, 2003). In April of 1941, New Mexico Normal University President Edward Eyring, with support from “State Senator Waldo Spiess of San Miguel County” and approval of Senate and House, changed New Mexico Normal University to New Mexico Highlands University (Vigil, 1993, p. 55). With the passage of the G.I. Bill in 1944 and the end of World War II, enrollments at universities increased, including NMHU, as the university was able to provide academic and vocational education to a large number of veterans (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Vigil, 1993).

It was not until the 1960s that “governmental and institutional policies explicitly promoted racial, class, and gender diversity for the first time” (Ogren, 2003, p. 640). At the time, former NMHU President Thomas C. Donnelly foresaw the need to better serve NMHU’s minority student-body population. The Hispanic student-body population increased in large numbers; they were now the majority of students at NMHU. In addition, the number of Native Americans and African American students also started to increase.
Although, Donnelly improved services and programs to serve the students, the university was criticized for lack of minority faculty representation (Vigil, 1993). It was not until the 1980s that more women and minority faculty and staff were hired.

NMHU started as New Mexico Normal School at Las Vegas in 1893 serving non-traditional students: women, students of low socioeconomics, working students. Today, NMHU continues to enroll non-traditional students. It is imperative to understand the needs and provide support to the growing numbers of non-traditional students to ensure their persistence to degree attainment.

**Minority Serving Institutions - Hispanic Serving Institutions**

A nation that acknowledges its diverse population and ensures that everyone has access to education will be the one to prosper. Education plays an important role in forming and supporting the growth of a democratic country. Traditionally, post-secondary institutions have served “White, upper and middle-class students” (Conrad & Gasman, 2015, p. 7). With the growth of our diverse population, it is imperative that post-secondary institutions address the needs of minorities, first-generation, and low-income students (Conrad & Gasman, 2015).

The purpose of Minority Serving Institutions [MSIs] of higher education is to provide access and education to minority students (Conrad & Gasman, 2015; U. S. Department of Interior, n.d.). More specifically, their purpose is to serve those minority, first-generation, and low-income students that have historically had limited access to mainstream colleges and universities (Conrad & Gasman, 2015; U. S. Department of Interior, n.d.).
There are different types of MSIs. For the purpose of this research, the focus is one MIS subtype, Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), particularly New Mexico Highlands University. The purpose of a HSI is to serve a diverse population. Hispanic-Serving Institutions were designated through the Higher Education Act of 1965 (Conrad & Gasman, 2015). Under the administration of the U.S. Department of Education (ED) and as part of the Higher Education Act (HEA), Title III (Institutional Aid) programs were created to help provide “educational opportunities for low-income and minority students” and first-generation students (Mercer, 2008, Introduction, para. 1). In 1998, an amendment to HEA established Title V as a separate program to provide aid to HSIs (Mercer, 2008).

The federal government’s support and designation of HSIs was based on changes in the demographic composition of the U.S. to address the equal educational opportunities for the growing Hispanic/Latino population (Conrad & Gasman, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). The growth of HSIs can be associated with changes in our society such as: 1) The Civil Rights movement; 2) Growth of Latino population in the U. S.; 3) Movement of Hispanic/Latino population to urban areas; and 4) The enrollment of Hispanic/Latino students in post-secondary institutions with significant larger proportions of Hispanic/Latino population (Conrad & Gasman, 2015, p. 29). Universities designated as Hispanic Serving Institutions were not necessarily established to serve the Hispanic/Latino population. Over time, through shifts in demographics, the proportion of Hispanic/Latino students in student-body populations of some universities has increased. Under the Higher Education Act and through Title V, universities that enroll 25 percent of their Hispanic population receive federal funding (Conrad & Gasman, 2015; U. S. Department of Interior, n.d.). New Mexico Highlands University meets the federal HIS requirements.
Women’s Access to Education

Throughout history, women around the world have faced inequality. In the United States, women’s right to education has been a contentious issue (Selden, 1999). During the 18th century, when women had access to education it was for domestic responsibilities “to prepare better wives and better mothers” (Rury, 2009, p. 107). Later, it was to help form civic citizens for the newly formed Republic. Women had to overcome several obstacles, from restricted access to education to denial of the right to vote (Hagedorn, Womack, Vogt, Westebbe, & Kealing, 2002, p. 340). Education is associated with empowerment (Kes, Gupta, & Grown, 2005): “These empowering effects of women’s education are manifested in a variety of ways, including increased income-earning potential, ability to bargain for resources within the household, decision making autonomy, control over their fertility, and participation in public life” (p. 37).

Education enables women to improve their lives as they have the resources and tools to take care of themselves and their families. Education not only creates opportunities for women, but also for the communities in which they live. Child marriages and teenage pregnancies drop when girls continue with their secondary education. Secondary education impacts fertility and infant mortality (Kes et al., 2005).

The education of women greatly impacts all aspects of society. Educated women support the personal growth of their own daughters and sons, creating a positive cycle. Society benefits by supporting women’s access to education.

Today, even though women have access to post-secondary education, traditional versus non-traditional women students face different challenges. As a Latina single mother who immigrated to the United States in pursuit of an education, I am interested in women’s
education. Specifically, I am interested in investigating factors that affect persistence of non-traditional women students in post-secondary education at New Mexico Highlands University, New Mexico.

**Student Population at New Mexico Highlands University**

In the fall of 2017, New Mexico Highlands University had a total of 3,296 students (undergraduate and graduate). NMHU’s main campus population accounted for 57 percent of the total student body population, about 1,884 students. NMHU has centers in Albuquerque, Rio Rancho, Santa Fe, Farmington, and Roswell. Approximately 43 percent of NMHU students were registered through the centers, close to 1,412 students (NMHU, 2018a). The undergraduate student body population on the main Las Vegas campus accounted for 1,390. The undergraduate student body population for all centers accounted for 632 students.

At NMHU, two thirds of the undergraduate student population are female. In addition, “most females are aged 25 and older,” which makes them non-traditional students (NMHU, 2018b). Of all non-traditional undergraduate students (males and females) enrolled at NMHU, 37 percent are enrolled in main campus, Las Vegas; while 63 percent are considered traditional students. As for the centers, 87 percent of the students are considered non-traditional (25 years and older) and 13 percent are considered traditional students.

**Undergraduate Non-traditional Hispanic Women Students.** In the fall of 2011, of the 230-first-time freshman Hispanic non-traditional women students enrolled at New Mexico Highlands University, seven students earned their undergraduate degree by May of 2017. Of those seven students, four earned their degree in 2015 and three in 2017 (Salas,
personal communication, October 26, 2017). The reason for focusing on fall enrollments is because “nearly 77 percent of all first-time entrants begin their college career at the start of the fall semester” (Tinto, 1993, p. 8). Therefore, it makes sense to look at fall semester enrollments.

**Mission Statement of New Mexico Highlands University**

The University’s website states:

New Mexico Highlands University is a public comprehensive university serving our local and global communities. Our mission is to provide opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students to attain an exceptional education by fostering creativity, critical thinking and research in the liberal arts, sciences, and professions within diverse community.

NMHU’s mission statement declares the goal of the university is to “provide opportunities for students … within a diverse community.” NMHU’s core values include “excellence, diversity, accessibility, and responsiveness.” A better understanding of the needs of non-traditional Hispanic women student population directly addresses the university’s mission statement and core values.

**Importance of Study**

Today, the Hispanic population is the fastest growing minority in the United States. As a minority-majority Hispanic state, it is imperative to address the needs of our population; particularly education as it creates opportunities for growth. Historically, the Hispanic population experienced limited access to education, which impacted their access to income and occupation, making them expendable.
Throughout history, women have faced inequality. In the United States, women had to overcome several obstacles to have access to education and be allowed to enroll in post-secondary education (Hagedorn et al., 2002). It must be noted that the first women to have access to education were White women from middle or upper-class backgrounds (Rury, 2009). It was not until the passing of the G. I Bill, the National Defense Education Act of 1958, the Higher Education Act of 1965, and Pell Grants in 1972 that all Americans potentially had access to a post-secondary education.

**Women’s Participation in the Workforce.** In the United States, women have gone through a series of struggles to be active participants in the labor force. Women have struggled to gain acceptance in the workplace. In 1848, when the Women’s Rights Movement was launched in the United States, “most occupations were off-limits to women” (Bateman, Snell, & Konopaske, 2016, p. 195). Today, women make up 46.8 percent of the labor force in the United States, about 74 million (United States Department of Labor Statistics, 2016). Women’s participation in the labor force has increased over the years, from 28.6 percent, about 17 million women who contributed to our economy in 1948, to 74 million in 2016.

Although women’s participation in the labor force has increased over the years, women still struggle for equality in the labor market. Participation of women in the workforce has increased gradually since the 1970, but not in terms of equality in managerial positions or pay. Women earn 80 cents for every dollar men earn doing the same job (Bateman, Snell, & Konopaske, 2016, p. 198). In addition, in terms of job positions, women encounter a glass ceiling, insofar women only “hold a paltry 4.2 percent of the CEO positions in America’s 500 biggest companies” (Zarya, 2016, para. 1). Women
are underrepresented in top leadership corporate positions (corporate officers) in Fortune 500 companies, accounting for only 14.2 percent in executive officers’ representation (Egan, 2015). The figures are not very different when assessing women’s representation in academia. According to a study by the American Progress Organization, only “30 percent of full-professors and 26 percent of college presidents” are women (Warner, 2015). Women lack relevance and representation and are not given the same opportunities as men in organizations.

Despite the fact that since the 1970s more women have entered the workforce, assumptions about gender roles still place women at a disadvantage in terms of household responsibilities and career development. Some organizations expect women to sacrifice their personal lives to put in long hours at work for the sake of the organization (Bateman, Snell, & Konopaske, 2016, p. 197). An issue to assess through the restructuring of organizations is to improve support and equal participation of women in the workforce, particularly in leadership positions. By restructuring organizations with the idea that both genders have the same potential as managers and leaders, organizations can improve their performance and ability to respond to their employees’ needs without discrimination. It would not only be beneficial for women, but for all other disenfranchised groups, such as Hispanics.

This should serve as a reflection on the lack of representation of women in managerial and leadership positions. In order to have women representation in top job positions and break the glass ceiling, it is imperative to understand and support women’s education, particularly in post-secondary education.
The current trends demonstrate the labor force “is projected to grow at a compound rate of 0.6 percent, from 159.2 million people in 2016 to 169.7 million people in 2026—an increase of about 10.5 million people” (United States Department of Labor, 2017, 2016-26 section, para. 2). The number of women who participate in the labor force is expected to grow at a faster pace than men.

In addition, the labor force will see a decline among the 16 to 24 age group and the 25 to 54 age group. “In contrast, the share of the 55-years-and-older age group in the civilian noninstitutional population is projected to increase considerably” (United States Department of Labor, 2017, Civilian noninstitutional population section, para. 1). Furthermore, the Asian and Hispanic populations are expected to be the fastest growing minority groups in the labor force. The projected labor force trends for 2024 indicate the U.S. labor force is expected to be more diverse in terms of age, gender, and ethnicity. It seems clear there is need a need to focus on the education of non-traditional Hispanic women.

Research Question

As a woman, I am interested in understanding factors that affect persistence to degree attainment of non-traditional women students as they are the fastest growing group in post-secondary education. Access to a post-secondary education and achievement will not only impact the life of the women who obtain their degrees, but the lives of their daughters. It will also impact access and employment opportunity.

As a professor at New Mexico Highlands University a Hispanic Serving Institution, I am interested in the growth and achievement of our students. I am particularly interested in understanding and helping address the needs and providing support to our non-
traditional Hispanic women students. As of today, no study has been conducted at New Mexico Highlands University to address the needs of this particular population. The research question that guided this study was: What factors affect persistence of undergraduate non-traditional Hispanic women students to degree attainment at New Mexico Highlands University a 4-year Hispanic Serving Institution?

Definition of Terms

Adult Learners

Adult learners can be characterized by 4 major principles:

1. Adult learners can practice self-directedness in the learning process “but at different rates for different people and different dimensions of life” (Knowles, 1988, p. 43).

2. Adult learners possess a wealth of experience; adult learners have accumulated life experience “which serves as a critical component in the foundation of their self-identity” (Rabourn, Shoup, & BrckaLorenz, 2015, p. 4).

3. Adult learners are ready to learn, “people become ready to learn something when they experience a need to learn it in order to cope more satisfyingly with real-life tasks or problems” (Knowles, 1988, p. 44).

4. Adult learners are task oriented; they see education as a way to apply the knowledge learned and realize their full potential (Knowles, 1988, p. 44).

Andragogy

American adult educator, Malcolm S. Knowles (1913 – 1997) originally defined the term andragogy as “the art and science of helping adults learn” (1988, p. 43). The definition of andragogy according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary is “the art or science of teaching adults” (2017a).
**Hispanic or Latino**

The U.S. Office of Management and Budget [OMB] defines “Hispanic or Latino” as a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture origin regardless of race” (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.).

**Hispanic Origin**

Per the United States Census Bureau (n.d.): “Hispanic origin can be viewed as the heritage, nationality, lineage, or country of birth of the person or the person’s parents or ancestors before arriving in the United States. People who identify as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish may be any race.”

**Hispanic Serving Institution**

HSIs are defined as colleges and universities where the total enrollment of undergraduate and graduate students accounts to 25% of Hispanic students (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities [HACU], n.d.).

**Non-Traditional Students**

Per the U.S. Department of Education (2015), non-traditional students are considered to have the following characteristics: “Being independent for financial aid purposes, having one or more dependents, being a single caregiver, not having a traditional high school diploma, delaying postsecondary enrollment, attending school part time, and being employed full time” (p. 1). Per the definition of the Encyclopedia of Women in Higher Education: A non-traditional college student is a person over the age of twenty-five who “enters post-secondary education for the first time or returns to continue post-secondary study begun at an earlier time” (Miller, 2002, p. 336). For this study, I
considered both definitions as they present factors that can potentially affect persistence to
degree attainment of non-traditional Hispanic women students.

**Persistence**

“Persistence in higher education can be defined as the collective actions and
behaviors taken by students that result in the acquisition of a degree. Although persistence
is frequently assumed to be synonymous with retention, in reality, the two terms are not
identical. Persistence is a human activity or behavior, whereas retention is the subsequent
outcome or result” (Hagedorn et al., 2002, p. 339)

**Self-Concept**

Bandura (1997, p. 10) defined self-concept as “a composite view of oneself that is
presumed to be formed through direct experience and evaluations adopted from significant
others.”

**Self-Efficacy**

Bandura (1994, p. 2), defined perceived self-efficacy as:

People’s beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of
performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives. Self-efficacy
beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave. Such
beliefs produce these diverse effects through four major processes. They include
cognitive, motivational, affective and selection process.

**Self-Esteem**

Self-esteem is concerned with judgments of self-worth (Bandura, 1997, p. 11). It
can also be understood as “a confidence and satisfaction in oneself: self-respect or self-
conceit (Merriam-Webster, 2018b, para. 1).
**Traditional college age student**

The traditional college age student is between 18 and 24 years old (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.).
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Since the time women gained access to pursue their education, they have faced challenges. Women had to overcome several obstacles, from being allowed to enroll in college to family support when pursuing their education (Hagedorn et al., 2002, p. 340). Women have faced gender discrimination. The Women’s Movement of the 1960s and the passage of Title IX challenged sex discrimination in education (Hagedorn et al., 2002; Rury, 2009). Changes in the economy and demand for jobs with higher levels of education helped fuel access to higher education to groups that had been discriminated against in the past, such as women and minorities. Women who complete their post-secondary education have better chances of professional advancement and higher pay (Hagedorn et al., 2002, p. 339). It is important to support minorities and women when pursuing their education, not only do they benefit, but society at large does as well.

The number of non-traditional students enrolled in higher education institutions has increased over the years. In comparison to traditional students, the rate of increase for non-traditional students is expected to be higher in the next few years. The NCES (2015) projected an increase in enrollment of non-traditional students in post-secondary education. It is imperative that higher education institutions understand and fulfill the needs of non-traditional women students as they represent a large number of the students pursuing a post-secondary degree. Non-traditional students enter post-secondary education with different levels of preparedness, life experiences, and responsibilities (Plageman & Sabina, 2010; Scobey, 2016). The needs of this population differ from traditional students’ needs because they have family and work obligations. In addition, non-traditional women
students face the challenge of returning or starting their post-secondary education in institutions that are designed to meet the needs of traditional students and not the needs of working adults who are pursuing a post-secondary education and who have different roles.

Unfortunately, in post-secondary education, the persistence rates for non-traditional students are lower than those of traditional students (Scobey, 2016; Stawinoga, 2017). This can be attributed to part-time enrollment and time constraints (Jacobs & Berkowitz King, 2002). A study conducted by Jacobs and Berkowitz King (2002) confirmed:

Women over the age of 25 are at a disadvantage in completing their degrees, but this effect is due largely to the fact that older students are more likely to be enrolled part time and to face competing demands for their time and attention. (p. 211)

Non-traditional women students represent a large number of students enrolled in post-secondary institutions, their persistence and degree attainment should concern post-secondary institutions and policy makers.

It is important to understand factors that affect persistence of non-traditional women students. Persistence in higher education is defined as “the collective actions and behaviors taken by students that result in acquisition of a degree” (Hagedorn et al., 2002, p. 339). Institutions have to evaluate their own practices and identify their non-traditional adult learners and implement services for this underserved group of students (Chen, 2017; Markle, 2015; Scobey, 2016; Ward & Westbrooks, 2000). Post-secondary institutions have made changes to accommodate a diverse traditional student body population such as infrastructure for the betterment of student quality of life, social programs, changes in curriculum and delivery of content such as online courses; but not to address the needs of non-traditional adult learners (Chen, 2017). One of the only accommodations made for
non-traditional students is alternative delivery of education such as online courses (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Chen, 2017; Choy, 2002; Kasworm, 2014; Ross-Gordon, 2011).

Online courses can be offered through different modalities: synchronous, asynchronous, and hybrid/blended, but not all universities offer these options to their students despite the potential benefit for non-traditional students.

The needs of non-traditional adult learners have not been addressed. The "youth-centric" approach of postsecondary institutions has created barriers for non-traditional adult learners (Chen, 2017, p. 3). Colleges and universities have increasingly cut services such as “daycare centers” (Chen, 2017, p. 4) that helped non-traditional adult learners. Instead of cutting services, universities should offer on-campus childcare services as they help adult learners (Cerven, 2013; Osam, Bergman, & Cumberland, 2017; Scobey, 2016; Ward & Westbrooks, 2000).

Historically, institutions of higher education have focused on traditionally aged students between 18 and 24 years of age. Over time, private higher learning institutions have been designed to address the needs of non-traditional students such as "Empire State University, Fielding Institute, Regis University and, more recently the University of Phoenix" (Ross-Gordon, 2011, p. 26). In many instances, educators, business leaders, and policy makers focus on the non-traditional students because they saw an untapped market for generating profit (Scobey, 2016). The purpose of education in the United States and in New Mexico should be to help form the next generation of civic-minded and morally responsible citizens and to provide access to all, not just to increase profits.

What can public higher learning institutions do to address the needs of non-traditional students and the many roles they play? Some of the programs developed by for-
profit institutions include: “Adult Credit Programs, accelerated learning, and adult degree programs” (Ross-Gordon, 2011, p. 26).

As of 2017, according to Dr. Edward Martinez, NMHU - Interim VP for Strategic Enrollment Management, at NMHU none of the core curriculum courses were offered online (Dr. Martinez, personal communication, October 6, 2017). As of fall 2019, according to Andrea Crespin, Scheduling and Special Projects coordinator, only ten core curriculum courses are offered online, through synchronous and asynchronous online modalities (Andrea Crespin, personal communication, September 20, 2019). At NMHU, some departments and schools offer online courses at the 300 and 400 levels, but not all required courses.

The focus of this study was non-traditional Hispanic women students at New Mexico Highlands University, a Hispanic Serving Institution. My intent was to better understand the needs of this particular population and provide support to help them on their road to degree attainment.

Factors that Affect Persistence of Non-Traditional Women Students

Some of the factors that affect persistence of non-traditional women students enrolled in post-secondary institutions are related to social support and different roles they play (spouse or partner, caregiver or parent, employee, and student), institutional support, and self-concept (self-efficacy and self-esteem). An individual’s persistence to graduation has been linked to different factors such as student’s aspirations, social support, responsiveness and support from post-secondary institutions (Bergman, Gross, Berry, & Shuck, 2014; Tinto, 1993). Students who lack social support from family, friends, and mentors, and those that lack knowledge of the university’s system and processes show
lower persistence (Arana, Castañeda-Sound, Blanchard, & Aguilar, 2011). A person’s efficacy can have an impact on the persistence of Hispanic/Latina traditional and non-traditional women students (Bordes-Edgar, Arredondo, Robinson Kurpius, & Rund, 2011; Quimby & O’Brien, 2004). Self-esteem refers to the perception a person has about her own self-worth. Self-efficacy refers to the perception a person has about her own abilities (Frank, 2015). Social support, institutional support, and self-efficacy impact persistence to degree attainment.

While I conducted the literature review, many themes emerged as to how other researchers have accessed persistence of adult learners and non-traditional students. For the purpose of this study, I grouped these themes into three major categories that impact persistence to degree attainment of non-traditional women students: social support - roles (caregiver or parent, spouse or partner, employee, and student) (Ross-Gordon, 2011), institutional support, and self-concept (self-efficacy and self-esteem).

**Social Support – Roles.** Non-traditional/adult learners not only play the role of students. Adult learners play multiple roles; as they work, either part-time or full time, might be a spouse or partner, might have dependents, and attend college part-time. The different roles played by non-traditional/adult learner students demand their focus, time, and attention (Choy, 2002; Fairchild, 2003; Jacobs & Berkowitz Kings, 2002; Quimby & O’Brien, 2004; Tinto, 1993).

Humans are social beings, as such the decisions people make are influenced in large part by family, friends, mentors, and co-workers. Individuals play different roles in their lives; this is no different for a non-traditional Hispanic woman student who enrolls in a post-secondary institution. A non-traditional Hispanic woman student will not only play
the role of student, but in many instances, she will play the role of spouse or partner, caregiver or parent, and employee. The importance ascribed to each one of those roles is determined by the individual. Without hesitation, one can infer the role of student might not receive major importance as that is not her sole responsibility.

**Caregiver or Parent.** Previous research demonstrates that family relations can have an impact on Hispanic/Latina women students (Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016; Bordes-Edgar et al., 2011). Non-traditional women students face different challenges than traditional students. Many non-traditional women students are mothers, who work and who have family obligations. The implication of role responsibilities might be seen by researchers as both placing a higher burden on women returning to college and as a motivator (Osam et al., 2017; Tinto, 1993).

The responsibility of caring for oneself and others can cause distress and overload when trying to pursue a post-secondary degree. The cause can be associated with “the level of importance a woman ascribes to having children and maintaining a good family relationship” (Lefcourt, 1995, p. 20). Women experience overload when they also take responsibility for housework such as “meal preparation and child care” (Plageman & Sabina, 2010, p. 157).

Caring for children imposes challenges for non-traditional women students such as: time management, limited time availability, limited time flexibility, and low levels of energy (Quimby & O’Brien, 2004). The age of children or dependents can be associated with higher role conflict and the care of younger children presents higher demands for time (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Fairchild, 2003; Home, 1997. The “age of children may well determine the persistence of women” (Fairchild, 2003, p. 12) in post-secondary
education (Jacobs & Berkowitz King, 2002). Time constraints can create feelings of anxiety which, in turn, lead to stress (Markle, 2015). However, it must be noted that for non-traditional women students, their children can be a source of inspiration and motivation (Vaccaro & Lovell, 2010). Low-income women students who provide for their children are motivated to pursue education (Cerven, 2013).

Furthermore, non-traditional women students who work full-time to help support their families face role overload if their standards of domestic living decrease (Lefcourt, 1995; Markle, 2015). Non-traditional women students experience higher inter-role conflict, such as family and work responsibilities; this in turn can impact persistence (Markle, 2015; Tinto, 1993). Added distress and overload might be attributed to lack of social support from family and friends. However, women who feel supported by family and friends experience less stress (Home, 1997).

**Spouse or Partner.** Although American society has experienced family change (single caregivers, single mothers) gender roles remain unchanged (Markle, 2015; Vaccaro & Lovell, 2010). Some of the challenges non-traditional women students still face in our society are related to gender role expectations and caregiver responsibilities (Marine, 2012; Markle, 2015; Plageman & Sabina, 2010; Tinto, 1993; Vaccaro & Lovell, 2010).

Non-traditional women students "may not have consistent support from their families … solidifying their sense that college is an inappropriate goal for them" (Marine, 2012, p. 1). This makes it difficult to attend and persist in postsecondary education when traditional gender roles are perpetuated, and family responsibilities are solely placed on women.
Plageman and Sabina (2010) demonstrated that "having the emotional support of a significant other was positively and significantly related to instrumental assistance, financial assistance, the perception that the significant other was proud of them, and the belief that school involvement had a positive influence on the family" (p. 162). However, the greatest supporters of women to attend college and persist with their education are the women in their lives, first their mothers and then their sisters (Plageman & Sabina, 2010).

**Employee.** Balancing academic responsibilities with parenting, family, and work responsibilities places pressure on non-traditional Hispanic women students (Grabowski, Rush, Ragen, Fayard, & Watkins-Lewis, 2016), and adult learners (Fairchild, 2003). For non-traditional women students, “paid employment, whether full time or part time, decreases the chances of finishing” completing post-secondary education (Jacobs & Berkowitz King, 2002, p. 222).

There is an economic urge to provide access and graduate non-traditional/adult learners (Miller 2014), but employers place barriers (Ritt, 2002). Although “employers may value a college degree” some positions held by employees do not require a college degree “thereby making it difficult to justify attending classes” (Ritt, 2008, p. 14). Furthermore, not all employers provide “release time” to employees to further their education (Ritt, 2008).

**Finances.** Finances can impact adult learners’ persistence (Fairchild, 2003; Tinto 1993). Returning to college presents financial barriers for women who are tied to different role responsibilities (Odam et al., 2017). In some instances, women who return to college might drop out of the workforce with reduced finances creating stress for women (Osam et al., 2017).
**Institutional Support.** It is important that university administrators understand the needs of non-traditional women students and adult learners to develop programs that support their learning and aid their persistence (Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016; Fairchild, 2003; Ward & Westbrooks, 2000). Non-traditional women students face different challenges than traditional students such as family obligations, marital status and having dependents (Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016). As stated earlier, non-traditional women students often work full-time to support their families. Institutions must examine their cultural climate and responsiveness to non-traditional students’ needs. It is important to be aware of institutional policies and procedures and how they impact persistence of non-traditional women students to degree attainment. It is important to develop programs that specifically support non-traditional women students such as mentoring, access to online support, and support groups.

**Institutional Culture.** The academic and social integration of undergraduate students impacts persistence (Maestas, Vasqueras, & Muñoz, 2007; Miller Brown, 2002). A supportive campus environment welcomes a diverse population including adult learners and non-traditional students by addressing their “unique needs” (Bergman et al., 2014; Miller Brown 2002; Wyatt, 2011). Institutions that support diversity and culture within the student body and faculty provide a safe environment to express a difference of views and ideas (Maestas et al., 2007). Positive social integration within the campus community impacts persistence. This can be achieved through positive integration of diversity in the classroom, supportive and empathetic faculty, and institutional support programs (Maestas et al., 2007; Marine, 2012).
The culture or campus climate of post-secondary institutions can either have a positive or negative impact on Hispanic/Latina students (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Maestas, Vasquera, & Muñoz Zehr, 2007; Marine, 2012). Campus environments with “a more positive attitude toward diversity have been shown to be beneficial for all students. These campuses make diversity a central point in their mission statements and work to create a harmonious campus environment where all students are welcomed” (Maestas, Vasquera, & Muñoz Zehr, 2007, p. 241). The success of Hispanic women students, traditional and non-traditional, can be attributed in part to the support system universities provide (Arana et al., 2011; Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016; Marine, 2012).

**Institutional Responsiveness.** University administrators must be aware of their student population and provide the support they need. In the case of non-traditional women students, creating programs that provide financial knowledge or support and information on scholarships can help keep them enrolled and pursue their education. Maestas et al. (2007), in a study at a Hispanic Serving Institution, identified financial aid and being able to pay for one’s education as having an impact on the sense of belonging of students, which can be associated with persistence.

Non-traditional women students “could benefit from learning about the possible facilitative role of social support in the development of confidence and eventual success” (Quimby & O’Brien, 2004, p. 335). Institutional interventions such as social gatherings specifically for non-traditional women students could help built community and social support (Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016; Quimby & O’Brien, 2004). Supportive faculty, staff, and university support programs enhance the likelihood that students persist and pursue their post-secondary education (Arana et al., 2011; Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci,
Colleges and universities that “enroll adult undergraduates should establish a nontraditional student support office” (Ward & Westbrooks, 2000, p. 222). Usually offices that provide services for students are open Monday through Friday 8 AM to 5 PM. Colleges and universities must provide extended office hours to address the needs of their non-traditional students.

Institutional responsiveness, including faculty, advisors, and staff, impacts the persistence of adult learners (Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016; Bergman, Gross, Berry, & Shuck, 2014; Miller Brown, 2002). In their study on adult student persistence, Bergman et al. (2014) demonstrated how providing “relevant curriculum, sufficient funding, and knowledgeable and caring faculty and staff have a direct impact on student success” and persistence to degree attainment” (p. 99). It is important for faculty and other personnel in institutions of higher education to support adult learners achieve their goals (Plageman & Sabina, 2010).

**Institutional Policies.** Institutional policies were created to address the needs of traditional students and not necessarily the needs of non-traditional women students. This causes non-traditional women students to feel marginalized, which can affect persistence (Markle, 2015). Regarding policy and procedure, administrators, staff, and faculty must schedule office and class hours that address the specific needs of adult learners (American Association of Colleges and Universities, 2010; Fairchild, 2003; Miller Brown, 2002; Osam et al., 2017; Scobey, 2016). Conflict between work and course schedules negatively impacts persistence, a barrier for non-traditional adult learners (Bergman et al., 2014; Choy, 2002).
Kasworm (2014, p. 74) suggests three main strategies that institutional leaders can implement to aid persistence and degree attainment of adult learners: 1) "institutions need to establish a set of operational benchmarks regarding adult successful continuance and eventual completion in specific curricula programs, independent of the length of time;” 2) higher learning institutions "review and revise their current policies and practices" to address the needs of adult learners, including curricular format, delivery, service, policies. Kasworm (2014) suggests universities instill 3) “faculty/staff awareness, instructional program flexibility, and select services and policies across a variety of places, schedules, curricula, and services” in order to address the needs to adult and non-traditional students (p. 74). Faculty and institutions must implement practices that address adult learners’ needs (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Kasworm, 2014; Ward & Westbrooks, 2000). Kasworm (2014) suggests institutions or subgroup of institutions "consider alternative measures of student progress and success beyond the six-year completion of a degree" (p. 75). It is imperative to understand the college needs of non-traditional students as they represent a large proportion of students attending post-secondary institutions today. It must be noted that incoming students possess many non-traditional characteristics.

Self-Concept. It is important to analyze and understand non-traditional women students’ perception of their self-concept as it impacts persistence. But, we must look at the self-concept construct first. Self-concept derives from self-esteem and self-efficacy (Lefcourt, 1995). Self-esteem refers to the perception a person has about her own self-worth. People with high self-esteem recognize and assume responsibility for themselves and can understand their limitations. They tend to work hard to be successful and are committed to their goals (Frank, 2015). People with low self-esteem tend to develop
feelings of anxiety and unhappiness, self-rejection; they tend to develop emotional problems (Frank, 2015; Lefcourt, 1995). They want to be accepted by others, so their goals and objectives are based on the needs of others (Frank, 2015).

Self-efficacy refers to the perception a person has about her own abilities (Frank, 2015). People with high self-efficacy have confidence in themselves and in their ability to succeed. They are willing to take a chance and learn from the experience. Mistakes are seen as opportunities to learn (Frank, 2015). In addition, "it appears self-determination plays a large part in women lives who undertake education in adulthood” (Plageman & Sabina, 2010, p. 164).

Non-traditional women students experience both self-efficacy and self-esteem in positive and negative ways (Lefcourt, 1995; Plageman & Sabina, 2010). This translates to feelings of being prepared to embark on the challenge to pursue a post-secondary education and not feeling prepared for the challenge.

**Self-esteem.** Confidence in one’s self, self-worth, and one’s abilities to succeed can either have a positive or negative impact on Hispanic/Latina traditional and non-traditional women students’ persistence in post-secondary education (Bordes-Edgar et al., 2011; Quimby & O’Brien, 2004).

**Self-efficacy.** Bandura’s work on Social Cognitive Theory assesses human development, which is key to understanding people by way of “self-efficacy and cognitive motivation” (Bandura, 1989; Brue & Brue, 2016). For social learning theorists such as Bandura (1982) “judgment of self-efficacy also determines how much effort people will expend and how long they will persist in the face of obstacles or aversive experiences” (p. 123). Since self-efficacy is a perception an individual has of her abilities, it may not
correspond to her capabilities, but it can potentially influence her choices (Ponton & Rhea, 2006).

Perceived self-efficacy and cognitive motivation are said to help individuals achieve goals and reach desired outcomes (Bandura, 1989; Brue & Brue, 2016; Ponton & Rhea, 2006). In a study conducted in Canada with both traditional and non-traditional undergraduate women students, the authors found that non-traditional female students demonstrated higher academic performance than traditional female students; this could be associated with their level of commitment and self-efficacy (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002).

When trying to understand self-efficacy of a non-traditional woman student it is relevant to look at student’s GPA, academic goals, satisfaction, and college outcome expectations (Ojeda, Flores, & Navarro, 2011).

Non-traditional women students might not feel prepared to embark on the challenge to continue with their post-secondary education (Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016). This can be attributed to a person’s self-concept. Bordes-Edgar et al. (2011) found “social support and self-beliefs are powerful predictors of academic persistence decisions and psychological adjustment” (p. 359). People with low self-efficacy avoid uncertainty and taking risks, because of their fear of failure (Frank, 2015). Studies indicate “low levels of student self-efficacy have been shown to relate to poor grades, attrition, and psychological struggles” (Quimby & O’Brien 2004, p. 324), negatively impacting student’s persistence to degree attainment. Furthermore, “non-traditional college women often underestimate their skills and ability to succeed in college” (Quimby & O’Brien, 2004, p. 323).
It is interesting that although non-traditional women students underestimate their skills, they are more likely to come prepared to class and participate in course discussions than their fellow traditional students and are more persistent in employing practices associated with academic success, particularly more frequent and higher quality-student interactions (Marine, 2012, p. 1).

Strong levels of social support strengthen non-traditional women students’ confidence “in managing the responsibilities associated with being a student and pursuing tasks related to advancing vocational development” (Quimby & O’Brien, 2004, p. 334).

There is a link between self-efficacy and persistence for Latina undergraduates (Bordes-Edgar et al., 2011). Self-efficacy is an important factor in determining women’s success in engineering programs (Marra, Rodgers, Shen, & Bogue, 2009); self-efficacy can be used to measure women’s career and home roles (Lefcourt, 1995; Quimby & O’Brien, 2004).

**Persistence Theory**

For decades researchers have investigated persistence in post-secondary education. At first, the focus was on traditional college-age students in 4-year institutions, later in 2-year colleges, non-traditional students, and minorities (Metz, 2004). In order to understand persistence theory, it is essential to review classical research on persistence.

Tinto (1993) is notably known for his contribution to persistence theory. In the 1970s, Tinto collaborated with Cullen and “built on” the work done by Spady, both scholars had investigated attrition (Metz, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980, p. 60). Tinto and Cullen developed a “theoretical model for attrition and persistence” (Metz, 2004, p. 192). The theoretical framework included components such as student’s attributes, goal
commitment, institutional experiences within the university setting including interactions with peers and faculty, academic and social integration, which lead to different departure decisions or outcomes (Metz, 2004). Tinto continued to work on his theoretical model emphasizing “academic and social integration” (Metz, 2004, p. 193; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980, p. 61). The theoretical framework was originally developed to understand traditional college-age students since usually they live or are required to live on campus. It is different for 2-year college students and non-traditional students who generally do not live on campus and have different responsibilities and roles than traditional students.

Over the years, Tinto looked closely at the different levels of student involvement and investigated 2-year institutions, non-traditional students, and minorities in part as a result of criticism of his original theoretical model (Metz, 2004). Although Tinto was criticized by researchers such as Bean, Pascarella, and Terenzini, his theoretical model has served as the basis for persistence and attrition research (Metz, 2004).

Tinto’s model has been utilized and adapted as the basis for research by renowned scholars such as Bean, Metzner, Pascarella, and Terenzini. Bean incorporated ideas from organizational behavior theory (Metz, 2004). Later, in collaboration with Metzner, they examined non-traditional students and external factors influencing persistence. Pascarella and Terenzini assessed “student involvement theory from the perspective of student interaction with faculty and peers” (Metz, 2004, p. 195). In one of their studies, Pascarella and Terenzini assessed Tinto’s academic and social integration concepts on freshmen and voluntary dropouts (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980).

Bean and Metzner (1985) defined “nontraditional students” and created a conceptual model of non-traditional undergraduate students’ attrition. They looked at the
work of Spady (1970), Tinto (1975), and Pascarella (1980), on traditional student attrition and developed a new model that would assess social integration and other variables appropriate for non-traditional students. The classic research of Bean and Metzner (1985) has served as a model for understanding non-traditional students’ attrition and persistence.

**Adult Learners, Andragogy, and Pedagogy**

For institutions of higher learning, it is important to think of non-traditional/adult learners from a different perspective as they bring in prior knowledge from their life experience. Two renowned scholars that focused on adult learners are Knowles (1988) and Freire (2000). Knowles originally defined the term andragogy as “the art and science of helping adults learn” (1988, p. 43). Adult learners can be characterized by four major principles:

1. Adult learners can practice self-directedness in the learning process “but at different rates for different people and different dimensions of life” (Knowles, 1988, p. 43).
2. Adult learners possess a wealth of experience; adult learners have accumulated life experience “which serves as a critical component in the foundation of their self-identity” (Rabourn, Shoup, & BrckaLorenz, 2015, p. 4).
3. Adult learners are ready to learn, “people become ready to learn something when they experience a need to learn it in order to cope more satisfyingly with real-life tasks or problems” (Knowles, 1988, p. 44).
4. Adult learners are task oriented, they see education as a way to apply the knowledge learned and realize their full potential (Knowles, 1988, p. 44).

It is important to consider Knowles’ (1988) theory when thinking about non-traditional students, as they are in a different stage in their lives and have different
responsibilities than traditional students. For traditional students attending college can be a rite of passage, what society expects. For non-traditional students the intention to attend and enroll in a post-secondary institution varies: personal growth, to attain a better job position, or to better support her family in the future.

Freire (2000) challenged the social status quo with his concept of “critical pedagogy.” Although Freire wrote about the social situation and education of adult learners in his country, his ideas provide a wealth of knowledge when thinking of non-traditional/adult learners.

Educators must consider the concept of “Banking education,” a traditional paternalistic relation between teacher and student (Freire, 2000), when reflecting on non-traditional/adult learners. According to this concept, the teacher is the one who holds the truth and knowledge and the student is filled with information. The student is not encouraged or allowed to question the teacher’s knowledge or authority. The teacher is always right and there is no room for critical thinking (Freire, 2000). Non-traditional/adult learners bring a wealth of knowledge and life experience; as educators it is imperative to support their active participation and be open to different perspectives as this can help motivate students. “The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in their turn while being taught also teach” (Freire, 2000, p. 80). This practice helps engage students in their education, particularly non-traditional/adult learner students.

The concepts and ideas of Knowles and Freire help us understand the characteristics and needs of non-traditional students as they pursue post-secondary
education. They can also serve as a model to understand non-traditional Hispanic women students’ persistence on the road to degree attainment.

**Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Model of Human Development**

Through the exploration of Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Model of Human Development, one can also understand the persistence of Hispanic undergraduate students (Arana et al., 2011; Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016). Bronfenbrenner’s model can be adapted to interpret factors that affect the persistence of non-traditional Hispanic women students in post-secondary education.

Through the Ecological Model of Human Development, Bronfenbrenner (1994) proposes that an individual’s human development is affected by the daily, long-term reciprocal interactions between a person and the immediate environment (persons, objects, and symbols) such as: “reading, learning new skills, studying, athletic activities, and performing complex tasks” (p. 1644). An individual is not only affected by his or her immediate environment, but also by more remote environments: “the interaction must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time” to be effective (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 1644). The model can be thought of as systems within other systems, a nested structure, from the innermost to the outermost level: microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems, and chronosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 1645). Each one of these systems is related to the other.

In the microsystems, the focus is on the interaction between the individual and immediate, complex, settings such as the family (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 1645). “The mesosystem comprises the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person” (p. 1645). For non-traditional Hispanic women
students enrolled in post-secondary education, their mesosystems would be comprised of the family (social support) and university processes (institutional support). The exosystem encompasses “linkages and processes” in which at least one of the systems “does not contain” the individual, but which can have an indirect effect on the individual (p. 1645). In this case, one can say that the exosystem for non-traditional Hispanic women students enrolled in post-secondary education encompasses the culture of the institution. The macrosystem refers to the same principles of microsystems and mesosystems, in addition, attention is paid to the exosystem’s characteristics of a culture or subculture, with emphases on “social and psychological features at the macrosystem level that ultimately affect the particular conditions and processes occurring in the microsystem” (p. 1646). The macrosystem could be associated with the perception that a non-traditional Hispanic women student has of herself, self-esteem. Lastly, the “chronosystem encompasses change or consistency over time not only in the characteristics of the person but also of the environment in which that person lives” (p. 1646). This last dimension could be thought of as the perception a non-traditional Hispanic women student would have of herself when and if she persists and completes her education; in other words, self-efficacy.

**Narrative of Theoretical Model**

As I developed the literature review for this study, I referred to Knowles’ andragogy and Adult Education Theory (1988), Freire’s “critical pedagogy” and “banking education” (2000), and Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Model of Human Development (1994).

Bronfenbrenner’s basic principle is that individuals are affected by their environment, both the immediate and remote environment, from the inner most to the
outermost levels resonated with my findings. As I developed the theoretical model, I decided to incorporate Bronfenbrenner’s basic principle. As with Bronfenbrenner’s model, when thinking about non-traditional Hispanic women students one must take into consideration their characteristics (Figure 1), the innermost layer (the core of the person); these characteristics determine how the person is defined by others (non-traditional). Next, I included social support: caregiver/parent, spouse/partner, friends, mentor, and employer, the interaction between the individual and their immediate setting. The next interaction level is related to the characteristics of the institution: culture, responsiveness, and policies, and the individual. The different levels represent the impact the different environmental levels have on the individual, in this case, non-traditional Hispanic women students at New Mexico Highlands University, a Hispanic Serving Institution.

In the theoretical model (Figure 1), one can see that non-traditional Hispanic women students’ self-concept (self-efficacy and self-esteem) and their adult learner characteristics influence each other; which in turn influence their goals and commitment, and their persistence to degree attainment. For the adult learner characteristics, I referred to Knowles’ (1988) research and findings. Lastly, Freire’s (2000) “critical pedagogy” and “banking education” serve as a reflection on non-traditional Hispanic women students’ life experience and the teacher-student relationship (characteristics of HSI) and the potential impact it has on the individual.
Theoretical Model

Figure 1. Theoretical Model. This figure illustrates factors that affect persistence to degree attainment of non-traditional Hispanic women students at New Mexico Highlands University.

Deficiencies in Evidence and Potential Contribution of Proposed Research

Minimal research attention has been focused on institutional support for non-traditional Hispanic women students. Additional research is needed to understand the persistence of Hispanic/Latina undergraduate and graduate students at institutions of higher education including HSIs (Arana et al., 2011; Arbelo-Marrero & Mallaci, 2016; Bordes-Edgar et al, 2011). Arbelo-Marrero and Millaci (2016, p. 32) stated that higher education institutions need to understand their Hispanic student population:

These institutions will need information on how to best serve Hispanic populations that promote their retention and academic persistence. It is important that HSIs and emerging HSIs understand that a part of the retention persistence formula is linked to student ethnicity, attitudes, relationships, and social networks.
It is imperative for New Mexico Highlands University as an HSI to understand and better address the needs of its non-traditional Hispanic women student population. Prior to this study, no research had been conducted at NMHU that addresses the needs of this population.

Institutional policies were created to address the needs of traditional students and not necessarily the needs of non-traditional women students. This causes non-traditional women students to feel marginalized, which can, in turn, affect persistence (Markle, 2015). It is important that university administrators understand the needs of non-traditional women students in order to develop programs that support their learning and aid in their degree completion (Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2015). Studies demonstrate a need for creating policies that support programs and provide sufficient financial aid for Hispanic and non-traditional students (Maestas et al., 2007; Miller Brown, 2002; Osam et al., 2017).

To date, no study has assessed the self-concept construct (self-esteem and self-efficacy) as a factor affecting persistence of non-traditional Hispanic women students in post-secondary education. Furthermore, no study has focused on factors that potentially affect persistence to degree attainment of non-traditional Hispanic women students in a Hispanic Serving Institution such as New Mexico Highlands University.

This research project focused on the individual non-traditional Hispanic woman student including her adult learner characteristics and how social support roles, institutional support, self-concept (self-esteem and self-efficacy), her goals and commitment can impact persistence to degree attainment.

As stated earlier, Bronfenbrenner’s model (1994), and Knowles’ (1988) and Freire’s (2000) concepts and ideas can be adapted to interpret factors that affect persistence to
degree attainment of non-traditional Hispanic women students in post-secondary education
and in this study, at New Mexico Highlands University, a Hispanic Serving Institution.
Chapter 3 - Research Methods

Introduction

Throughout history, women around the world have faced inequality, not only regarding education but also different aspects of life. In the United States, women had to overcome several obstacles, from being allowed to have access to education to the right to vote (Hagedorn et al., 2002). Education enables women to improve their lives. Educated women create opportunities for themselves and the communities in which they live.

Understanding factors that affect persistence to degree attainment of non-traditional Hispanic women students is important for several reasons: they are the fastest growing group in post-secondary education; education impacts access and employment opportunity; and women’s participation in the labor force will continue to increase, but so far not in terms of managerial positions or pay (Bateman, Snell, & Konopaske, 2016; United States Department of Labor Statistics, 2016). This must change, and it can only change if women have access to education and are empowered.

Access to a post-secondary education and achievement not only impacts the life of the women who obtain their degree, but the lives of their daughters and sons. It also impacts access and employment opportunity.

As a woman, I am interested in women’s education. As a professor at New Mexico Highlands University a Hispanic Serving Institution, I am interested in the growth and achievement of our students. I am particularly interested in understanding and helping address the needs and providing support to our non-traditional Hispanic women students, as they represent a large proportion of our students. At NMHU, two thirds of the undergraduate student population are female and “most females are aged 25 and older”
As a New Mexico citizen, a minority-majority State, where the population is of Hispanic ancestry, I am interested in the education of Hispanic women. This chapter includes the research design, which guided the study, and the methods I used to collect, organize, analyze, and interpret the information. This chapter addresses issues of trustworthiness and measures taken to enhance the study as well as credibility (validity), dependability (reliability), transferability (external validity or generalizability), and confirmability. The chapter includes limitations and delimitations of the study and positionality.

**Research Design**

The appropriate methodology for this study was qualitative research. One can trace back interest in social inquiry (qualitative research) to Greek scholars and philosophers such as Heredotus (5th century B. C. E.), Aristotle (3rd century B.C.E.), and Sextus Empiricus (2nd century C. E.). Both Heredotus and Sextus Empiricus were interested in cross-cultural history; they explored the “other” non-Greeks on issues such as morality (Erickson, 2011, p. 43).

Narrative was common practice during the Renaissance and Baroque eras. During the 16th and 17th century, Europeans such as Bartolomeo de Las Casas and French Jesuits missionaries explored, collected, and documented information about inhabitants of the new world. Bartolomeo de Las Casas focused on Indigenous people living in Latin America. French Jesuit missionaries wrote about their work with Native Americans in North America (Erickson, 2011). Collecting and documenting folklore and folk life has been a common practice for centuries.
During the 19th and 20th centuries, scholars were also interested in understanding human behavior. In the social sciences, sociologists, anthropologists, and philosophers such as August Comte (developed the science of sociology), Wilhelm Dilthey (social philosopher), Max Weber (sociologist), Ernest Gellner and Clifford Geertz (anthropologists) focused on understanding human behavior through different qualitative research methodologies (Erickson, 2011). Qualitative research is the ideal method to achieve in-depth understanding of situations and phenomena (Cooper & Schindler, 2014; Merriam, 1995).

The appropriate qualitative interpretative framework for this research is social constructivism. Through social constructivism, “individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work” (Creswell, 2013, p. 24). Individuals “develop subjective meaning of their experiences” (Creswell, 2013, p. 24). Subjective meaning is ascribed from social interactions, and cultural and historical norms; creating a rich source of information from which participants experience and researchers draw to understand a situation or phenomenon. In order to achieve this, the researcher must develop open-ended questions that encourage participants to explore the phenomenon of interest.

In the early 1900s, the German philosopher Edmund Husserl established the school of phenomenology as a philosophical tradition (Creswell, 2013; Smith, 2013). Phenomenology is applied in the social and health sciences such as psychology, sociology, education and nursing (Creswell, 2013).

Given that the purpose of this study was to understand factors that affect persistence to degree attainment of non-traditional Hispanic women students at New Mexico Highlands University, a Hispanic Serving Institution, a hermeneutic
A phenomenological approach illuminated understanding of the shared experiences of non-traditional Hispanic women students. Hermeneutics focuses on the interpretation of the participants’ lived experiences (Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016; Creswell, 2013). “A phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). People that have lived a phenomenon might share commonalities on what and how they experience the phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 82). This method helped reveal the meaning of the lived experiences of non-traditional Hispanic women students through uncovered themes. This allowed me, the researcher, to interpret the meaning of the participants’ lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). The research was guided by the following research question.

**Research Question**

What factors affect persistence of undergraduate non-traditional Hispanic women students to degree attainment at New Mexico Highlands University a 4-year Hispanic Serving Institution?

**Research Study Site**

For the purpose of understanding factors that affect persistence to degree attainment of non-traditional Hispanic women students in a 4-year Hispanic Serving Institution, I focused on New Mexico Highlands University [NMHU]. The Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities [HACU] created the term Hispanic Serving Institutions [HIS]. In order for an institution to be recognized as an HSI specific criteria must be meet. New Mexico Highlands University [NMHU] meets the criteria necessary to be considered an HSI.
Research Sample

In the fall of 2011, of the 230-first-time freshman Hispanic non-traditional women students enrolled at New Mexico Highlands University, 7 students earned their undergraduate degree by May of 2017. Of those 7 students 4 earned their degree in 2015 and 3 in 2017 (Salas, personal communication, October 26, 2017). As one can see, only 4 of the 230 non-traditional Hispanic women students who started their post-secondary education in the fall of 2011, earned their undergraduate degree in 4 years. By the fall of 2017, after 6 years of attending college, 3 non-traditional Hispanic women students earned their undergraduate degree.

Clearly, there is a need to understand factors that affect persistence to degree attainment of non-traditional Hispanic women students at NMHU. For this study, it was appropriate to invite junior and senior non-traditional Hispanic women students enrolled at NMHU, since they are on the road to degree attainment.

It also was appropriate to invite non-traditional Hispanic women students who enrolled in the fall of 2014. The reason for focusing on fall enrollments is because “nearly 77 percent of all first-time entrants begin their college career at the start of the fall semester” (Tinto, 1993, p. 8). Furthermore, this helped address the need to interview non-traditional Hispanic women students in their junior and senior year at NMHU. For the purposes of this research, I first invited all non-traditional Hispanic women students who had enrolled in the fall of 2014 that met the criteria and who had enrolled in the Las Vegas campus and the NMHU centers in Albuquerque, Rio Rancho, Santa Fe, Farmington, and Roswell.
Recruitment

Following UNM’s IRB and NMHU’s IRB requirements, I was able to identify potential participants. Utilizing purposeful sampling, I invited non-traditional Hispanic women students in their junior and senior years who enrolled at NMHU for the first time in the fall of 2014; 37 potential participants met the requirement. These women are on the path to degree attainment, their commonality is their ancestry (Hispanic) and their shared experience. Researchers recommend interviewing 5 to 25 participants (Creswell, 2013). To make this study viable, my goal was to interview eight non-traditional Hispanic women undergraduate students: two in their junior year, two in their senior year, two that had graduated, and two that had dropped out without earning a degree from NMHU. I contacted the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research (OIER) at NMHU to request information about the potential participants.

During the fall 2018, I emailed the potential participants, inviting them three different times to participate in the study. I did not receive a single response. With the support of my Chair, Dr. Borden, I submitted amendments to the UNM and NMHU IRB Boards, one in the fall of 2018 and one early in the spring of 2019. In the first amendment, submitted in October 2018, I requested personal emails and telephone numbers. Since, I had not been able to reach the potential participants through their NMHU email, I thought that would be a viable way to reach them. After receiving approval from the IRB Boards on the first amendment, I email potential participants once again, this time through their personal email. I only received one email from an interested participant, who then decided not to participate in the study.
In January 2019, I submitted a second amendment to the UNM and NMHU IRB Boards (see Appendix A). This time, I asked approval to expand the pool of potential participants to include all currently enrolled (spring 2019) non-traditional Hispanic women undergraduate students over the age of 25 and not just those who had enrolled for the first time in the fall of 2014. The second amendment was approved by both UNM and NMHU IRB Boards.

After and approval from the IRB Boards, I contacted, once again, the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research (OIER) at NMHU to request demographic and contact information of potential participants that met the study criteria. The pool of participants increased to seventy-seven non-traditional Hispanic women students. I then sent emails (NMHU and personal email) to the new pool of participants. I emailed the potential participants twice. I followed up with short text messages requesting the potential participants to check their email accounts. This time, I was successful at recruiting participants. I was able to set up personal interviews with 9 participants. Participants that accepted the invitation and agreed to set up an interview with me, agreed to take part in the study. Participation in the study was voluntary. I explained to them that they could terminate their involvement in the study at any time without negative consequences.

Once participants agreed to set up a personal interview with me, and prior to asking the questions, I went over the consent form with each participant to answer or clarify any questions participants had.

Since NMHU’s main campus is in Las Vegas, NM but it also has centers in Albuquerque, Rio Rancho, Santa Fe, Farmington, and Roswell, and participants were in different locations, I conducted face-to-face interviews and through ZOOM, a web-based
conferencing platform that allows people to connect and interact through video cloud computing as one would in a conference room setting.

I was the only researcher conducting the interviews with participants. I collected qualitative data via personal, semi-structured interviews in locations where the participants’ privacy was protected, in a conference room at the NMHU library and via ZOOM video conference room. I utilized a digital audio recorder and ZOOM recorder. I stored the audio and ZOOM recordings in a password protected computer.

**Interview Questions**

The interview questions I developed for this study were based on the literature review. The questions helped me answer the research question: What factors affect persistence of undergraduate non-traditional Hispanic women students to degree attainment at New Mexico Highlands University a 4-year Hispanic Serving Institution?

The following is the list of semi-structured questions I asked the participants during their interview.

1. What would you say are challenges non-traditional women students face on the path to degree attainment?
2. Which challenges impact or influence the success of non-traditional Hispanic women students?
3. How do you think non-traditional women students deal with the challenges they face on the path to degree attainment?
4. What are the qualities that non-traditional Hispanic women student possess that help in their pursuit of degree attainment?
5. How do non-traditional Hispanic women students navigate the campus environment?

6. What support do you receive from the university that impacts your persistence to degree attainment?

7. How do non-traditional women students describe themselves?

8. What factors impact your persistence to obtain a degree?

9. What support do you receive from family, friends, mentors on the path to degree attainment?

10. Do you have children? If so, does having the responsibility of being a parent and caring for one or more dependents impact your persistence to degree attainment?

11. Did delaying postsecondary enrollment impact your persistence?

12. Do you attend college full-time or part-time? Does attending college part-time or full-time impact your persistence to degree attainment?

13. Are you employed part-time or full-time? Does being employed part-time or full-time while enrolled in college impact your persistence to degree attainment?

14. Do financial responsibilities impact persistence to degree attainment?

15. What plans do you have after you graduate?

16. Please share with me any other thoughts you have about your experience as a student.

Collection, Organization, Analysis, and Interpretation of Data

For this section, I followed Creswell’s methodology for a phenomenological study (2013) and Marshall and Rossman’s (1995) three basic steps for phenomenological

Before starting the investigation, I first bracketed my own personal experience (refer to positionality) as a non-traditional Latina woman student (Creswell, 2013; Marshall and Rossman, 1995). I addressed my personal experience with the phenomenon under investigation in order to understand my own preconceptions about the phenomenon and address personal bias. This helped start the investigation with a renewed perspective.

After conducting the interviews and collecting the information from the participants I organized the data, transcribing the recordings into narrative to engage in phenomenological reduction. Following Saldaña’s (2013) steps for reducing the data into themes, I formatted the narrative creating a chart that included the raw data (narrative), preliminary codes (themes), and final codes (themes) (see Appendix B). At that point, the data was ready for analysis.

I started by carefully reading the narrative, sentence by sentence, paying close attention to what each participant was sharing with me, making “margin notes to form initial codes” (Creswell, 2013, p. 190). As I read and re-read each interview, I drew “significant statements” (Creswell, 2013, p. 190) from the participants, then clustered the statements “into a series of organized themes” (Saldaña, 2013). Following Saldaña (2013), I organized themes into categories “according to commonality and ordered in superordinate and subordinate outline format to reflect on their possible groupings and relationships” (p. 178). I created a table to illustrate the preliminary codes and final codes (see Table 1). Next, I continued by interpreting the data. I developed a “textual description” of “what happened” and a “structural description” on “how” the participants’
experienced the phenomenon, followed by a summary of findings for each theme (Creswell, 2013, p. 191). I developed a chart with participants’ pseudonyms and non-traditional characteristics as defined by the U.S. Department of Education and the Encyclopedia of Women in Higher Education. That helped explain the experience of the participants with the phenomenon of being a non-traditional Hispanic women student. The “essence” of the experience is narrated and supported with participants’ personal statements (Creswell, 2013). I used pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of participants.
Table 1

Preliminary and Final Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preliminary Codes</th>
<th>Revision</th>
<th>Final Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic culture</td>
<td>To reflect the recurring themes of</td>
<td>Hispanic culture mentality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotype</td>
<td>homemaker and education associated</td>
<td>Homemaker</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td>with the Hispanic culture mentality</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Responsibility</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Household Responsibilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of Mother</td>
<td>No change</td>
<td>Role of Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role model for children</td>
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<td>Role model for children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Children a priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges age of children</td>
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<td>Challenges with young children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Role</td>
<td>To reflect what the role of wife entails for</td>
<td>Role of Wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>the women</td>
<td>Caring for husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Obligations</td>
<td>To reflect the role played by the women.</td>
<td>Role of Employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workload</td>
<td></td>
<td>Workload</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-image</td>
<td>Self-image, age, and time were associated</td>
<td>Role of Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>to the student</td>
<td>Time to be a student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time/Time management</td>
<td></td>
<td>Age to be a student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finances</td>
<td>To reflect financial concern was</td>
<td>Finances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Financial</td>
<td>associated to education.</td>
<td>Sources of Aid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tuition &amp; Books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid/Help</td>
<td></td>
<td>Financial Concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Support</td>
<td>To reflect support coming from family and</td>
<td>Social Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse/Partner</td>
<td>friends.</td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td></td>
<td>Significant other</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
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<td>Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Friends &amp; Mentors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Themes related to the university</td>
<td>Institutional support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professors/teachers</td>
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<td>Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology – challenges</td>
<td></td>
<td>Technology</td>
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</table>
Methodological Rigor

Methodological rigor or trustworthiness was attained through different credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability strategies.

Trustworthiness - Measures Taken to Enhance the Study

To ensure trustworthiness in this research, I followed Guba’s conceptual model on criteria and provisions for rigor in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Krefting, 1990; Shenton, 2004). Guba (1981, p. 79) identified “four major concerns relating to trustworthiness” (1) truth value, (2) applicability, (3) consistency, and (4) neutrality. Truth value refers to the confidence a researcher has in her findings. Qualitative research “is subject-oriented” and the discoveries come from the “lived and perceived” experiences of informants (Krefting, 1990, p. 215). Truth value refers to internal validity, credibility in qualitative research.

Applicability can be thought of as transferability. It is thought that in qualitative research, it can be challenging to generalize the findings from a sample to a population. Research suggests, “the goal of qualitative research (…) is to understand the particular in depth, rather than finding out what is generally true of many” (Merriam, 1995, p. 57). In other words, qualitative researchers try to find the commonality in the particular.
In terms of consistency (dependability), in qualitative research the researcher focuses and learns from participants’ range of experiences with the phenomenon. Variability is anticipated as no individual is exactly alike. “Qualitative research emphasizes the uniqueness of the human situation, so that variation in experience rather than identical repetition is sought” (Krefting, 1990, p. 216). Therefore, the “concept of dependability implies trackable variability” (Krefting, 1990, 216). Finally, in terms of trustworthiness of neutrality, one should look at the confirmability of the findings in the data (Krefting, 1990).

To ensure trustworthy results, I contextualized and bracketed my own experience with the phenomenon. What follows are strategies I used to enhance trustworthiness for this study.

**Credibility (validity).** In quantitative research, the researcher ensures internal validity when the instrument measures what it intends to measure (Shenton, 2004). Qualitative researchers seek to establish credibility with their findings. The findings have to correspond to reality (Shenton, 2004). Through the following strategies, I established credibility.

**Member Checking.** After collecting the information, transcription, analysis, and development of themes, I took the findings back to the participants for corroboration or member checking (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Krefting, 1990; Merriam, 1995; Shenton, 2004). It is an important technique for establishing credibility (Creswell & Miller, 2000). To support the credibility of this study, I wrote a memo with the findings and shared the memo with each participant for corroboration.
Submersion in the Study. This refers to the process of collecting information over a long period of time “to ensure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon” (Merriam, 1995, p. 55). This process allows the researcher to build trust and understanding of participants (Creswell & Miller, 2000). A researcher can submerge in the study through continuous engagement and observation (Creswell & Miller, 2000). For this study, I interviewed participants directly to answer the research question.

Dependability (reliability). In quantitative research, the researcher ensures reliability when the study findings can be replicated, and the researcher finds consistent results (Cooper & Schindler, 2014; Merriam, 1995). In qualitative research, the replication of a study would not provide the exact same results, but “both sets of results stand as two interpretations of the phenomenon” (Merriam, 1995, p. 56). The intent is that “the results of a study are consistent with the data collected” (Merriam, 1995, p. 56). Qualitative researchers seek to understand people and human behavior, which is “never static” (Merriam, 1995, p. 55). In qualitative research, researchers ensure dependability by reporting in detail the process of the study “thereby enabling a future researcher to repeat the work, if not necessarily to gain the same results” (Shenton, 2004, p. 71). Nonetheless, by doing so, the researcher demonstrates “proper research practices have been followed” (Shenton, 2004, p. 71). Qualitative researchers can apply the following strategies to enhance dependability, code-recode procedure, triangulation, peer examination, and audit trail (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Merriam, 1995; Shenton, 2004). I established credibility in my study through the code-recode process, peer examination, and audit trail.

Code-recode procedure. This refers to the process of coding the data once, then coming back to the data a second time after a period of time, and then coding the data
again to ensure dependability (Krefting, 1990). I engaged in this practice to ensure dependability.

Peer examination. The purpose of peer examination or peer scrutiny is to challenge the researcher and provide an external view of the research project. This practice helps the researcher closely examine the findings, and challenge assumptions (Creswell, 2013; Shenton, 2004). I consulted with my chair and committee members on the research study to get additional insight and as an opportunity to learn.

Audit Trail. The researcher describes in detail and provides documentation on how data was collected, analyzed, and rationale for categories and themes (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Merriam, 1995). This detailed description can be thought of as a map that other researchers can use to “replicate the study” (Merriam, 1995, p. 56). I created an audit trail by “keeping a research log of all activities, developing a data chronology, and recording data analysis procedures clearly” in the dissertation (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This helped establish credibility of my research.

Transferability (generalizability). In quantitative research, the researcher can generalize findings or make inferences from a sample to the population. In qualitative research, “since the findings of a qualitative project are specific to a small number of particular environments and individuals, it is impossible to demonstrate that the findings and conclusions are applicable to other situations and populations” (Shenton, 2004, p. 69). The qualitative researcher is called to provide as much detail of the research study, including the setting, participants, and themes, “to enable the reader to make such transfer” (Shenton, 2004, p. 70). This is described as “reader or user generalizability” (Merriam, 1995). In this case, “it is not up to the researcher to speculate how his or her findings can
be applied to other settings; it is up to the consumer of the research” (Merriam, 1995, p. 58). For the purposes of enhancing user generalizability, I described the boundaries of my study and engaged in dense description (Shenton, 2004).

*Dense description.* A researcher accomplishes dense rich description by defining in detail “the setting, the participants, and the themes of a qualitative study” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 128). Through “detail description, the researcher enables readers to transfer information to other settings and to determine whether the findings can be transferred” since there are common characteristics (Creswell, 2013, p. 252). This process enhances transferability (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1995). I have provided a close detail of the setting, participants, and themes in my research study to enhance transferability.

*Confirmability.* Quantitative research focuses on objectivity through precise measurements and analysis such that “objectivity is the criterion of neutrality and is achieved through rigor of methodology through which reliability and validity are established” (Krefting, 1990, p. 217). The researcher does not influence and is not influenced by the study, the researcher distances herself from the study (Krefting, 1990). In qualitative research, the researcher seeks to decrease the distance between herself and the participants through “prolonged contact with informants or lengthy periods of observation” (Krefting, 1990, p. 217) to enhance confirmability (Shenton, 2004). The goal of confirmability is to ensure that the research findings come from the participants, “the experiences and ideas of the informants” (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). Therefore, it is important that the researcher reflects on her own position so as to prevent bias (Shenton, 2004).

Furthermore, the process of triangulation, using multiple sources or multiple methods to collect information to discover themes or categories helps prevent “investigator
bias” (Shenton, 2004, p. 72) and enhances confirmability of the data findings. I enhanced confirmability by engaging in reflexivity, by including a detailed account of my positionality.

**Reflexivity.** Through the process of reflexivity, qualitative researchers disclose “their assumptions, beliefs, and biases” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127) that may shape their research projects (Creswell, 2013). It is important that researchers describe their positionality in the study, to bracket themselves. This is accomplished by acknowledging and describing “their entire beliefs and biases early in the research process to allow readers to understand their positions” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127). I have included a detailed account of my positionality, my life story growing up in Lima, Peru, a paternalistic society. I have reflected on social and cultural norms that have shaped me and my own experience with the phenomenon in this study.

**Limitations of the Study**

This phenomenological study helped me, the researcher, gain insight into the factors and challenges that non-traditional Hispanic women students enrolled at NMHU face on the path to degree attainment. Measures were taken to ensure trustworthiness. Given that this study included nine non-traditional Hispanic women students from NMHU, it is not possible to generalize the findings to the entire population on non-traditional Hispanic women students at NMHU or other post-secondary institutions. However, their lived experience with the phenomenon might resonate with the lived experience of other non-traditional Hispanic women students enrolled at NMHU.

NMHU and other higher education institutions can benefit from understanding the needs of non-traditional women students, as the number of non-traditional women students
enrolled in higher education institutions has increased and will continue to increase over the next few years.

**Delimitations of the Study**

I conducted this study at New Mexico Highlands University. The study started in August 2018 and concluded in May 2019. The purpose of the study was to understand factors that affect persistence to degree attainment of non-traditional Hispanic women students at New Mexico Highlands University, a Hispanic Serving Institution. Based on the literature review I conducted and the findings, I focused on three major categories that impact persistence to degree attainment of non-traditional women students: social roles, institutional support, and self-concept (self-efficacy and self-esteem). A hermeneutic phenomenological approach illuminated understanding of the shared experiences of non-traditional Hispanic women students.

**Positionality**

I was born and raised in Lima, Peru, a patriarchal society. I was raised to be a good girl, listen to my parents and respect my elders, no questions asked.

Ever since I can remember, I have had a love for learning, especially books and art. I was very fortunate that my parents valued education and were able to provide my siblings and me with a good education. Education and books are a luxury in Peru. A Peruvian child has access to a good education if parents can afford the outrageous tuition private institutions charge. Public education is limited and not competitive. Even then, books and school supplies are a luxury and are an additional cost. There is no browsing at bookstores, every book is covered in plastic wrap to prevent books from deteriorating, consequently limiting people’s ability to look at books.
Spanish is my first language. I learned English at school as I attended an all-girls private school. I loved having the opportunity to learn in a different language. I read books written in English from our small school library. When we were assigned one book report a month, I would do two or three. I enjoyed school; there is no doubt about it. I also enjoyed art. I took private drawing lessons. I was a dedicated student and worked hard to earn good grades.

During my last high school year, the school psychologist gave all the students an aptitude test. I was very excited about the outcome and looked forward to the results. What a disappointment! I still remember meeting with the female psychologist. Her words left a sour taste in my mouth that day and for years to come. The school psychologist indicated that I was not a people person, a surprise to me as I was very involved in school and had no problem communicating with people of any age. I enjoyed public speaking and giving presentations in front of my peers. The psychologist continued with her interpretation of the findings. She stated that since I enjoyed art, that would be a good option as I was a pretty girl and eventually I would get married and someone would support me. Her comments made me feel dumb, a pretty face, and empty brain. Words mark people, especially coming from an authority figure.

Her interpretation of the test results reminded me of an earlier time in my childhood. My brother and I met with another psychologist and completed an IQ test. I remember, being in that office and my mother sharing the IQ results with me. Based on the results and my mother’s interpretation, my brother was smarter than I was as he had a higher IQ. That also left a mark. I worked hard at school to earn good grades. The idea of not being smart haunted me for years!
As predicted by the school psychologist, after high school graduation, I applied for art school. Getting into art school was competitive and required a lot of preparation. I took several tests to be admitted into La Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú art school.

Following my first year of art school, my life took a turn away from a college education. I met my future husband and the father of my children. I was only nineteen. I was infatuated with the idea that an older man, by nine years, was interested in me. He invited me to visit him in Louisiana during my summer break.

That visit turned into a five-year stay. I got married and had two daughters. Initially, the idea was that I would attend school in Louisiana, but that was not the case. Although my husband worked at a university in Louisiana and I had a tuition waiver, my now former husband was unsupportive of my continuing my education. Instead, I was a stay at-home mom and took care of our daughters. Though I enjoyed spending time with my babies, at times I would think about what life would be like if I returned to school. To compensate, I would spend a lot of time at the public library.

At the age of twenty-five, I was separated with two daughters, a four-year old and one-year old, and no prospect of an education. I moved back to Lima, Peru for a few months where I stayed with my parents. My parents tried to be helpful, but it was stressful to be under the same roof as a young mother of two. Within a few months of my arrival in Lima, Peru, my parents decided to move to La Paz, Bolivia. Due to my lack of a post-secondary education and preparedness, I had no other option but to follow them. I lived in La Paz, Bolivia for five years. To make ends meet and support my daughters, I worked as an English tutor, teaching private English lesson to children and adults. To advance my education, I enrolled in English at the British Council and French lessons at the Alliance
Française in La Paz, Bolivia. It was at that time that I realized I enjoyed not only learning but also teaching others.

Compelled by the desire to better educate myself and to offer my children a better future, I started investigating my options of post-secondary education in the United States. I made an appointment at the American Embassy with the Consul to evaluate my options. I was fortunate an assistant to the Consul suggested I contact the American School in La Paz as they could provide information about colleges and universities in the United States. I worked diligently to find information about schools in the southwest, as I had always been attracted to that area of the United States. It took a lot of effort and determination to go through the process. I was not only going to leave a land I then called home, but I was going to take daughters away from the safe place they knew. I applied for colleges in New Mexico and was accepted at the Santa Fe Community College in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The transition was not easy. Yes, I was accepted into the college, but now I had to apply for a student visa, which could be denied.

Fortunately, I was awarded a student visa. I packed my belongings and within a few months of starting my search for education, I moved to New Mexico in the summer of 2003. I had no family in New Mexico. I was driven by the desire to educate myself. It was not an easy decision, but it is one I do not regret. The summer of 2003 changed our lives. I came to the United States with a student visa. I arrived at the Santa Fe, New Mexico airport with two little girls and our belongings packed in three suit cases. I had rented a hotel room where we stayed for 10 days while I looked for an apartment and enrolled them and myself in school. At the time, my daughters spoke Spanish and French, not English. My daughters had to learn a new language and adapt to a new life style.
The first few months were a challenge. My daughters learned the language in a few months. I felt rusty after not being in school for so many years. It was stressful going back to college. At times, I would get overwhelmed and cry, thinking what did I get myself into? but I persevered. Perseverance became my motto. The girls and I would sit around the dining table and work on our homework together every day. In the evening after dinner and showers, the girls would go to bed and I would study late into the night. The first few months we only had our beds and a dining table. We did not have a TV for months, not that we really needed one. The focus was on studying. We all had to learn and adapt to our new life.

As an international student, I could only work at the college I attended, making it economically tight. We lived on a budget. I was fortunate to receive government assistance for my American citizen daughters. The government aid, food stamps and Medicaid, helped my daughters. My Peruvian family provided emotional support from a distance. I was a single mother with young children attending college as a non-traditional student. I persevered through the hardships. I tried to always stay positive and think about my education and my daughters’ future.

I came to the United States with the intention to educate myself and offer a better life to my children. I wanted my daughters to become independent women, to build a life for them, without the stereotypical machismo of my society. My daughters have learned that they can do anything they set their minds to. I had to reiterate those words to myself many times, reminding myself that I could become an independent woman and take care of myself and my children. I came to the United States to better educate myself. My goal was to get an associate degree. I never imagined I would be working on my doctorate or that I
would be a professor one day. I had to work on my self-esteem and constantly remind myself that I could accomplish what I set my mind to. I tried to stay positive and make the best of every situation.

I was fortunate to make a friend at the Santa Fe Community College who guided me through the school process and was supportive. We helped each other out. Anna worked for the college and knew the ins and outs of the education system. We have stayed friends throughout the years. We are family now.

I met my husband a few years ago in Las Vegas, NM. He has also been very supportive of my studies. We met when I was in the MBA program at New Mexico Highlands University. He has supported my studies throughout the MBA and the Doctoral programs. He reminds me of my talents and is supportive of my education. I am grateful for him.

My goal is to be a good role model for my children and step-children, and to help open the road to education to other women; those that dream about an education, and those who do not. We all have potential. We need to empower and help each other grow.

As an educator, my goal is to help students expand their horizons and participate in various scholarly activities beyond the classroom. I believe I am contributing to the formation of future business leaders. It is imperative students have a strong ethical and socially responsible perspective and to support the growth of all, including women and minorities. Our society can only improve if education is accessible to all.

**Rationale**

In recent years, New Mexico Highlands University has invested in recruitment campaigns and branding in an effort to increase enrollment. Retention efforts can be
associated with the lower financial resources and aid from government public universities face. In the case of New Mexico Highlands University, shrinking enrollments and lower financial resources have led to retention efforts.

Universities play an important role “influencing the social and intellectual development of their students” (Tinto, 1993, p. 4). Therefore, it is imperative to understand the characteristics of New Mexico Highlands University non-traditional Hispanic women students to serve them well. The purpose of this study is to understand factors that affect persistence to degree attainment of non-traditional Hispanic women students at New Mexico Highlands University, a 4-year Hispanic Serving Institution. Through the oral stories of non-traditional Hispanic women students on the path to degree attainment, I hope to shed light on the ways through which New Mexico Highlands University can provide support and retention efforts to its large non-traditional Hispanic women student population.

Summary

It is of interest to focus on New Mexico since this is where we live. The Hispanic population in the United States is projected to grow to approximately 119 million people by 2060 (Colby & Ortman, 2015). That means that by 2060, 28.6 percent of the population in the United States will be of Hispanic ancestry. Data shows that, “Hispanic Americans rank well below average on all measures of class: income, occupation, and education” (Marger, 2008, p. 304). The focus of this study is on non-traditional Hispanic women students.

Examining the factors that affect persistence to degree attainment of non-traditional Hispanic women students at New Mexico Highlands University, and other New Mexico
higher education institutions could benefit “Hispanic Americans” as a class. In addition, other universities that enroll large numbers of non-traditional Hispanic women students around the country could benefit from this study. By examining the factors that impact persistence to degree attainment of non-traditional Hispanic women students, university institutions can develop programs that specifically support the needs of this group of students: mentoring, access to online support, and support groups.

This study could provide insight for prospective non-traditional Hispanic women students to understand and be able to address factors that affect persistence to degree attainment. This study can help inform faculty members in terms of how to understand non-traditional Hispanic women students’ self-esteem and self-efficacy; how these factors can potentially affect persistence to degree attainment and develop teaching methods that provide support.

This study could provide additional insight to researchers that want to replicate the study for non-traditional Hispanic students in other states or replicate the study for other minority groups. Furthermore, policy makers could benefit from the research findings and develop policies that address and better serve the needs of non-traditional women students since they are the largest and fastest growing number of students enrolled in higher education institutions.
Chapter 4

Study Findings

In this chapter, I present the study findings and address the research question “What factors affect persistence of undergraduate non-traditional Hispanic women students to degree attainment at New Mexico Highlands University a 4-year Hispanic Serving Institution?” The chapter begins with a profile of the participants. It is important to not only hear the voices of these women but associate their voice with a human face. I assigned each participant a pseudonym to protect their confidentiality. Although their story might resonate with women from different cultures and backgrounds, it is important to remember this is their story. These are the lived experiences of non-traditional Hispanic women students at New Mexico Highlands University whose commonality is their ancestry (Hispanic) and their lived experience. This phenomenological study was appropriate to interpret the meaning of the participants’ lived experiences through uncovered themes. This chapter ends with a summary of the findings.

Study Participants

All non-traditional Hispanic women students enrolled in the spring of 2019 were invited to participate in this study. Of the 77 potential participants, nine women decided to participate in the study. These women were between the ages of 28 to 68. Seven of the nine participants were between the ages of 30 and 60. All were returning students who had delayed post-secondary enrollment and are considered independent for financial aid purposes. Eight of the nine participants are mothers; four still have children living with them. Of those four, three are considered single care givers (single parents). Three of the nine participants do not have a traditional high school diploma. Furthermore, six of the
nine participants attend college part-time and six of the nine participants work full-time.

Table 2 provides a description of the study participants according to the definitions used in this study (see to Chapter 1). All participants met several non-traditional student characteristics as indicated by the X in the table below.

Table 2

**Description of Study Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>≥25 age</th>
<th>Return Student</th>
<th>Independent</th>
<th>≥1 or more dependents</th>
<th>Single caregiver</th>
<th>No traditional HS diploma</th>
<th>Delayed enrollment</th>
<th>Attending school part-time</th>
<th>Employed full-time</th>
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**Meaning Drawn from the Experience**

What follows is a “textual description” of “what happened” and a “structural description” on “how” the participants’ experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013, p. 191) of being a non-traditional Hispanic woman student. The “essence” of the experience is narrated and supported with participants’ personal statements (Creswell, 2013). I used pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of participants.
**Hispanic Culture Mentality.** During the interviews, some of participants repeatedly used the term “Hispanic Culture Mentality” or referred to their “Hispanic Culture” to discuss values instilled in them regarding “homemaker” expectations and their “education.” Since the term “Hispanic Culture Mentality” emerged from the voice of the participants, I decided it was appropriate to use it as a category.

**Homemakers.** Throughout the interviews, many of the participants expressed being raised to take care of their family. From their personal experience, six of the nine participants expressed getting married and having children at a young age. When participants were asked to consider challenges that influence or impact non-traditional women students on the path to degree attainment, several of the participants expressed the “Hispanic Culture Mentality” of being raised to be “homemakers,” to get married, have children, and take care of their family. Sofia expressed, “I believe coming from a Hispanic culture, just growing up with a mind-set that you have to fall into a certain category as far as just raising your family.” Manuela shared,

I think there is some cultural old Hispanic values. Certainly, from my father, that maybe a woman stays home, she raises her kids, she is not an executive, she is not an entrepreneur. I think traditional roles in my father’s eyes were, she can be a receptionist, those type of things and not so much achieving more. And so, the homemaker mentality is a little bit instilled in Hispanic women, I think.

This resonates with Laura’s statement, “I think that women are sort of looked down-on, and maybe people don’t think that we can actually succeed. I feel that we really are looked down-on, especially being a woman and especially being Hispanic.” Elena explained, “I mean if you look at the values of some Hispanic or non-traditional Hispanic
most of them are either married young, have children, and stay at home and they believe that is a stopping point for them.” Sofia, Manuela, Laura, and Elena shared their perceptions of and experience with being raised to be “homemakers” and the feeling of being “looked down-on” as Hispanic women.

Seeing family and relatives get married and having children at a young age is the reality some of the participants experienced at a personal level. Sofia expressed,

Um, getting into relationships at a very young age. Also is a reinforcer from Hispanic culture that I’ve learned. Growing up a lot of friends and family have had kids as young as fifteen. Um, parents are still very old fashioned in traditional ways, thinking that you need to find a mate at a young age and stay with them and have children and that is the way you live your life.

Elena stated, “I would just say for me, as a Hispanic person, I mean, you grow up in a culture, you get married young; you have kids at a young age.” These women are told, see it, and experience having children at a young age.

The stereotype of women as “homemakers” and the responsibilities ascribed to them are clearly stated in the reflections shared by the participants. Monserrat expressed,

I think that although people say that women and men are equal, there is still that taboo that women cannot (are not capable). More than anything it's because women are the head of the family, so we must have chores that men don't have.

All these statements reflect the “Hispanic Culture Mentality” as participants stated, of being raised to be “homemakers” get married, have children, and take care of their family.
It can be challenging to break the “Hispanic Culture Mentality” of “homemakers” as the participants stated. Sofia explained,

I think for a lot of Hispanic women, eventually, once you break up that barrier, that wall of having to meet certain expectations from your family, it’s just about finding yourself a lot of the times and that requires you to keep pushing forward.

Manuela shared,

The homemaker mentality is a little bit instilled in Hispanic women, I think. And that is a barrier because I think we get it into our heads that we can’t do more, that we can’t learn more, that we can’t achieve more. And it takes a while and maybe some different exposures to overcome that.

It is a challenge to break the “Hispanic Culture Mentality” as Sofia and Manuela expressed. However, women can break that pattern and it is positive to see the change as Elena describes it,

I just started to notice, more Hispanic women are out there trying to come up and become something. I think that is great. Kind of seeing the big difference from getting married, having babies, staying at home, to like now, okay, is more like getting degrees and advancing your career. It’s kind of nice seeing more Hispanic women, seeing that there is more out there for us. Just than that other life of being married and staying home with kids.

Sofia, Manuela, and Elena describe the challenges of overcoming the “homemaker” mentality and seeing other possibilities.
The participants shared the values instilled in them by their Hispanic culture. The participants refer to the “Hispanic Culture Mentality” of being raised to become “homemakers” get married, have children, and take care of their families; perpetuating the traditional gender roles. Although the American society has experienced family change, gender roles remain mostly unchanged (Markle, 2015; Vaccaro & Lovell, 2010); this is the case for this group of Hispanic women. It is a challenge for women when gender roles are perpetuated and the expectations their family places on them limits their potential. As the participants expressed, it can be challenging to break the “Hispanic Culture Mentality” of “homemakers.” As some of the participants mentioned, it takes “different exposures” and “finding yourself” to “breakup the barrier” of been raised to be “homemakers.”

**Education.** Regarding education, participants in this study expressed lack of encouragement and support related to education coming from their Hispanic Culture. Elena stated,

> Just being in my culture, I was not exposed to a lot of education. My parents didn’t, my mom didn’t finish school; she only went to fourth grade. I didn’t grow up around my dad. So, my mom was not educated. So, it took me a long time also to get education, and I am still struggling sometimes. Just not being in that environment, I guess, was harder.

Elena’s statement is echoed in Guadalupe’s statement: “I guess coming from a Hispanic culture of women not typically going to school and staying at home, raising kids, that type of thing, that mentality, might hamper women seeking higher education.” Ana expressed, “I don’t think we value a woman’s education at the level that it should be valued.” Ana shared what her mother, a non-traditional student, experienced while...
attending college, “I can tell you my mom, when she was pursuing her education, and she was a non-traditional student too, family members literally told her, why are you doing that? It’s just a waste of time.” Sofia and Manuela expressed sentiments similar to those of Ana. The message these women received from their Hispanic Culture, their family and relatives, was there is no value to a women’s education.

Sofia and Manuela experienced lack of encouragement from their parents on post-secondary education. Sofia shared,

I wasn’t brought up with the mind-set of pursuing education. I had to learn through many years of working odd end jobs, and just finding random things to do, to make ends meet to support my family. I had to actually think outside of my box, outside of the bubble that was created for me. To really see that education was a main goal.

Manuela shared,

One of the other things that I found for myself was that my parents never talked about college while I was going to high school at all or even when I graduated. It was more like, get a job. And that is what I did. I am not sure what the turning point was for me, but it certainly wasn’t encouraged. They never ever talked about it (going to college).

As stated by Elena, Guadalupe, Ana, Sofia and Manuela, growing up, their families did not talk or encourage pursuing education.

Monserrat is the only woman in this study to share her family had a positive view of education, which is different than the message received by the other women in this study. Monserrat expressed, “My family always told me that the best inheritance I could
have was education.” Although Monserrat’s family expressed support for education, she will be the first person in her family to graduate from college.

The other women in the study had to realize on their own that they could achieve more with an education. For Violeta, earning the degree is for personal growth, “to finish my degree, is for me. Nothing else, for me.” Laura shared, “I feel that getting a degree is very important. That is something no one can take away from you. I will always have my degree, so I feel that it is important to be here and to do this.” Manuela shared what her education means to her, “It’s more for ME, [it] is something that can never be taken away.” Monserrat echoed Manuela and Laura’s sentiment. Monserrat shared, “Now as an adult I realize that yes, the more one learns, that it is something that nobody can take away.”

For Guadalupe, getting a college degree “it gives you a level of success within yourself, that you did it. You achieved it.” For Elena, education provides opportunities for growth, “I know now with a degree, I will have a lot more opportunities. Doors will open up for me.” Laura shared that sentiment, “I’m finishing soon and I’m hoping to move up into a higher position and that will be all thanks to the degree I’m getting.”

Although these women were told that they did not need an education and were raised to be homemakers, they have found a way to realize education is for their personal growth and they can achieve more.

Some of the women in this study were not encouraged to pursue a post-secondary education. They attribute this fact to the “Hispanic Culture Mentality” of having been raised to be homemakers and take care of their families. The women shared lack of exposure to and lack of support for education, coming as they did from uneducated parents and being with family members that placed little value on a woman’s education. Non-traditional women students such as the ones in this study "may not have consistent support
from their families … solidifying their sense that college is an inappropriate goal for them" (Marine, 2012, p. 1). The women in this study had to realize on their own that they could achieve more with an education.

**Importance of Roles.** Non-traditional students and adult learners play multiple roles. The participants in this study play different roles; they are mothers and caregivers, wives or partners, employees, and students. The different roles played by non-traditional students and adult learner students demand their focus, time, and attention (Choy, 2002; Fairchild, 2003; Jacobs & Berkowitz King, 2002; Quimby & O’Brien, 2004; Tinto, 1993). Balancing academic responsibilities with parenting, family, and work responsibilities places pressure on non-traditional Hispanic women students (Grabowski et al., 2016), and adult learners (Fairchild, 2003). This is no different for the participants in this study. What follows are the themes that emerged from the interviews with participants that fit in the category of roles. The themes are presented in terms of importance as they were ascribed by the participants.

**Role of Mother.** Eight of nine of the women in this study, except for Monserrat, have children. Although Monserrat does not have children, she talks about what she would want for her children. The following themes are tied to the role of the mother.

**Role Model for Children.** For the women in this study being a role model for their children is very important. They want to set a good example for their children and future generations. They believe going to college themselves will help their children follow in their footsteps. Elena explains, “they will see me going to college and doing something for myself, which that is good exposure for them. So, they know that they have to do
something like that if they want to get ahead.” Sofia hopes that her struggles inspire her children to attend college,

My kids always talk to me, mommy when you graduate from school, we will be able to do this and that, and have a house. They are looking forward to all the opportunities. I’m hoping through me, accomplishing that, they will too. Seeing me struggle through all this, that they will say, I want to do good like my mom someday.

Elena and Sofia hope their children learn college is a good thing and follow their example. Manuela wants her children to see she can achieve her degree, “I have three daughters, two adopted and one biological. It is important to me, for them to see me finish what I started. I do want to be an example for them for sure.” For Laura, her inspiration to attend college are her children. She wants her children to realize they can achieve their dreams: “I came back to school because I want to give them a better life and I want to show them that they can make their dreams come true, no matter how big or small they are.” Violeta wants to earn her degree and be able to share with her grandchildren and great grandchildren that it is possible to earn a college degree: “If I can get it, you can get it. That’s what I want to sell to my grandkids and my great grandkids.” Elena, Sofia, Manuela, and Laura hope to inspire and be role models for their children while Violeta aspires to be a role model for her grandchildren and great grandchildren. Although Monserrat is not a mother, she talks about what mothers want to offer their children: “I think more than anything, one of the qualities is we want to provide our children better opportunities and prepare ourselves to get new jobs.” Monserrat describes well what the
women in this study aspire to do, be an example and provide better opportunities for their children.

It is important for the women in this study to be a role model for their children. They believe going to college themselves will help their children follow in their footsteps. For non-traditional women students, their children can be a source of inspiration and motivation (Vaccaro & Lovell, 2010). This is no different for the women in this study. They want to inspire and are inspired by their children to pursue their education. The implication of role responsibilities might be seen by researchers as both, placing a higher burden on women returning to college and for others as a motivator (Osam et al., 2017; Tinto, 1993). In this study, the role of mother, having children and going back to college, is a motivator.

*Children a priority.* For the women in this study, their children are a priority, they are mothers first. Their personal interests, such as schooling, come second. Guadalupe explains, “children are a big thing. Honestly, that is part of the reason why I’ve had to take classes for so long. I would take one or two classes a semester over the years.” Her statement resonates with what Ana says about family over personal interests: “Having family. I think most women; we tend to put our family in front of what we want.” It was important for Ana to be available for her children: “For me, my kids. Being available for them.” As is the case with Sofia, tending to her children comes first, then her schooling: “As far as like, getting assignments done and things like that, it can. It can be pretty difficult at times because I get home and I have to tend to them.” For Manuela who is trying to graduate, school is top priority except for her children, who come first: “this semester I am going full-time, which is twelve credit hours, which is what I needed to
finish up. Everything else except my children is secondary, right now.” Again, although Monserrat does not have children, she talks about the role of the Hispanic mother, “personally, I think that children make a big impact on Latina women, and more because we are ‘querendonas’ (loving) with our family. And we put family first.” Family, and particularly children, come first for this group of women. Although school is important for them, taking care of their children is a priority.

The women in this study are mothers first, their priority is children. Their personal interests come second, in this case their schooling. As they explained, this is the reason why they take one or two classes at a time, to be available for their children, to take care of them. The role of a mother or caregiver comes first, everything else is secondary.

*Challenges with young children.* Participants share the challenge of being a single parent while attending college, being the primary caregiver, and the challenge of having young children. As one can read in the statements below, the responsibility of children falls onto this group of women. Magdalena shared her experience of trying to go to college when she was younger and caring for her daughter:

I was a single mother, so that is what was really hard for me, that I could not do a lot of things that students could do. I could not take evening classes because I had to be home by a certain time to take care of her. So, it does impact a lot when you are trying to complete your degree.

Violeta was also a young mother when she enrolled in college for the first time. She described her situation:“I was a single parent, so I was responsible for my three children. Being the primary caregiver for children while trying to attend college can be challenging.”
It can be difficult to be a single mother and provide for children, while pursuing a college education. Sofia shared,

Having children at a very young age has a huge impact. I think it’s important for people to know that at a young age, if you don’t have children, pursue all that you can as far as education goes. Because once you do have kids and if you are single it is very difficult to make ends meet and be able to provide not only for yourself but your kids.

Elena shared Sofia’s sentiment; it can be challenging “just being a single mother. Ah, trying to provide for the family.” Just as single mothers face challenges, so do married mothers with young children. Sofia, a single mother of three young children, shares her experience: “the youngest definitely needs a lot more of my time. A lot more attention;” and her older children, “they have a lot of chores and they have to be more responsible than what I like them to be. But at this point, they kind of have to take on a role of helping me more.” Laura is married and has three young children:

I’m a mom of three kids so that is a challenge in itself. I have a 1-year-old, a 3-year-old, and a 7-year-old, so having them being so young and still relying on me for so much, that’s definitely a challenge.

As described by Magdalena, Violeta, Elena, Sofia and Laura, being the primary caregiver, single parent, and caring for young children that depend and need close attention from a parent is challenging when trying to a pursue post-secondary education.

Being a single caregiver or primary caregiver of young children imposes challenges for women when trying to pursue their education. The “age of children may well determine the persistence of women” (Fairchild, 2003, p. 12) in post-secondary education (Jacobs &
Berkowitz King, 2002). The age of children or dependents can be associated with higher role conflict and the care of younger children presents higher demands for time (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Fairchild, 2003; Home, 1997). As shared by this group of non-traditional Hispanic women students, young children that depend on a parent demand close attention.

**Role of Wife.**

*Caring for Husband.* Sofia and Manuela shared their experiences being raised to tend to and focus on their husbands’ needs and put aside their personal interests, perpetuating the “Hispanic Culture Mentality” expressed by the participants earlier. Sofia shared,

I think, um, for me, my family really focused me on adhering to what my husband(s) or my husband at the time wanted. What he wanted was best for me. I didn’t have a voice kind of scenario. I was basically developed to be a mother, a wife. Cook and clean, and go to work, but my priority was to make sure he was happy, and my family was taken care of.

Manuela shared her married life experiences with two Hispanic men:

I was married twice to Hispanic men and I don’t think that they really valued me gaining more education. Not that you should depend on them to inspire you, but I think if it’s learned early, then you fall into that. It’s familiar when you get married, right? When that is the culture, women don’t need education. Someone will always take care of you.

Sofia and Manuela expressed “adhering” to their husbands’ desire was the norm.
Magdalena, Violeta, Guadalupe, and Monserrat shared their current roles and expectations as wives and the hardship it places on their schooling. Magdalena shared, “in my free time, I am working at home doing some stuff for Pedro and is a non-stop. It is non-stop.” Violeta shared, “what is hard for me is having the energy to work and go home and take care of my spouse and my home and try to do class.” Guadalupe expressed, “My husband is quadriplegic. Help with him, help at home, help with errands, therapies, all of that and school is very hard.” Guadalupe takes care of her husband. The same goes for Magdalena and Violeta, who not only care for their husbands, but take care of their homes, and this impacts their schooling.

The women in this study shared they have been raised to adhere to the “Hispanic Culture Mentality” of “homemakers” taking care of their family. The message these women received was to care for and support their husbands. Their personal needs become secondary, impacting their education. Non-traditional women students experience higher inter-role conflict, such as family and work responsibilities; this in turn can impact persistence (Markle, 2015; Tinto, 1993). The women in this study place the needs of their family first and their own needs and interests become secondary.

*Role of Employee.* The non-traditional Hispanic women students who participated in this study, all have been employed at some time during their live. At the time the interviews took place, six of the nine participants were working full-time, two were working part-time, and one had stopped working in order to pursue her education. The two women working part-time shared they made that decision so they could focus on their schooling and complete their degree in the spring of 2019. The other six women were
working full-time while attending college, one of those women was working two jobs in order to pay for her tuition.

*Workload.* What follows are their experiences as employees while trying to pursue post-secondary education. Magdalena and Elena expressed having a hard time working a 40-hour work week and 12-hour workday respectively while trying to attend classes.

Magdalena shared:

Is very hard for me, especially with the 40-hour week job. That’s hard for me. I have to make the time for myself to take the classes. I think it’s a little bit harder as being a non-traditional student and working full-time.

Elena explained,

I would work twelve-hour days, and I was so exhausted by the time I got home and then trying to get to school, and find time for homework, it was just…it was tough, but it’s nice if you are able to do it.

Violeta shared the demands of having a full-time job and how that impacts her schooling. Violeta expressed,

There are times, especially if your job is the type of job that you can go sometimes, but not all the time. And so, you have days you miss class and that becomes an issue where you are missing too much class and you can’t catch up.

For Guadalupe not only working full-time but tending to family can be challenging.

Guadalupe shared,

I would say if you have family or a career it’s really hard to get through school, to finish. You have so many obstacles as it is with school, it’s so demanding. And then you have those parts of your life that are as important, it’s hard to find the balance.
Ana found that it was helpful to attend classes on the weekend while working full-time:

I was fortunate when I did those multi-credit hour semesters. That is when we had the Learning Center open here in Raton, and so typically those classes were held on weekends: Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and so that is when I went. It saved me from missing work, of course.

Having a full-time job while attending post-secondary education can be challenging as Magdalena, Elena, Violeta, and Guadalupe expressed. For Ana taking classes on the weekends was helpful. Manuela shared the sentiments described by Magdalena, Elena, Violeta, and Guadalupe. She decided to work part-time in order to complete her education:

And now over the last two years, I’ve worked part-time. I was working three days a week up to last summer and a couple of weeks ago I took a job that is only 20 hours a week and is only to the end of April, so part-time temporary. So, that brings in money and is a weight on my shoulders. This semester I am going full-time, which is twelve credit hours, which is what I needed to finish up.

In contrast, Monserrat has two jobs in order to attend post-secondary education. She explained,

I have two jobs. I can't take full-time classes because I have two jobs, my family, my husband, that's what keeps me from being full time. I do not qualify for scholarships, so that's why I have two jobs, one to pay my bills and another to pay for classes.

All the women in this study work or have worked at some time during their post-secondary education. Magdalena, Elena, Violeta, Guadalupe, Ana, Manuela and Monserrat,
deal with different challenges with their roles as employees while trying to pursue their education, from finding time for themselves to take classes, finding a balance, and working however many hours they need to complete their education.

Working a 40-hour work week or more impacts persistence in post-secondary education. For non-traditional women students, “paid employment, whether full time or part time, decreases the chances of finishing” completing post-secondary education (Jacobs & Berkowitz King, 2002, p. 222). Finding time to work on homework assignments while working full-time is a challenge for non-traditional Hispanic women students. Finding alternatives, such as taking courses on the weekends, can aid with persistence to degree attainment. Working part-time while attending post-secondary education can aid with persistence to degree attainment, unfortunately, that is not an option for all non-traditional students.

*Role of Student.* As noted, all the women in this study are considered non-traditional students, however when they talk about themselves only four of the nine participants describe themselves as either a student or non-traditional student. Magdalena stated, “I have to put myself in those shoes and actually try to… be a student.” Violeta, Laura, and Manuela see themselves as non-traditional students, but then again, they do not identify with their traditional student peers. Laura has hard time relating to her traditional college age peers:

> I think that the fact that I’m not a traditional student has been very challenging. I see my peers and they live on campus, and they have the normal college student life, and I don’t. I don’t at all. Mine is very different, compare to their lives. They eat at the cafeteria, they study at the library, they participate in campus activities,
and I don’t do any of that. I come to work, I come to class, and at five o’clock I leave, and I go home, and I do my homework at home. My experience is a lot different than traditional students.

Manuela sees herself more as mother or mentor for her peers. She explained, “I do describe myself as the non-traditional student. Now, I feel more like a mom or a mentor in the class.” Violeta has a hard time thinking of herself as a student. She finds, “It’s just hard being a non-traditional student because you are not just focused on going to school, is too many things and I still find that to this day.” For these women it is challenging to see themselves or describe themselves as either a student or non-traditional student and be able to relate to their peers.

All the women in this study are considered non-traditional students. However, not all the women in this study refer to themselves as students. The women in this study have a hard time identifying with and relating to their traditional college age peers. This is associated with the fact that these women attend classes, but do not participate in other college activities as their traditional college age peers. The different roles played by non-traditional/adult learner students demand their focus, time, and attention (Choy, 2002; Fairchild, 2003; Jacobs & Berkowitz King, 2002; Quimby & O’Brien, 2004; Tinto, 1993). Non-traditional women students have different responsibilities and play different roles, such as mothers or caregivers, wives, employees; those roles supersede the role of student.

Time to be a student. The women in this study take on other roles besides being students. They are mothers or caregivers, wives, employees; as such they must find time for all responsibilities. Time constraints can create feelings of anxiety, which can, in turn, lead to stress (Markle, 2015). The women described their challenge of finding time in the
day to be students, to attend classes, and work on school tasks. Sofia explained, “And just finding time in general, there is a lack of time every day, every day.” For Manuela and Guadalupe, it helps to think about organizing their time. Manuela emphasized, “so, you have to be good about time management. But making yourself and your school a priority, so it’s a balancing act.” Guadalupe echoed Manuela’s sentiment: “I just schedule everything. I try to stay on that schedule and when something else comes into play into my world, gosh, sometimes things have to be re-scheduled.” However, Monserrat shared she is having a hard time organizing her time, pointing out “scheduling is very difficult too. It is difficult because you have to become familiar with technology, homework, books, and find the right time, because honestly for me sometimes it’s difficult and I don’t have children.”

Time management as described by the participants can be challenging.

Magdalena, Elena, and Violeta talked about finding time to take classes and to complete homework. Magdalena stated,

I have to make the time for myself to take the classes. To complete what I’m doing and taking the classes, and I have to make time as well, to do assignments, and study, and to do quizzes, and stuff like that.

Elena echoed what Magdalena shared: “trying to get to school, and find time for homework, it was just…it was tough.” Violeta has “a hard time with the idea” that she “can’t get it done,” because she wants “to go to class.” Ana described taking a break from school and finding solace in waiting to return to school when her children were older and having the time to go to school:

There is a point where I was taking fifteen, eighteen, while working full-time and raising three kids. But it was rough. I took about a six-year break. But it was easier,
too. Easier for me to persist because I had time to clear my mind. I had time to do other things that I wanted and needed to do.

For Ana, it was easier to return to post-secondary education when her children were older, and she had the time to be a student.

The women in this study play different roles and it is challenging for them to take the time to be a student. The role of a student demands time to attend class, prepare for class, and work on homework. The women mentioned limited time availability and having a hard time organizing themselves due to their many responsibilities. In order to take the time to be a student, this group of non-traditional Hispanic women students stated having to manage and schedule time.

Age to be a student. During the interviews, all the women in this study refer to their age compared to their traditional student peers. Six of the nine women referred to feeling “old” and overwhelmed, while three participants embraced their age and felt more confident. Magdalena and Violetha respectively expressed “having to study a little bit harder” and “not been able to keep up.” Magdalena shared, “I’m going to be honest, it’s not easy being my age. I don’t know if it is because of my age or what, but I have to study a little bit harder than others.” Violetha explained,

I get tired, I’m older. I don’t have that anymore. Sometimes, I want to do nothing.

So, I try to go to class. Right now, I registered for a class and I have not been able to keep up and I’m like, ugh, here it goes again.

Sofia and Laura described feeling out of place and not been able to relate to their traditional student peers. Sofia feels “old, not fitting in with, I guess what I would consider the average age of campus students.” Laura substantiated Sofia’s sentiment,
I guess my goals in life and my responsibilities are different from my peers, they are a lot younger than me and they view life differently than I do. And so that can be challenging sometimes, because I don’t really relate to my classmates on any other level besides being in the same class with them.

Sofia and Laura find it hard to relate to their peers because of their age, this is comparable to Laura’s sentiment who expressed, “my goals in life and my responsibilities are different from my peers.” Laura and Monserrat compare themselves in terms of their responsibilities and the perception they have of traditional college age students and their responsibilities. Monserrat stated, “and less when one faces young people who have the time to take four classes in one day. While you have to take it slowly, for everything I said, family, husband, work, economic.” Sofia, Laura, and Monserrat find it difficult to relate to their peers because of the perception they have of age and the difference in responsibilities between them and traditional college age students.

Elena expressed negative feeling towards herself because of her age, while Ana, Manuela, and Guadalupe acknowledged their age, but found the positive in attending post-secondary education as non-traditional students. Elena elaborated, “I was also nervous, you know, going back to school at an older age. I felt stupid, because all these young kids are going to school and I felt older, I felt very stupid.” Contrasting Elena’s perception of herself, Ana stated,

You know, as you age your center of confidence is just different and I think that makes a big difference too. You know, I was like, I can do whatever I choose to do at any time, so here I go. Delaying enrollment impact my persistence, just because my confidence was higher.
Guadalupe voiced, “I think there is a level of intimidation, and for me, I have not felt intimidated or held back from going to school because of my age, it’s a goal.” Manuela who also thinks of herself as old feels like a “mom” and a “mentor” to other students shared a positive take on being a non-traditional student. She exclaimed, “we would need to instill that women of that age or older age, have valuable input into your classes.” Ana, Guadalupe and Manuela have a different perception of their age and what they can accomplish and share with their peers than Elena. Non-traditional students possess valuable experiences that can be shared with all students in the classroom regardless of age.

The women in this study compared themselves to other students in relation to their age. Some of the women stated having difficulty keeping up with the traditional college age students and having to place more effort in their studies. The women also shared feeling out of place and not being able to relate to their student peers because of their different role responsibilities. Non-traditional Hispanic women students’ responsibilities impact the way they feel in relation to their peers, traditional college age students. Some of the non-traditional Hispanic women students, because of their age, feel they possess valuable experiences that can be shared with other students in the classroom.

**Finances.**

*Sources of Aid.* As Magdalena, Violeta, Elena, Monserrat, and Guadalupe expressed, financial responsibilities can put a strain on attending a post-secondary institution and can impact persistence to degree attainment. Magdalena and Violeta both explained that it makes it easier to enroll in post-secondary education when the place of work helps with tuition. Magdalena stated, “I’m not able to take the classes that I need.
Unless, like [place of work] is paying for me” to attend post-secondary education. Violeta echoed Magdalena’s sentiment, “for those of us that work at [place of work] and are non-traditional, it’s easier for us to come to school because we do have it as a benefit.” Elena believes, “It’s good to find a job that is going to pay for your tuition.” As Magdalena, Violeta, and Elena stated it is advantageous if the place of work helps cover tuition for post-secondary education.

Elena and Monserrat found having someone help pay for tuition can impact in a positive way their focus on attending post-secondary education. Elena expressed, “if you have resources, if you have people that help you, it is a good way to go if you can focus on school, then you have more time to focus on your kids than school.” Monserrat corroborated,

If I had another option, if I had a scholarship, or a person who would help me economically to pay for my college, I would have the time to study for the exams and take time and not worry about tomorrow, or how I'm going to pay for school or things like that. I think taking courses part-time puts a strain.

Magdalena, Violeta, Elena, and Monserrat find it beneficial if the place of work or someone helps pay for tuition. As Guadalupe confidently stated,

College is expensive and if you don’t get financial aid or anything you have to come up with the money to pay for your classes and everything. Finances are kind of like the ticket to be able to be successful with college. If you don’t have money, it’s hard to get through college.

The non-traditional Hispanic women students who participated in this study are financially responsible for their families and children. Finances can impact adult learners’
persistence (Fairchild, 2003; Tinto 1993). The women in this study expressed having financial responsibilities that put a strain on attending college. Financial concern impacts persistence to degree attainment of non-traditional Hispanic women students. This group of non-traditional Hispanic women students shared that having financial resources or aid, such as scholarships, and tuition waivers from the place of employment is beneficial.

*Tuition and Books.* Throughout the interviews, the women in this study talked about finances impacting their access to education. Magdalena, Violeta, Laura, and Sofia expressed having to save up money specifically to pay for tuition and books. Magdalena emphasized, “I need to save up money. I need to save up money just to pay for the classes that I need.” Violeta said, “When you have to order a book in my case, sometimes I have to make sure I have the finances to buy the book.” For Sofia, a single mother of three children, to pay for tuition “out of pocket” is a “struggle.” She explained,

I have had to pay for the last few semesters out of pocket and it’s been a struggle. It definitely has been hard, especially with my kids. I’ve had to really cut back on a lot. Trying to pay an additional 2,900 every few months is a lot for a single person with kids. But I’m managing to get through it.

Laura who is married and has three children finds paying for tuition and books an additional burden. She told me, “My husband and I both work and we have a household to run. We have three kids and on top of that paying for tuition and books.” The women in this study are at different stages in their lives and have different family responsibilities, nonetheless, finances play a role in their access to education.
Ana and Guadalupe find ways to explain why paying for tuition out of pocket is a good thing. Ana explains attending post-secondary education as a non-traditional student is easier if the person has financial stability:

I have been very fortunate. I was able to pay as I went, pay as I go, that type of thing. So, I was very fortunate. So that is one good thing about entering the program or a program late, you are a little bit more financially stable.

Guadalupe finds paying for tuition out of pocket a “motivator.” She said, “When you pay out of your own pocket, and you don’t have scholarships, I mean that in itself is a motivator.”

Monserrat described having two jobs in order to pay for tuition. She does not qualify for scholarships” and as result she has “two jobs, one to pay my bills and another to pay for classes.” Having someone pay for tuition, as in Elena’s case, can be helpful. Elena depends on her fiancé to pay for tuition and books: “He is helping me. He is paying for my tuition and my books. That is pretty much all the help I have right now.” It is a burden on a person having to work two jobs to pay for tuition; in contrast, it can help if someone contributes funds for tuition and books.

For the non-traditional Hispanic women that participated in this study, finances impact their access to education. Having to pay for tuition and books “out of pocket” places an additional concern and financial burden on the women. Financial stability and financial support allow access to post-secondary education.

Financial Concern. Magdalena, Elena, Violeta, and Manuela described how lack of financial resources concerns Hispanic non-traditional women students. Madgalena exclaimed, “Oh my God! I think more is also money… money is a big thing for Hispanics.
She continued, “Ahh… Just because, I mean, we don’t… I mean we are not living in a big city. We are not living where we make a lot of money. It’s very challenging, especially when you are from a small town.” Violeta echoed Magdalena’s concern:

The biggest one is finance. Finance, and if it is maybe an issue with getting to campus, or maybe not having internet, not having a computer. Those things are critical. Because in our area, we are very low income, people don’t have access.

Elena described her poor upbringing and her concerns about paying for post-secondary education: “You know coming from an upbringing of not being wealthy, I mean, I grew up very poor. Then trying to figure out, well, how am I going to pay for my studies, for my school?” Elena and Manuela described how Pell Grants helped them start post-secondary education, but then having to borrow money. Elena and Manuela both got student loans in order to continue with their education as non-traditional students. The women shared the hardship of paying the loans long after they graduate. Elena told me,

Uhm, the help that I got from them started off with the Pell Grants or some of the grants, but then after that, I ended up getting student loans, which was the biggest mistake! Especially (laughs nervously) when you have an A.A. and then you have this 35,000 U.S. dollar loan or whatever. But, it is like, you go to school for so many years and then you get this student loans, and then is like, you are paying for student loans for the rest of your life, so what’s the point, you know?

Manuela expressed similar concerns:

For me in order to finish this and fortunately, I’m grateful for Pell Grants, but it didn’t pay for everything, I took out loans. So, I’m going to be paying on those for
a while, and that is really hard because it sets you back for your future or your family, and that is always weighing on the back of your mind.

Both Elena and Manuela took out student loans. Elena felt discouraged about having borrowed a large sum of money to earn her A.A. and continuing with post-secondary education. Manuela has trouble with the impact student loans will have on her future and family. This was a choice Elena and Manuela made in order to continue with their education and attend post-secondary education.

Financial concerns impact access to education, which in turn can impact adult learners’ persistence (Fairchild, 2003; Tinto 1993). Non-traditional Hispanic women students living in low-income communities find it difficult to attend post-secondary education. Returning to college presents financial barriers for women who are tied to different role responsibilities (Osam et al., 2017). Financial aid such as Pell Grants provide access to education. However, when Pell Grants are no longer a possibility, non-traditional Hispanic women have difficulty accessing education. Although student loans are an option to access education, incurring student loans places a burden on students in this case non-traditional Hispanic women students.

**Social Support.** An individual’s persistence to graduation has been linked to different factors including social support (Bergman et al., 2014; Tinto, 1993). The non-traditional Hispanic women students who participated in this study explained the importance of receiving emotional support from family and friends, while on the path to degree attainment.
Family.

Significant other: Of the nine women that participated in this study, six mentioned having the support of their significant other while they attend post-secondary education. Magdalena, Elena, Violeta, Ana, Laura, and Guadalupe shared how their significant other provides support. Some women are encouraged to continue with their education as is the case of Magdalena and Elena. In the case of Violeta and Ana, their spouses respect their space as students. Laura’s spouse helps with household chores and Guadalupe’s spouse supports her goal of attending and completing her degree.

Magdalena and Elena shared words of encouragement from their significant other. Magdalena said her husband tells her, “show all those other non-traditional older Hispanic women that, if you can do it, they can do it too.” Elena receives words of encouragement from her fiancé, “school is a good thing to do if you want to get ahead.” It is important for Elena that her fiancé supports her, she shared, “he believes in me. And he is absolutely right. If I want to get ahead, I’m going to get back in school and get my degree.” Words of encouragement are important for Magdalena and Elena.

Violeta and Ana’s spouses make sure their wives have space to be students. Violeta described, “He will do whatever he needs to help me with, to get to class, to give me the time to do it, to provide the space.” Ana shared, “my husband makes sure I have a quiet place so I can go do this. He is just cool.” Both women feel supported by their spouses.

Laura and Guadalupe’s spouses provide support in different ways. Laura’s spouse helps at home and she said, “my husband is also a great support for me, uhm, he helps me at home, so that is nice.” Guadalupe’s spouse supports her goal of attending post-secondary education: “I have my husband who supports me in the sense that, he knows I want to get it
done, that this is a goal that I have.” All six women receive support from their significant other to attend post-secondary education.

Non-traditional Hispanic women students receive emotional support and instrumental support from their significant other. In this case, non-traditional Hispanic women students receive emotional support through words of encouragement and receive instrumental support in terms of space to be a student. It is important for non-traditional Hispanic women to perceive their significant other is proud of them and supports their goal on the path to degree attainment.

*Parents.* Sofia, Manuela, and Laura mentioned receiving support from their parents. Sofia and Manuela had shared not been encouraged to attend post-secondary education when they were growing up. As the women became older, non-traditional students, their parents understood education was important to them. Both Sofia and Manuela share how their parents encourage them. Sofia explained,

You know, what is interesting is, initially my parents didn’t support me, coming to college. My father has really let down his walls a lot. I think, just him seeing me grow as an individual, finally in my thirties, he is finally seeing I’m capable of doing what he could do. I’m capable of being better for myself and my kids without a man, you know. He’s really let down his wall. He is excited for me. So, he’s really… he had a stroke, he went through a lot. He still talks to me about it all the time, always asking me how I’m doing and encouraging me, and that’s really help me a lot too.

Manuela shared nowadays she receives support from her parents:
Now my mom will text me and say, *I know you are studying, so I’m not going to bother you today*, so that is very supportive. So, I love hearing from her and knowing that her and my dad are okay. She gives me my time, my time to study.

Both women shared with joy how their parents encourage and support their goal of attending post-secondary education. Laura also receives support from her parents. She is a first-generation student, she told me, “…so that is really big for my family. It’s very important to my family and to myself, to be here.” Her parents also help take care of her children while she attends post-secondary education. Laura explained, “My parents help me a lot. They help me by picking up my kids from school, they watch them until I get out of work, or if I need to study for a test, they will watch them.”

It is important for these non-traditional Hispanic women students to perceive their parents are proud of their education and it is important to receive emotional support from their parents.

*Children.* Even though eight of the nine women have children, only Magdalena and Ana reported receiving support from their children. Magdalena’s daughter tells her, “*if I can do it mom, you can do it.*” Ana’s daughters are “emotionally supportive and verbally supportive.”

*Friends.*

*Friends and Mentors.* Magdalena, Elena, Manuela, and Laura mentioned having other people besides family encourage them to continue with post-secondary education. For Elena and Manuela, encouragement comes from women friends. Magdalena has a women supervisor; she is the person outside her family that encourages her to persist. Laura shared having found good support in her friends.
Elena and Manuela reported receiving support from their women friends. For Elena, having met strong women that have earned post-secondary degrees and are thinking of changes for themselves is encouraging:

Now, as far as mentally, like with encouraging, I do have a couple of friends that I started going to yoga, that are pretty encouraging. We are middle age women, some of them have degrees, some have Masters, they are talking about making career changes themselves. I think we have hit an age in our lives when it’s time to make some changes, it’s just strange going through that.

For Manuela, having strong women friends that support her decision to continue with post-secondary education is valuable:

For me, I had a couple of strong women friends, a best friend that is an entrepreneur herself, so that was very helpful. And she kind of has a strong attitude, which is nice like don’t you let him tell you...and yes, you can do it. And so she cheered me on, you don’t need a man, you can do it on your own, you don’t need his support, if that is what you want to do and that is what makes you happy then you should move forward with it.

Magdalena has found support from her female supervisor who helps her see the finish line:

My supervisor, she gives me a lot of support. She tells me Magdalena you need to finish your degree. You are going to take this as one of your goals. So, she kind of pushes me and tells me you are going to finish, and you are going to get your degree. You are not far from finishing.
Laura shared not only having support from family to earn her degree, but also having support from friends. Laura told me, “I think that I have a great support system in place, both by my family and my friends. I’ve surrounded myself with a great group of people who support me and who push me.” Having a support system is important for Laura, she can count on them when she is having a difficult time:

If I’m having a bad day or if, you know, there are days when I do feel like giving up, I know that I can call anyone of them, and they will talk to me and get me through it.

It is important for all four women, Elena, Manuela, Magdalena, and Laura, to have not only family, but also friends, encourage them on their path to degree attainment. Non-traditional Hispanic women students find value in emotional support from friends and mentors. The emotional support they receive is through words of encouragement. Receiving encouragement from other women, who have post-secondary degrees and who non-traditional women students perceive as strong role models, motivates them to persist and stay on the path to degree attainment.

Overall, it is important for non-traditional Hispanic women students to receive emotional support from family and friends. In this case, non-traditional Hispanic women students receive emotional support from their significant other, parents, children, friends and mentors. Strong levels of social support strengthen non-traditional women students’ confidence “in managing the responsibilities associated with being a student and pursuing tasks related to advancing vocational development” (Quimby & O'Brien, 2004, p. 334). For this group of women, their greatest supporters are their significant other. As Plageman and Sabina (2010) established, "having the emotional support of a significant other was
positively and significantly related to instrumental assistance, financial assistance, the perception that the significant other was proud of them, and the belief that school involvement had a positive influence on the family” (p. 162). Receiving emotional support from family and friends is a positive reinforcer for non-traditional Hispanic women students on the path to degree attainment.

The University. As stated in the literature, the success of Hispanic women students, traditional and non-traditional, can be in part attributed to the support system universities provide (Arana et al., 2011; Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016; Marine, 2012). This is no different for this group of non-traditional Hispanic women students; faculty and staff provide support on their path to degree attainment.

Institutional Support. I asked participants about the support they receive from the university that impacts their persistence to degree attainment. Most of the participants mentioned receiving support from faculty and only a few mentioned receiving support from staff.

Faculty. Magdalena, Elena, Violeta, Sofia, Laura, Manuela, Guadalupe and Monserrat described receiving support from the faculty at NMHU. Only Ana did not mention receiving support from faculty. Those who received support from the faculty reported feeling comfortable with their professors. Yet, two also stated having encountered faculty members that were not as receptive to their needs.

Magdalena and Monserrat expressed receiving support from faculty and being able to ask questions. Magdalena explained, “they are also there for me 100 percent no matter what. I feel that the faculty are always there for you no matter what type of questions you have.” Monserrat shared Magdalena’s sentiment. She has rapport with one of her
professors: “I have contact with a teacher, who was the first teacher I had since I started school at Highlands. She is the one that guides me. If I have a question, she guides me more.” It is important for Monserrat and Guadalupe to feel supported by their faculty and be able to ask questions. Guadalupe shares Magdalena’s sentiment; when she needs help with her classes, she reaches out to the faculty: “If I need help with classes, I go straight to the instructor and get my tutoring there.” The same goes for Laura, who can reach out to the faculty when she has concerns with classes:

I feel like I am really connected with my professors, so I’m able to reach out to them if I have a problem or if I’m struggling. I’m in the [department] so everyone there has been helpful, and they are all really good there.

Laura finds the faculty to be helpful and so does Violeta. For Violeta it is important to build a relationship with her professors. She finds the faculty to be more helpful if they have a relationship with her. Violeta stated,

I either know the faculty member or I get to know them, and we have a relationship beyond just my professor and myself. We are acquainted, we get to know each other. And they are more willing to work with you and to help you get through and to me that is really a big plus.

For Sofia as with Violeta, it is important to feel comfortable and have a relationship with her professors:

The teachers have always made me feel very comfortable. As far as the teachers themselves, I’ve got to know a lot of them really well. And having that, I guess, I could say is somewhat support just getting to know them and them speaking with
me on personal issues, that has helped me. A lot of the professors have worked with me, so that was supportive.

For Manuela, as with Violeta and Sofia, it is important to be supported at a personal level. It is important that her professors know her and follow her career path. Manuela shared:

Having a professor that knows your name, and this is what I like about Highlands, knows your name, follows your career path, is really, really nice. It makes you feel supported; it makes you feel good. They are proud of you and what you can accomplish.

It is important for Manuela to have support from faculty, she believes that would be helpful for other non-traditional women students like herself. Manuela told me, “I think our non-traditional students need that. And they may lack the pat on the back at home.”

Elena and Monserrat shared the importance of feeling supported by faculty and the impression unsupportive faculty can have on them. Elena reported,

I’ve had some teachers that are very… they care about the students and they want to make sure they are understanding, and I appreciate those teachers. So, having mentors like that, teachers that encourage you makes such a big difference.

Monserrat shares Elena’s sentiment:

As a student, I think, I have been very fortunate to encounter teachers who have been able to understand my situation. They give me a chance to express myself with my accent. Some teachers have been able to orient me very well. Have been able to value my culture, my traditions, have respected my "background" as one says.
It is important for Elena and Sofia to have professors that understand their needs and provide support. Encountering unsupportive faculty makes it difficult for them as Elena and Monserrat explained. Elena put it this way, “but I’ve also been exposed to teachers that… don’t really care and I’m just like, ugh, how am I supposed to understand?” Monserrat echoed this sentiment:

There are some who don’t (care), there are teachers who give one a face. One has to go out and learn that this is life, that one is going to bump into people, that will close doors and that is adult life.

Elena and Monserrat shared feel disheartened by professors that are not in tune with their students’ needs. However, it makes a difference for Monserrat and Elena to feel supported by their professors as is the case with Magdalena, Violeta, Sofia, Laura, Manuela, and Guadalupe.

For these non-traditional Hispanic women students, receiving and perceiving that faculty at NMHU support their needs as students is essential. Plageman and Sabina (2010), stated, “instructors are in a unique position because for adult students, their time in the classroom makes up the majority of time that is spent on campus” (p. 165). It is important for non-traditional Hispanic women students to have positive relationships with the faculty, to feel supported at a personal level, and to be able to reach out to faculty with concerns regarding college courses. It is important for non-traditional Hispanic women student that faculty know them by name and understand their personal needs as students. Encountering unsupportive faculty members who are not in-tune with students’ needs and not willing to provide support can make non-traditional Hispanic women students feel discouraged. For
non-traditional Hispanic women students, receiving support and perceiving that faculty care impacts their persistence on the path to degree attainment.

**Staff:** Ana, Sofia, and Monserrat mentioned receiving support from the staff at NMHU. Ana receives support from staff: “If I seek it out, then I get the support that I’m seeking. Whether it’s in one of the administration offices or whatever it maybe.” Sofia and Monserrat both find the staff to be helpful. Sofia told me, “the staff has always been very helpful. Which has helped with why I continued to push forward.” Monserrat has had similar experiences: “the staff has always been very friendly; you must go at specific hours to be able to answer questions. If they have helped me, they have helped me, they have been very helpful to me.” Monserrat mentioned that she can get help during office hours.

Monserrat and Sofia shared on the importance of receiving support from staff. Monserrat noted, “Mr. Ford is one of the people, who when I go to the Rio Rancho campus, has always been attentive and answers any of my questions. Despite not being a counselor.” Sofia emphasized:

I really do appreciate the staff that has helped me, to just kind a keep pushing me regardless of all of my unfortunate circumstances. I have been able to form some good relationships, so I’m happy to walk away with that and continue on.

It is important for Monserrat and Sofia to feel they have a relationship with the staff, this gives them a sense that people care about them. Monserrat mentioned, “I had a counselor and we met every month to see where I was, what to follow.” Monserrat had formed a relationship with her college advisor which was helpful to her. She continued,
When they changed her it became a headache, because I send emails to like four people at the same time to ask for help, ask for information, to find or grab a form that I can't find online, it's hard.

It was difficult for Monserrat when the university assigned her a different advisor. Monserrat had lost the sense of care, which was important to her. The participants in this study find the staff at NMHU to be attentive and willing to help. It is important that staff at NMHU demonstrate a sense of care for non-traditional Hispanic women students because this can contribute to their retention and completion. Supportive faculty, staff, and university support programs enhance the likelihood that students persist and pursue their post-secondary education (Arana et al., 2011; Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016).

**Technology.** Elena, Violeta, Ana, Manuela, Guadalupe, and Monserrat mentioned the challenges of learning how to use and keep up with new and advanced technology and how it can be intimidating. Elena and Violeta expressed having to “learn over” or “take a computer class” to get up to date and current with technology. Elena told me, “trying to learn over again it’s like, the new technologies, the advances, I mean there is so much change. It’s like trying to get yourself current with everything, so you can be current with everyone else in organizations.” Violeta clarified:

I know, if you have not been in the workforce for the last twenty years you don’t know anything about it. You want to come back and try to go to school, is like you have to take a computer class as well to get to know what you need to do.

Monserrat described the difficulties her “older” peers experience with technology noting, “I have some older classmates in school who are having a harder time with
technology.” For Monserrat it is intimidating to attend classes with “younger” students who she thinks are more advanced in technology:

I think going back to school is hard. It's hard because of age. Because in the classes, maybe not online, but when we go to classes face-to-face, we find young people who are more updated in technology, that are younger. So, we are brave to return to school.

Ana, Manuela, and Guadalupe focused on learning to adapt to changes in instruction, finding Zoom (online modality) intimidating at first, but embracing it later. Ana described her experience over time as a non-traditional student, adapting to different instruction modalities:

I’m in [place], and at one time Highlands had a satellite here, there were a handful of life instructors, you know, in a classroom setting with a person to person instructor and then there were a lot of ITV classes, which have now turn into the Zoom classes. So, my last go has all been just through Zoom, which is fine. I had to learn how to navigate that system a little bit because I was not that familiar on how all that worked, but I figured it out. I think technology can definitely be a barrier for folks.

Adapting to instructional changes as Ana shared, including the Zoom (online modality) can be intimidating at first. Manuela found this to be true: “Even learning how to use Zoom, it’s not hard, but it’s a little intimidating if you have never done it before.”

Adapting to technology can be a challenge, however attending classes online via Zoom sometimes is the best option for non-traditional students, as Guadalupe expressed:
Because of my situation with my husband I like to do as many online classes as possible, and thank God for that, because it would probably have been one of the impediments, of not being successful, it would have been one of the weaknesses of me seeing this through.

Guadalupe feels confident in her ability to “maneuver” Zoom: “I’m also not a traditional on-campus person either. Just my life, I can’t do it. I don’t maneuver the campus; I maneuver the Zoom. I do that pretty well.” Although challenging and intimidating, online classes allowed Ana, Manuela, and Guadalupe to attend classes and pursue their education.

It can be challenging to learn how to use and keep up to date with new and established technology. Some of the programs developed by for-profit institutions include “Adult Credit Programs,” “accelerated learning,” and “adult degree programs” (Ross-Gordon, 2011, p. 26). For non-traditional Hispanic women students, adapting to instructional changes from the traditional classroom set up to the Zoom classroom (online modality) can be intimidating at first, but they learned to embrace it later. For these women, attending classes online via Zoom might be the only opportunity they have to attend post-secondary education because of their many responsibilities. Distance learning is a viable option to address the needs of non-traditional students.

Language. Elena and Monserrat speak Spanish as their first language, resulting in their experiencing difficulties as they attend post-secondary education. Elena feels self-conscious about her Spanish accent and speech. She told me, “one of my barriers is, I have an accent sometimes, or sometimes, I am not able to articulate things well.” Monserrat found it challenging to attend college: “more than anything it took me time to go back to
school, because English is not my first language. I had to spend four years studying English.” Monserrat had to overcome her challenge. She feels “courageous” when she does presentations “in front” of her peers. She explains, “I say courageous, because the fact that English is not my first language, and I stand in front of the class to expose (present) with my accent, just as I do online, is difficult.” Monserrat and Elena are conscious of their Spanish accent; as each explained, this can be a “barrier” or “difficult” for them.

Monserrat exclaimed:

For me it is extra-work to complete an essay because of the spelling, because I must take it twice to the tutors for reviewing. If I must turn in a paper the following week, I must start with the paper three weeks before, so I can finish it and the paper is to my satisfaction.

Although only two of the nine participants in this study speak Spanish as their first language and faced struggles with the English language while attending post-secondary education, it is important to consider their experience. The academic and social integration of undergraduate students impacts persistence (Maestas, Vasqueras, & Muñoz, 2007; Miller Brown, 2002). Although this is the shared experience of two participants, other non-traditional Hispanic women students enrolled at NMHU might experience similar challenges. The two non-traditional Hispanic women students stated feeling self-conscious about their Spanish accent and speech, and one of them, having to study and learn English for several years before attempting post-secondary education.

**Self-Efficacy.** These non-traditional Hispanic women students shared feelings of self-assurance, confidence in their abilities to succeed and persist on the path to degree attainment. People with high self-efficacy have confidence in themselves and in their
ability to succeed (Frank, 2015). However, a few women also shared feelings of doubt, lack of confidence in their abilities. People with low self-efficacy avoid uncertainty and taking risks, because of their fear of failure (Frank, 2015). The feelings of self-doubt these women shared were associated with the perception they have of age. As stated by Quimby and O’Brien (2004), “non-traditional college women often underestimate their skills and ability to succeed in college” (p. 323). In this case, the women who expressed feelings of self-doubt are close to finishing; they are only few classes away from completing their undergraduate degree.

**Self-Assurance/Confidence.** Magdalena, Elena, Ana, Laura, Manuela, Guadalupe, and Monserrat used language that expressed confidence in their abilities. Believing in their abilities helps them continue with their post-secondary education. Magdalena explained, “I know, I know as much as the younger kids and that is what keeps me going basically, with being a student here.” Magdalena compares herself to the younger students, she believes she knows as much as them and assures herself, “even if it is just one or two classes per semester, I will finish hopefully.”

Elena realizes, she will have “more opportunities” with a degree. Elena assures herself the decision to attend post-secondary education was a positive one: “I know that what I am doing is for a better future for all of us. I know now with a degree; I will have a lot more opportunities. Doors will open up for me.” Manuela feels “confident” in her abilities and what she has learned. She told me, “I have felt, at work, confident and knowledgeable in my skills and what I’ve learned and what I can bring to a corporation.” Just as Elena, Manuela feels “confident” in her abilities and her decision to continue with her education. For Manuela her education is for her self-growth, saying, “It’s more for ME,
is something that can never be taken away, and so I share that.” For Madgalena, Elena, and Manuela assuring themselves about their abilities and decision to continue with their education helps them persist.

Ana and Laura have different views on delaying enrollment in post-secondary education. However, both women are confident they can persist. Ana demonstrates confidence in herself: “I can do whatever I choose to do at any time. Delaying enrollment impact my persistence, just because my confidence was higher.” Ana feels confident in her abilities and is confident she will persist. For Laura the realization that it is taking her longer to complete her degree is upsetting: “It is hard that it is taking me so long and I kinda get mad at myself over it sometimes, but I know that I’m doing the best that I can to get there.” Laura assures herself, she is “doing the best” she can to persist and obtain her degree.

For Guadalupe and Monserrat, seeing other women pursue their post-secondary education helps boost their confidence and determination to persist, despite the hardships. Guadalupe shared,

I see other women, and I say hey, they are doing it, I think, I just have to find a way. Just the struggle makes you want more. You think, yes this is hard, but in spite of that, I know the end result, so you just see that determination in Hispanic women, that they want better, they want more.

Guadalupe is determined to complete her post-secondary education. Monserrat assures herself she can move forward in life with an education, stating:

As long as you continue to prepare yourself mentally and learn new things, you will go forward in life, and you will know new things, not everything is lost. I think,
that education is super important, not just finishing high school, but going on and then being able to help others so they can do something positive with their lives.

Monserrat is determined to complete her post-secondary education and help other people do the same. Magdalena, Elena, Ana, Laura, Manuela, Guadalupe, and Monserrat expressed confidence in their abilities and their decision to attend post-secondary education, they are determined to persist with their post-secondary education.

Seven of the nine non-traditional Hispanic women students in this study expressed confidence in their abilities and they intend to persist with their post-secondary education. This “self-determination plays a large part in women’s lives who undertake education in adulthood” (Plageman & Sabina, 2010, p. 164). The language they used to describe their abilities impacts their decision to stay on the path to degree attainment. These women perceive they will have more opportunities and be able to offer more to employers. The women expressed optimism in their decision to pursue a college degree, despite enrolling in post-secondary education later in life.

**Self-doubt/Lack of Confidence.** Although, Magdalena and Elena believe their abilities help them continue with their post-secondary education and know post-secondary education will lead to better opportunities, they also shared feelings of self-doubt. Non-traditional women students might not feel prepared to embark on the challenge to continue with their post-secondary education (Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016). The feelings of self-doubt Magdalena and Elena share are associated with the perception they have of age. Magdalena explained, “Sometimes I feel like I am too old to be here in school, but I should not feel like that.” Magdalena and Elena shared the same sentiment of feeling “old” and going back to college. Magdalena tells herself she “should not feel like that.” Elena said,
“going back to school at an older age. I felt older, I felt very stupid.” Elena compared herself to the young students, the traditional students. Magdalena questioned her ability to be in college in terms of her age: “I feel that, I know I’m smart, but sometimes I feel, am I smart enough to be here?”

Sofia also questioned herself:

I was like, what am I doing? I’m coming back to college again! And it’s been nine years and back and forth and having to drop classes and withdrawing. It was very difficult. My pride took a hit. I should not be back in college, at…going on 36 years old.

Three of the participants in this study shared feelings of self-doubt that were associated with the perception they have of their own age while attending post-secondary education. The perception of age is associated with the image these non-traditional Hispanic women students have of a traditional college-age student. Confidence in one’s self, self-worth, and one’s abilities to succeed can either have a positive or negative impact on Hispanic/Latina traditional and non-traditional women students’ persistence in post-secondary education (Bordes-Edgar et al., 2011; Quimby & O’Brien, 2004). These three women expressed feelings of self-doubt; nevertheless, the women are close to earning their degree.

Goal. Having a goal on the path to degree attainment is significant for all the women in this study. Violeta, for example, dreams of graduating with one of her grandchildren:
My dream would be that I get my degree on one of the years one of my grandchildren graduate, that way we would both be walking the line at that time. That would be the most exciting thing for me.

For Guadalupe, Monserrat, and Manuela having a “goal” seeking “opportunities” and making college a “priority” helps them stay on the path to degree attainment. Guadalupe expressed focusing on her goal despite the hardships help her stay on the path to degree attainment:

Just always having that goal in mind, that you said you wanted to do this, and you just have to do it. You have to find a way to get through it. So, there is not one factor other than that, I put that in front of me and I say this is your goal, you’ve come so far, you have to finish it.

Guadalupe and Monserrat shared that overcoming obstacles and seeking opportunities helped them stay on the path to degree attainment. Guadalupe explained to me, “I think when you have a goal you just keep chipping away at it and you will get there. Everybody has obstacles in everything, you just have to find a way.” As with Guadalupe, Monserrat’ goal is to finish school and “be the first family member to graduate from a university.” She said, “It makes me feel proud.” For her, the reward justifies the hardships because “there are opportunities, of course, it is difficult, of course college is expensive, but I think the rewards will come at a certain time.” Guadalupe and Monserrat know that focusing on their “goal” of completing their degree helps them stay on the path to degree attainment. The same goes for Manuela. Her goal is to complete her degree: “so, my whole priority this semester is definitely school. This semester I am going full-time which is twelve credit hours which is what I needed to finish up.”
As is the case with Guadalupe, Monserrat, and Manuela, the other women are on the path to degree attainment. Their “goal” is to complete their undergraduate degree and continue with their education. Magdalena, Elena, Ana, Sofia, and Laura talked about the possibility of enrolling in a Master’s degree or an advanced program. Magdalena, for example, noted, “After I graduate, I want to continue with my Master’s. I might be giving myself too much, but hey, I am going to try to finish one class or two classes at a time.” She is determined to complete her degree no matter how long it takes her to finish.

Elena is optimistic about accomplishing her goal of earning her undergraduate degree, telling me:

So, when I graduate in December I’m going to apply for the program for occupational therapy or physical therapy, it just depends what program it is. And when I get accepted, because I’m going to be persistent with that. Hopefully, I can jump into the program. Um, I want to keep my mind focused on that, getting accepted.

Ana is on the path to graduating in May with her undergraduate degree. For Ana, a Master’s degree “is not out of the possibility” because she likes school, “it’s fun.” Sofia is also on the path to degree attainment and will graduate soon. She noted, “It was difficult. But I managed to get through it, and I am so thankful that I was, because I won’t be where I am today. A couple of months away from finishing. Finally!” Sofia found, “setting a goal at this point in my life has helped me to better myself.” Sofia has “higher expectations” for herself, she wants to continue with her education, “so now it’s like, that’s not enough and that’s why I want more. I want to go for my Master’s degree and hopefully, I will get in somewhere. But it’s a work in progress.” As with Sofia, Laura’s goals help her stay on the
path to degree attainment: “Just keeping that mindset of moving forward with my dreams and my goals and always having that in the back of my mind; that drives me to keep going.” Laura will earn her undergraduate degree soon and she reflected on her options: “Right now, I’m looking at a couple of different options, either starting graduate school here at Highlands, um, or I’ve also been offered recently a new position.”

All the women who participated in this study have goals. Their goals help them stay on the path to degree attainment. Violeta’s goal is to graduate with one of her grandchildren. Manuela, Guadalupe, and Monserrat share the goal of graduating with their undergraduate degree. Magdalena, Elena, Ana, Sofia, and Laura share the goal of graduating with their undergraduate degree and the possibility of continuing with their education, enrolling in a Master’s degree or advanced program after they earn their undergraduate degree. Perceived self-efficacy and cognitive motivation are said to help individuals achieve goals and reach desired outcomes (Bandura, 1989; Brue & Brue, 2016; Ponton & Rhea, 2006). The non-traditional Hispanic women students who participated in this study all have goals for themselves; they shared feelings of self-assurance, confidence in their abilities to succeed and persist.

Summary of Findings

The women who participated in this study are non-traditional students as defined by the boundaries of this study (see Table 2). The challenges non-traditional Hispanic women students face on the path to degree attainment are related to family expectations ascribed by their Hispanic culture, different social roles, and finances. In addition, new and established technology and the English language represent challenges for some. Receiving emotional support from family and friends and perceiving that faculty and staff
demonstrate a sense of care help the women stay on the path to degree attainment. Feelings of self-assurance, expressing confidence in their abilities, and having goals for themselves, also contribute to their progress towards degree attainment.

The women in this study expressed that the values and expectations instilled by their “Hispanic Culture” or the “Hispanic Culture Mentality,” as some described it, influence their success. The women described being raised to be “homemakers,” get married, have children, and take care of their families. They described growing up with parents and family members that placed little value on a woman’s education. These participants were not encouraged to pursue education and, through their struggles, have learned for themselves the value of education. These nine women expressed having to learn that education brings opportunities in terms of jobs and career advancement.

In terms of social roles, these non-traditional Hispanic women students are mothers and caregivers, wives or partners, employees, and students. These different roles demand their time and attention. The responsibility of being a mother or caregiver for one or more dependents impacts persistence to degree attainment. And yet, for these women, being mothers comes first. Although the women expressed knowing the value of education, when it comes to the roles of student and mother, they are mothers first. The needs of their children exceed their own personal needs as students. In their own words, this explains why it has taken them extra time to work on their undergraduate degree. Some of these women have put off taking classes while raising their children, have taken classes on weekends, and have taken one or two classes at a time. The single mothers or caregivers of young children, toddlers and elementary age children, expressed their children demanded more time and attention.
The eight women who are mothers expressed wanting to be role models for their children. They hope to inspire their children and share with them the value of education. For these non-traditional Hispanic women students, their children are a source of motivation to continue and persevere on the path to degree attainment.

All the women in this study expressed having a spouse or a partner at some point in their lives. Some women shared and described being married to Hispanic men as challenging in terms of having to adhere to their husband’s needs, predisposed, as they explained, by the “Hispanic Culture Mentality.” Although some described breaking away from the values instilled by their parents and the “Hispanic Culture Mentality,” they continued to tend to their spouse or partner’s needs.

The demands of work present a challenge for these women in terms of completing their degrees. They expressed finding time to attend classes and work on homework while working full-time imposes restraints.

The participants in my study did not describe themselves as students. They described feeling “old,” out of place, and having a hard time relating to the traditional college age students. These women perceive traditional, college-age students’ lives as being different than theirs. They described traditional college age students as having time to participate in college activities and living the college life they cannot have. In their view, the responsibilities presented by the different social roles place different demands on their time.

For these nine women, financial responsibilities impact their ability to persist and earn their degrees. For them, it can be a concern and an added burden to pay for tuition and books while having the financial responsibility of their family. They consider receiving aid,
such as scholarships, Pell-Grants, and jobs that cover college tuition, as potentially having a positive impact on attending post-secondary education. At the same time, relying on loans to attend post-secondary education increases the burdens they already have.

These participants expressed having a hard time dealing with new and established technology. They felt uncertain when facing the changes in instruction from the traditional to the online classroom. Although the women felt intimidated by the online classroom, they have learned to embrace it and see it as the way to attend post-secondary education. Five of these women live in various New Mexico cities and attend NMHU online. Access to online instruction allows them to pursue their post-secondary education.

Two of the participants speak Spanish as their first language. They shared feeling self-conscious of their oral and written communication in English. This presented a challenge when thinking about attending post-secondary education, but they overcame what they thought was a barrier.

These non-traditional Hispanic women students received emotional support from family and friends. The emotional support from their family comes from their spouse or partner, parents, and children. For six of the participants, their spouse or partner demonstrates the greatest support. Their spouses or partners provide emotional support through words of encouragement and instrumental support, such as space to do schoolwork. Three women reported receiving support from their parents. Their parents provide emotional support through words of encouragement. Children provide emotional support for two of the eight women who are mothers while friends provided emotional support for four participants. For those women, receiving encouragement from other
women who they perceive as strong role models encouraged them to persist and stay on the path to degree attainment.

This group of non-traditional Hispanic women students expressed receiving support from the NMHU faculty and staff. The participants shared the importance of faculty demonstrating a sense of care and recognizing when they needed support. Faculty and staff that are helpful have a positive impact on non-traditional Hispanic women students, contributing to their perseverance and degree attainment.

Knowles (1988) described adult learners using four major principles: self-directness, life experience, being ready to learn, and task oriented. The non-traditional Hispanic women students who participated in this study exhibited all four characteristics. They expressed confidence in their ability to pursue post-secondary education and their intention to persist, demonstrating self-directness. These women have accumulated life experiences and feel confident of what they can share in the classroom and in the work field. The women perceive they will have more opportunities once they complete their undergraduate degree. They are confident they will be able to offer more to employers because of their degree and their lived experience. The women expressed feeling ready to learn and doing it for their personal growth. The women shared having to be organized and schedule their time in order to attend post-secondary education because of the demands of the different roles they play. The women demonstrated being task oriented. The language they used to describe their abilities impacts their decision to stay on the path to degree attainment.

Although, seven women used language and demonstrated confidence in their abilities to pursue and persist on the path to degree attainment, three participants also used
language that demonstrated self-doubt. Their self-doubt was related to the perceptions they have of their age and what they think a traditional college student age should be. Nonetheless, in this case, the feelings of self-doubt have not impacted their persistence to degree attainment.

All nine women recognized having a goal helps them stay on the path to degree attainment. Their shared goal is to graduate and obtain their undergraduate degree. Having a set goal helps these women see the finish line and persist. For some of these women, earning their undergraduate degree is no longer enough, and they see themselves pursuing a graduate or advanced degree.

By the end of the spring 2019 semester, after the interviews were completed, Ana, Sofia, Laura, Manuela, and Monserrat had earned their undergraduate degree. Magdalena, Elena, and Guadalupe are a few classes away from completing their degree and expect to complete their undergraduate degree either in the fall of 2019 or the spring of 2020. These women demonstrate that it takes determination to persist on the path to degree attainment.
Chapter 5

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Hispanic population is the fastest growing minority in the United States. Historically, Hispanics have experienced limited access to education. Education is tied to occupation and earnings (Marger, 2009). For New Mexico, a minority-majority Hispanic state, it is imperative to address the issue of education, as it creates opportunities for growth. Higher education institutions have experienced a decrease in enrollment of traditional students and an increase in enrollment of non-traditional/adult learners (Wyatt, 2011) and "growing part-time enrollment of young adult undergraduates" (Kasworm, 2014, p. 68). This is no different for New Mexico Highlands University. The goal of this study was to address and understand the needs of non-traditional Hispanic women students enrolled at NMHU because they represent a large portion of the student population. The study’s goal was to uncover factors that affect persistence of undergraduate non-traditional Hispanic women students to degree attainment at NMHU a 4-year Hispanic Serving Institution.

As stated in the summary of findings at the end of Chapter 4, the nine non-traditional Hispanic women students who participated in this study expressed dealing with challenges related to family expectations ascribed by their Hispanic culture, social roles, and finances. For some, learning and dealing with new and established technology was seen as a challenge. For two of the participants, the English language represented a challenge. Receiving emotional support from family and friends and perceiving that faculty and staff demonstrate a sense of care help the women stay on the path to degree attainment.
Feelings of self-assurance, expressing confidence in their abilities and having goals for themselves also help the women stay on the path to degree attainment.

**Recommendations**

The following are recommendations for New Mexico Highlands University leaders and university officials, faculty, staff, and designers, given that the study was conducted at that institution. However, other post-secondary institutions could benefit from these recommendations.

In general, post-secondary institutions have made changes to accommodate a diverse traditional student population such as infrastructure for the betterment of student quality of life, social programs, changes in curriculum and delivery of content such as online courses; but they have not fully addressed the needs of non-traditional adult learners (Chen, 2017). It is imperative institutions evaluate their own practices and identify their non-traditional adult learners and implement services for this underserved group of students (Chen, 2017; Markle, 2015; Scobey, 2016; Ward & Westbrooks, 2000). Beginning with the identification of the composition of the student body population will enable universities to better serve their students and address issues with retention and completion.

NMHU serves low income, first generation, transfer, non-traditional students enrolled at the main campus in Las Vegas and those enrolled through the satellite centers in Albuquerque, Rio Rancho, Santa Fe, Farmington, and Roswell, New Mexico. Undergraduate traditional students enrolled in main campus and satellite centers accounted for 52.8 percent, and undergraduate non-traditional students accounted for 47.2 percent of the undergraduate student population (NMHU, 2019a). Almost half of the undergraduate student body population at NMHU is considered non-traditional.
Leaders and University Officials. To better respond to the needs of non-traditional students, university officials and leaders should:

- Analyze carefully the composition of the student population;
- Evaluate the university’s practices, goals, and objectives to address the needs of the student population (Chen, 2017; Kasworm, 2014; Markle, 2015; Scobey, 2016; Ward & Westbrooks, 2000);
- Evaluate core curriculum and specific curriculum programs across the university to keep up with our changing times and prepare students for careers (Kasworm, 2014);
- Conduct research to assess the economic demands of our state, labor force needs, and prepare students to meet those demands (Ritt, 2008);
- Create a curriculum that addresses the needs of non-traditional, working adults, that offers a flexible schedule, such as different online modalities across all programs of study (Bergman et al., 2014; Choy, 2002);
- Create a curriculum that supports continuance in post-secondary education regardless of length of time (Kasworm, 2014);
- Provide support services that provide support and address the unique characteristics of adult and non-traditional students (Wyatt, 2011).

At NMHU, non-traditional students represent almost half of the undergraduate student body population. Instilling these changes would help address the needs of non-traditional students.

Leaders and university officials should recognize there might be resistance from educators to change their methods and practices of educating students; however, university
officials and educators must work together to address the changes in the student population. Both parties need to compromise and buy into change.

At NMHU, programs have been developed to provide support for traditional students, with the intention of retention and student completion. However, no programs have been developed specifically to address the needs of non-traditional, working adults, students. Consideration must be given to develop support programs to address the needs of non-traditional students; this could help enhance retention and college completion (Ward & Westbrooks, 2000).

**Faculty, Staff, and Advisors.** Given the number of undergraduate, non-traditional students enrolled at NMHU main campus and satellite centers, it is imperative faculty, staff, and advisors be cognizant of the students they serve and understand and address their needs. A supportive campus environment welcomes a diverse population including adult learners and non-traditional students by addressing their “unique needs” (Bergman et al., 2014; Miller Brown 2002; Wyatt, 2011).

Faculty, staff, and advisors can engage in actions that instill a sense of care for students. The academic and social integration of undergraduate students impacts persistence (Maestas et al., 2007; Miller Brown, 2002) to degree attainment. NMHU is a small, post-secondary institution, with an average student population of 2348 students, where the teacher-student ratio is 14:1 (NMHU, 2019a). It is possible to establish a closer relationship with students. Faculty can instill a sense of care by learning and addressing students by name, encouraging class participation, recognizing when students share from experience, and assisting with courses or guiding students to support services offered at NMHU. Wyatt (2011), suggests “faculty should strive to understand and adopt their
teaching methods and delivery systems to incorporate nontraditional student learning styles” (p. 18). Faculty must recognize non-traditional and adult learners have unique characteristics. Adult learners can be characterized as self-directed individuals “but at different rates for different people and different dimensions of life” (Knowles, 1988, p. 43).

When appropriate, it is important to encourage all students, including non-traditional and adult learners to share from their learned experiences. Non-traditional and adult learners bring experience to the classroom, they have accumulated life experience, “which serves as a critical component in the foundation of their self-identity” (Rabourn et al., 2015, p. 4). Adult learners are ready to learn and are task oriented (Knowles, 1988). Faculty can start by acknowledging students’ enthusiasm for learning, including non-traditional and adult learners. Encouraging class discussion and participation can be beneficial for all students in the classroom, including non-traditional and adult learners taking courses online. This will also help create a sense of connection between the students sitting in the classroom and online students.

Faculty should inform all students, including non-traditional students of the various services NMHU offers. Services currently offered at NMHU include: Student Success Center, ARMAS in Education Center, Highlands Undergraduate Enrichment Study Lounge and Peer Mentoring, Language Learning Center, Writing Center, and Net Tutor. The Student Success Center offers academic support through success coaches that help with scheduling in main campus, Las Vegas, NM. The Student Success Center is open during regular business office hours, 8 AM to 5 PM. ARMAS in Education Center offers tutoring in STEM courses; located on main campus, Las Vegas, NM. ARMAS offers extended hours, but not online tutoring. The Highlands Undergraduate Enrichment Study Lounge
and Peer Mentoring addresses the needs of freshmen and sophomore students enrolled in Learning Communities; located on main campus, Las Vegas, NM. The Language Learning Center offers tutoring in Spanish and American Sign Language. The Language Learning Center is located on main campus, Las Vegas, NM, is open during regular business hours and does not offer online tutoring. The Student Success Center, ARMAS in Education Center, Highlands Undergraduate Enrichment Study Lounge and Peer Mentoring, and the Language Learning Center, offer valuable services to students. Although, all NMHU students are welcomed to access these resources, the services address the needs of students attending the main campus, some offering aid specifically to freshman and sophomore students. Offering extended office hours and online tutoring would better serve non-traditional students enrolled across the university’s main campus and satellite centers.

Some of the services offered at NMHU available to all students, including those taking courses through the satellite centers and online, include the Writing Center and Net Tutor. The Writing Center is located on main campus, Las Vegas. The Writing Center offers tutoring and support with English assignments. The Writing Center is open during regular business hours and does offer tutoring online. Net Tutor is a web-based online tutoring service, available 24 hours. All students, including students enrolled in the satellite centers can have access to this service. Students can meet online with tutors or submit their work and get feedback from tutors. The Writing Center and Net Tutor are valuable resources for all students, providing access to students enrolled in main campus Las Vegas and the satellite centers. Offering extended office hours would be helpful to all students, particularly non-traditional students who work during the day when some of these services are offered.
Additional resources offered to NMHU students include the Donnelly Library and access to libraries located in Albuquerque, Farmington, and Santa Fe, through specific agreements (NMHU, 2019b). The Donnelly Library provides access to students in Las Vegas and to students enrolled through the satellite centers. Students have access to data bases, tutorial, and can get assistance online. The Donnelly Library offers extended hours to address the needs of all students, including students enrolled through the satellite centers.

Services are offered face-to-face, however many of the services are offered online to address the needs to students taking courses in remote locations and through the satellite centers. Access to resources is valuable and can help create a sense of care for students. Since many non-traditional students take courses online, it is appropriate to inform students that NMHU offers services online. In addition, it is important to consider providing extended office hours to address the needs of non-traditional students.

As NMHU develops programs that address the needs of their main campus and traditional college age students; NMHU must consider developing a support program that addresses the unique needs of their non-traditional students. Given that NMHU has a large non-traditional student population enrolled through main campus and satellite centers, it would be appropriate to consider offering a support program that meets not only on main campus, but in a virtual room. The support program could aid with courses, tutoring, and social gatherings for non-traditional students. It must be noted that institutional interventions such as social gatherings specifically for non-traditional women students can help built community and social support (Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016; Quimby & O’Brien, 2004). It is important to acknowledge and provide a sense of care for non-
traditional students. As stated in the findings, the perception that faculty and staff demonstrate a sense of care helps non-traditional Hispanic women stay on the path to degree attainment.

The NMHU staff aids students through many offices across campus and satellite centers. Staff must be cognizant of the student body population they serve in order to provide appropriate assistance. Usually offices that provide services for students are open Monday through Friday 8 AM to 5 PM. NMHU administrators should consider extending office hours to address the needs of their non-traditional student body population.

NMHU advisors must also be cognizant of the student body population they serve in order to provide appropriate assistance. It is important advisors receive training and understand non-traditional students might have accumulated college credit from prior studies or might have taken standardized tests such as College Level Examination Program [CLEP] and DANTES Subject Standardized Tests [DSST].

NMHU colleges and departments should evaluate and revise their curriculum to offer relevant courses to students. Some of the programs developed by for-profit institutions include “Adult Credit Programs,” “accelerated learning,” and “adult degree programs” (Ross-Gordon, 2011, p. 26). At NMHU, some schools and departments offer online courses at the 300 and 400 level, but not all are required courses. Program designers, the Registrar’s Office, and faculty should work together to evaluate students’ enrollments and needs and evaluate the core curriculum and the core for each concentration. In their study on adult student persistence, Bergman et al. (2014) demonstrated how providing “relevant curriculum, sufficient funding, and knowledgeable and caring faculty and staff have a direct impact on student success” and persistence to
degree attainment (p. 99). Program designers, the Registrar’s Office, and faculty should consider working together, evaluate and offer courses at pertinent times of the day including courses in the evening and on weekends, to address the needs of non-traditional student. Furthermore, they could “develop programs and events that would appeal to nontraditional students and include their families” (Wyatt, 2011, p. 18). These practices can help provide support and engage nontraditional students.

One of the only accommodations made for non-traditional students has been delivery of education through online courses (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Chen, 2017; Choy, 2002; Kasworm, 2014; Ross-Gordon, 2011). Online courses can be offered through different modalities: synchronous, asynchronous, and hybrid/blended, but not all universities offer these options to their students. Non-traditional students would benefit from such offerings. At NMHU, not all colleges and departments offer online courses. Program designers and faculty could evaluate offering relevant courses through the various online modalities; this would help retain and address the needs of their non-traditional undergraduate student body population.

Policy Makers

In the United States, the job market and its demands have changed dramatically. The United States has transformed from a manufacturing economy to a service-oriented economy and a knowledge-based economy. A high school diploma was more valued in the job market in the past (Sernau, 2014, p. 215). This is not the reality of today. There is a need for a more skilled workforce. The Hispanic population is expected to be the fastest growing minority group in the labor force. Given that New Mexico is a minority-majority states it is imperative New Mexico policy makers evaluate education state policies and
address policies that have implications for the growing non-traditional, adult learner population attending post-secondary institutions across our state.

New Mexico policy makers can start by evaluating the Hispanic population educational levels and assess whether current state educational policies are “hindering the acceleration” of Hispanic “student success” (Santiago & Calderón, 2018). New Mexico legislators need to explore options in the area of higher education governance for online core courses (New Mexico First, 2018, Creative Solutions, para. 2). This would improve access of post-secondary education for non-traditional and adult learners. Next, legislators should develop policies that support the increased demand for an educated Hispanic population. It would benefit the state if policies are developed that help increase college completion of the large non-traditional adult learner population attending post-secondary institutions.

Limitations of the Study

This study included nine non-traditional Hispanic women students from NMHU. It is not possible (nor desirable) to generalize the findings to the entire population of non-traditional Hispanic women students at NMHU or other post-secondary institutions. However, their stories can help us understand the factors that impact persistence to degree attainment of non-traditional Hispanic women students at NMHU.

In terms of the design of this study, attempting to contact students via email through their NMHU and later personal email made it difficult to recruit participants. Former NMHU students who had graduate or dropped out of college did not respond to NMHU emails. Some personal emails were outdated. I had to submit amendments to the
IRB in order to reach participants through text messages. Once I was able to reach participants via text message, the recruiting processes were successful.

**Implications for Future Research**

Given the increased number of non-traditional students enrolled in post-secondary education and particularly at NMHU, it would be wise to focus on research that can help practitioners further understand the needs of this population. The following are suggestions for future research at NMHU:

- Develop a quantitative, descriptive survey research project to uncover factors that impact persistence to degree attainment of a larger pool of NTHWS at NMHU.
- Further research on NTHWS and other non-traditional and adult learner students on factors that impact persistence to degree attainment at NMHU.
- A longitudinal analysis of NTHWS academic persistence at NMHU.

**Lessons Learned**

Non-traditional Hispanic women students have a desire to attend post-secondary education. The need is based on personal growth and for career advancement. There is a growing number of non-traditional women students attending post-secondary institutions, not only at NMHU, but in post-secondary institutions across the United States. There is a growing demand for skilled and educated employees with advanced degrees, to fill the demand of our knowledge-based economy.

It is necessary for leaders and university administrators to evaluate the university’s practices, goals, and objectives to address the needs of the student population, in this case non-traditional students and the changing social and economic demands. It is imperative that leaders, university administrators, and faculty work together to better serve students by
developing programs and curriculums that keep with our changing times. It is imperative faculty across universities adapt to new technologies in their teaching to address our societal demands. There is opportunity to increase enrollment, retention, and degree completion by offering more courses online. For profit institutions have focused on offering courses online and developing programs such as “Adult Credit Programs,” “accelerated learning,” and “adult degree programs” (Ross-Gordon, 2011, p. 26). It is time, all departments across public universities adapt to the changing demands of our society.
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Appendix A UNM IRB Approval Letter

DATE: September 14, 2018

IRB #: 15818
IRBNet ID & TITLE: [1316999-1] Non-Traditional Hispanic Women Students in Post-Secondary Education
PI OF RECORD: Allison Borden
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

BOARD DECISION: APPROVED
EFFECTIVE DATE: September 14, 2018
RISK LEVEL: Minimal Risk
PROJECT STATUS: Active - Open to Enrollment

DOCUMENTS:
- Advertisement - Recruitment Email (UPDATED: 09/4/2018)
- Consent Form - Interview Consent Form v 09.14.18 (UPDATED: 09/14/2018)
- Other - Scientific Review (UPDATED: 09/4/2018)
- Other - Project Team (UPDATED: 09/4/2018)
- Other - Project Information (UPDATED: 09/4/2018)
- Questionnaire/Survey - Qualitative Interview Questions (UPDATED: 09/4/2018)

Thank you for your New Project submission. The UNM IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an acceptable risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks to participants have been minimized.

This project is not covered by UNM’s Federalwide Assurance (FWA) and will not receive federal funding.

The IRB has determined the following:

- Informed consent must be obtained and documentation has been waived for this project. To obtain consent, use only approved consent document(s).

This determination applies only to the activities described in the submission and does not apply should any changes be made to this research. If changes are being considered, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to submit an amendment to this project and receive IRB approval prior to implementing the changes. A change in the research may disqualify this research from the current review category. If federal funding will be sought for this project, an amendment must be submitted so that the project can be reviewed under relevant federal regulations.
All reportable events must be promptly reported to the UNM IRB, including: UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to participants or others, SERIOUS or UNEXPECTED adverse events, NONCOMPLIANCE issues, and participant COMPLAINTS.

If an expiration date is noted above, a continuing review or closure submission is due no later than 30 days before the expiration date. **It is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to apply for continuing review or closure and receive approval for the duration of this project.** If the IRB approval for this project expires, all research related activities must stop and further action will be required by the IRB.

Please use the appropriate reporting forms and procedures to request amendments, continuing review, closure, and reporting of events for this project. Refer to the OIRB website for forms and guidance on submissions.

**Please note that all IRB records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the closure of this project.**

The Office of the IRB can be contacted through: mail at MSC02 1665, 1 University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131-0001; phone at 505.277.2644; email at irbmaincampus@unm.edu; or in-person at 1805 Sigma Chi Rd. NE, Albuquerque, NM 87106. You can also visit the OIRB website at irb.unm.edu.
Appendix B

Coded Interview

INTERVIEW 5
Date: 3.13.2019

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<tr>
<th>Raw Data</th>
<th>Preliminary Codes</th>
<th>Final Code</th>
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<tr>
<td>What would you say are challenges non-traditional women students face on the path to degree attainment?</td>
<td>Hispanic culture – Stereotype “racing a family rather than pursuing a career”</td>
<td>Hispanic Culture Mentality Homemaker</td>
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<td>I believe coming from a Hispanic culture, just growing up with a mind-set that you have to fall into a certain category as far as just racing your family. Uhm, focusing more on those aspects rather than perusing a career or advancing your life. I think that is a big, big thing that we face as far as not being able to be thinking outside of the box.</td>
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<td>Which challenges impact or influence the success on non-traditional Hispanic women students? Challenges, wow. Do you want me to say it from my own perspective? Yes. Or a generalization? You can say it from your own perspective. Uhm, from my own perspective, kind of leading into the last thing I said, having children at a very young age has a huge impact. Uhm, getting into relationships at a very young age. Also is a reinforcer from Hispanic culture that I’ve learned. Growing up a lot of friends and family have had kids as young as fifteen. Uhm, their parents are still very old fashioned in traditional ways, thinking that you need to find a mate at a young age and stay with them and have children and that is the way you live your life. Uhm, which definitely has an impact on women succeeding a lot. Unless you are capable of pushing yourself after that point of having children.</td>
<td>Hispanic culture – Stereotypes/Expectations Importance of Roles – mother, spouse. Determination – “Unless you are capable of pushing yourself after that point of having children.” Personal goals.</td>
<td>Hispanic Culture Mentality Homemaker</td>
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<td>How do you think non-traditional women students deal with the challenges they face on the path to degree attainment? Uhm, geez. I think for me personally, I really had to go through the challenges in order to realize what I wanted in my life. Because, I wasn’t brought up with the mind-set of pursuing education. I had to learn through many years of working odd end jobs, and just finding random things to do, to make ends meet to support my family. I had to actually think outside of my box, outside of the bubble that was</td>
<td>Challenges – working odd end jobs. Family responsibility – young age.</td>
<td>Hispanic Culture Mentality Education</td>
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created for me. To really see that education was a main goal. And through that, the education system has actually helped me though financial aid to be able to get back into school.

Unfortunately for me I didn’t graduate. I dropped out of high school when I was sixteen. I went with my boyfriend at the time and I moved out on my own.

Uhm, so for me, really just finding myself throughout all the trials and tribulations was the way that I was able to deal with it. Uhm, and pursue education at a later age.

What are the qualities that non-traditional Hispanic women student possess that help in their pursuit of degree attainment?

I think a lot has to do with perseverance. Also, just, I can never think of the word, but it’s when you just keep fighting, uhm, resilience. Through resilience, uhm, just be able to continue no matter what.

Setting a goal at this point in my life has helped me to better myself.

And I think that goes for a lot of Hispanic women. We do face a lot of different trials, I believe we do, throughout our lives. Just growing up in the type of culture that we have, uhm, we are expected to be a certain way and it’s hard for a lot of traditional mothers, for Hispanic mothers to see outside of that also. That puts up walls. And to make it, you have to, be able to do what you need for yourself. That’s where I think the resilience comes in and helps us out a lot.

So, what is that wall?
I think, uhm, for me, my family really focused me on adhering to what my husband(s) or my husband at the time wanted. What he wanted was best for me. I didn’t have a voice, kind of scenario. I was basically developed to be a mother, a wife. Cook and clean, and go to work, but my priority was to make sure he was happy, and my family was taken care off.

Uhm, whereas for me, that was never enough. So, after the divorce, I was really able to pursue what I wanted for myself. That wall, that barrier that my parents had, I feel they had for me, dropped. That was the point in my life where I was, okay, it’s no...
longer what they want. I’m doing what I want at this point. Still, they don’t agree with all my choices, but I’m able to do what I feel, I need to do for my family now.

**How do non-traditional Hispanic women students navigate the campus environment?**

I feel old. For me personally, I feel that I am an older student. I don’t feel that I necessarily fit into, I guess what I would consider the average age of campus students. I feel a little bit out, out of the average scenario. I just feel that I don’t really fit in. Because there are a lot of younger students. I’m attending in the days and I understand a lot of older students maybe attending in the evenings.

But for me, I feel, I guess, it could be a little bit more comforting in knowing that there are older students attending. Uhm, that’s something I had to learn to deal with throughout the years. It is a little bit discouraging at times. You know, because you see a lot of younger kids, and you are like, wow, they are almost half my age. But still is a good dynamic.

The teachers have always made me feel very comfortable. The staff has always been very helpful. Which has helped with, why I continued to push forward.

**If you need resources do you know where to go?**

Definitely, I feel that they’ve been very helpful. I feel that everything is pretty easy to find within the school. Some scenarios where stuff got mixed up throughout the year, with paperwork, particularly with the Registrar’s Office and things like that, but they were able to fix it almost immediately.

Everyone seems to work pretty well together, which is nice. It makes everything run a lot better. So overall is a good experience. It has been good.

**What support do you receive from the university that impact your persistence to degree attainment?**

I have not necessarily received additional support. I don’t think I’ve had anybody say, hey you are doing a great job! Or, Keep up the good work! Or anything like that. As far as the emails I receive, I do receive some emails with scholarship opportunities things

| Importance of Roles: Role of Student | Self-image - “I feel old” Not fitting in with “I guess what I would consider the average age of campus students.” |
| University Support | Support from faculty & staff |
| **Age** – “it could be a little bit more comforting in knowing that there are older students attending.” | Support – “The teachers have always made me feel very comfortable.” |
| **Helpful** – “The staff has always been very helpful.” | Support – “professors” |
like that which are helpful. But at this point in my
degree, I’m graduating this semester, so it’s not
necessarily anything I can use. Uhm, but as far as
the teachers themselves, I’ve got to know a lot of
them really well. And having that, I guess, I could
say is somewhat support just getting to know them
and them speaking with me on personal issues, that
has helped me. Because I’ve had a lot going on this
past year. So, in that sense yes, I’ve had a lot of
support, not the staff in general but the professors. A
lot of the professors have worked with me, so that
was supportive.

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<th>University Support</th>
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<tr>
<td>Support from faculty</td>
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</table>

How do non-traditional women students describe themselves?
Non-traditional students, uhm, … I would say, for me, hardworking, resilient, like I said earlier, and persistent.

| “Hardworking” |
| “Resilient” |
| “Persistent” |

Determination –
Family expectations –
Hispanic culture – “I think for a lot of Hispanic women, eventually, once you breakup that barrier, that wall of having to meet certain expectations from your family, it’s just about finding yourself a lot of the times and that requires you to keep pushing forward.”

| Hispanic Culture |
| Mentality |
| Homemaker |

What factors impact your persistence to obtain a degree?

Number one, my children. My children have definitely impacted that. And, struggling.

| Importance of Roles – Children priority. |
| Finances – “Income” working odd end job to provide for the family. |

Income. I have gone through so many different obstacles. Just being able to afford, you know, to get enough food on the table. Cloths for them, things that they want, that I haven’t been able to provide for them, it really affects me as a mother! Which is why I spent so many years doing odd end jobs and not getting paid as much as co-workers that had a degree, making double or almost triple, while I was doing the exact same job.

| Importance of Education – in relation to opportunities and finances. |
That really brought into my view of how important it is to have a college education. You can be doing the same job as someone else, because you don’t have that college education you will not be making nearly as close to the amount of income.

So, my kids are number one, that’s why I continue to keep pushing. I don’t intent to stop. I’m going to try to pursue my Master and someday my PhD. It will take me a while, but someday, you know.

**What support do you receive from family, friends, mentors on the path to degree attainment?**

You know, what is interesting is, initially my parents didn’t support me, coming to college. My father has really let down his walls a lot. I think, just him seeing me grow as an individual, finally in my thirties, he is finally seeing I’m capable of doing what he could do. I’m capable of being better for myself and my kids without a man, you know. He’s really let down his wall. He is excited for me. So, he’s really... he had a stroke, he went through a lot. He still talks to me about it all the time, always asking me how I’m doing and encouraging me, and that’s really help me a lot too.

My kids always talk to me, mommy when you graduate from school, we will be able to do this and that, and have a house. They are looking forward to all the opportunities. I’m hoping through me, accomplishing that, they will too. Seeing me struggle through all this, that they will say, I want to do good like my mom someday.

**Do you have children? If so, does having the responsibility of being a parent and caring for one or more dependents impact your persistence to degree attainment?**

I can’t say it impacts the persistence. I mean it does as far as me wanting to come to college, yes, definitely does.

As far as like, getting assignments done and things like that, it can. It can be pretty difficult at times because I get home and I have to tend to them.

So late night hours are difficult, very late-night hours to get done everything I need to get done is...
kind of a struggle. But in a way it just helps me to be persistent and continue to push myself to the limits.

**Do you think the age of the children impact more?**

I would say, I think so. My son is fourteen, my daughter is eleven, and my youngest is five. The youngest definitely needs a lot more of my time. A lot more attention. My older ones do as well, but they help me a lot. I hate to put that burden on them at such a young age, uhm, of having to help me clean up. They have a lot of chores and they have to be more responsible than what I like them to be. But at this point, they kind of have to take on a role of helping me more. Because there is not a dad in the house. They are kind of feeling in some of that void; by being more responsible brother and sister and helping me babysitting if I have to come and do and assignment late at night or being responsible if I have to come to class for an hour. They will go with family, but they still need to watch over their little sister.

**Did delaying postsecondary enrollment impact your persistence?**

I have been going to college on and off for the past ten years. It’s been long, very long. I got my A.A. in Colorado and barely, this semester finished the last class I needed to complete the A.A. degree even though I’m completing my B.A. this semester.

So, it has been pretty hard, taking a break and then getting back into it, that was a pretty big struggle for me only because I was like, what am I doing? I’m coming back to college again! And it’s been nine years and back and forth and having to drop classes and withdrawing. It was very difficult. So as far as coming back, I say it was a little more difficult than if I would have kept following through. You know? If I would’ve been able to maintain my college classes and graduate a year and a half ago it would have been a lot easier.

Getting back to it, … it was more like, my pride took a hit. Because I should already be done. I should not be back in college, at, … going on 36 years old. So that was the hardest part, I think.

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<tr>
<th>Importance of Roles: Role of Mother</th>
<th>Challenges with young children</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perseverance.</td>
<td>Importance of Roles – age of children. Younger child “the youngest definitely needs a lot more of my time. A lot more attention.”</td>
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<td>Older children – “They have a lot of chores and they have to be more responsible than what I like them to be. But at this point, they kind of have to take on a role of helping me more.”</td>
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<td>Single mother.</td>
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<td>Time – many years to complete the degree A.A. and B.A.</td>
<td>Self-doubt</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Difficult” – Challenging</td>
<td>Self-doubt – “I was like, what am I doing? I’m coming back to college again! And it’s been nine years and back and forth and having to drop classes and withdrawing. It was very difficult.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem – “my pride took a hit.”</td>
<td>Age – “I should not be back in college, at, … going on 36 years old.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you attend college full-time or part-time? Does attending college part-time or full-time impact your persistence to degree attainment?</td>
<td>Full-time student.</td>
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<td>Last semester I took 19 credits and I was working 30 hours a week, that was pretty hectic. This semester I’m only taking 12 credit hours. And, I’m also still working about 30 hours a week. So, it’s full-time. How long have you been doing full-time? The whole last year I did it and this semester, because I need to just finish. Otherwise it would take me an additional year, so I pushed myself. I believe, I did, the spring semester 18 credits, summer was 11, fall was 19. It was difficult. But I managed to get through it, and I am so thankful that I was, because I won’t be where I am today. A couple of months away from finishing. Finally!</td>
<td>Determination – “I need to just finish. Otherwise it would take me an additional year, so I pushed myself.” Difficult – Challenging Determination – “Higher expectations” – “So now is like, that’s not enough and that’s why I want more. I want to go for my Master’s degree and hopefully, I will get in somewhere. But it’s a working progress.” Goal</td>
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<td>You must be very excited. You know it’s interesting, I’m not. I’m not anymore. I think, I’ve been waiting so long for this to happen that I have higher expectations now. So now is like, that’s not enough and that’s why I want more. I want to go for my Master’s degree and hopefully, I will get in somewhere. But it’s a working progress.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are you employed part-time or full-time? Does being employed part-time or full-time while enrolled in college impact your persistence to degree attainment? If anything for me, it impacted it in a positive way. Because being employed for me at a job that I am not interested in pushed me that much more to say oh my gosh, I need to get this degree. And get into something I really want to do, you know? Or at least I’m proud to be at. My current position is a good job it helps me pay my bills and it provides for me and my family, which I couldn’t ask for more now. But I want more, so in that sense it helped me to continue. Just to really continue thinking is this what I want for myself? Because this is the path I be on right now, if I don’t get my degree.</td>
<td>Determination – to advance in her career through education. Self-inquiry – “Just to really continue thinking is this what I want for myself? Because this is the path I be on right now, if I don’t get my degree.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do financial responsibilities impact persistence to degree attainment?</td>
<td>Finances – “Trying to pay an additional 2,900</td>
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<td>Finances</td>
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Yes. Fortunately, for me I think, financial aid has helped me. Uhm, I have had to pay for the last few semesters out of pocket and it’s been a struggle. It definitely has been hard, especially with my kids. I’ve had to really cut back on a lot. Trying to pay an additional 2,900 every few months is a lot for a single person with kids. But I’m managing to get through it.

Finish getting through it, is all I can do. Just keep pushing to get to the end of this, for now.

Having to pay for schooling. And having to pay for my kids’ necessities, has been very difficult. I personally, I don’t think I’ve bought myself anything for the past six years of my life. I don’t spend money on myself. It’s really been about trying to make sure they have what they need and trying to get through.

What plans do you have after you graduate?
I have a lot going through my head at this point. I really want to continue to pursue my Master’s degree. So, I’m going to look into, well, I already have looked into Master’s degree programs in different areas. More than likely, I will try to go online and get a career going somewhere. My brother lives in Seattle and I plan to move up that way, if all works out as far as me finding a good career. Being able to get settled in that area. So, I’m currently in the process of looking up there. Hopefully, I will fall into place.

Please share with me any other thoughts you have about your experience as a student.
I would have to say for me it’s been quite a struggle just to get things accomplished. Being so much older, having children.

I think it’s important for people to know that, at a young age if you don’t have children, pursue all that you can as far as education goes. Because once you do have kids and if you are single is very difficult to make ends meet and be able to provide not only for yourself but your kids.

And just finding time in general, there is a lack of time every day, every day. So, it’s more of a struggle if you cannot attain your degree immediately after high school or shortly after you graduate.

As far as my experience in general, it has been a good one here at Highlands. I’ve had a really good...
experience with all the professors. I really do appreciate the staff that has helped me, to just kind a keep pushing me regardless of all of my unfortunate circumstances. I have been able to form some good relationships, so I’m happy to walk away with that and continue on.

| Support – NMHU faculty and staff. | Support from faculty and staff |