

## **Latina/o Student Achievement: Exploring the Influence of Student-Faculty Interactions on College Grades**

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*The influence of student-faculty interactions on the academic achievement of Latina/o college students is examined using a national cross-sectional sample of 836 students (36.1% men, 63.9% women). Students' college grades were regressed onto college and student variables, and a variety of student-faculty interactions. Academically related and personal interactions with faculty, as well as the perceived quality of relationships with faculty were found to be positively associated with academic performance.*

The comparatively low educational attainment rate of the Latina/o population combined with demographic changes the United States underscores the importance of identifying factors that may enhance Latina/o educational achievement. The graduation rates for minority students continue to lag behind those of White students. Recent figures show that 82% of White, 75% of Black, and 57% of Latina/o youths graduate from high school (Wilds & Wilson, 1998) and the college participation rates for each group reflect the same pattern, 41%, 30%, and 22% respectively (Devarics, 2000). The educational attainment for Latina/o students does not bode well in light of the fact that Latinas/os make up 12% of the U.S. population, a figure that is expected to reach 14% by 2010 and 25% by the middle of the 21st century (U.S. Census Bureau, 1999). Unfortunately the baccalaureate degree attainment rates are also bleak; amongst the recipients 79% are White, 7% are African American, and 5% are Latina/o students (Wilds & Wilson). Thus, enhancing the educational achievement of Latina/o students would serve the nation well. The natural place to turn is towards college faculty given that interactions with faculty directly impact student "degree attainment, and . . . overall academic development" (Pascarella

& Terenzini, 1991, p. 342). However, a careful examination of the higher education literature reveals a lack of data, beyond descriptive information, on minority students in general and even less research on Latina/o students. Furthermore, perhaps because of the increasing tendency in published research to not include or report race as a variable (Graham, 1992), very little is known about race-linked factors associated with the educational experiences of and outcomes for minority students (Oakes, 1990). This study examines the potential influence on the achievement of Latina/o students of different interactions with faculty while taking into account student and college factors.

Theoretically, the social context contributes significantly to the development of racial minorities (Garza & Lipton, 1982; Hall, Cross, & Freedle, 1972; Helms, 1990; Keefe & Padilla, 1987) and shapes individual experiences and interracial interactions (Helms, 1985; Ramirez, 1977). In a multiracial society, student and faculty experiences may vary as a function of differences in race-related experiences, awareness of race, ability to deal with racial diversity, and differences in understanding of racial issues. Moreover, interracial interactions reflect the experiences of the individuals involved (Helms, 1985); and students or professors might have positive student-faculty contacts and continue these interactions, or they may experience frustration with and early termination of student-faculty interactions. Hypothetically, these experiences can shape student educational outcomes. For instance, a model of student-faculty informal contact depicts universities as socializing organizations, influencing student outcomes through various institutional factors and through student interactions with institutional agents such as faculty (Pascarella, 1980). As

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such, the effectiveness of educational policies programs and practices would be a consequence of the student involvement elicited and maintained (Astin, 1984). Student involvement, development, and learning have been hypothesized to be a direct function of the amount of time and energy a student invests in relevant activities (Astin, 1984). Essentially, theory suggests that academic college environments, experiences, and activities, as well as student-faculty interactions, can promote learning and achievement; research has provided supporting evidence.

Student-faculty interactions have been studied in some cases in terms of the frequency of interactions and in other cases the influence of different types of interactions has been examined. In 1977, Astin observed that interacting frequently with faculty had a positive impact on a variety of developmental outcomes but no impact on academic outcomes. Subsequent research yielded mixed results. Pascarella, Terenzini, and Hibel (1978) reported that academic performance was facilitated by a variety of student-faculty interactions (discussions over intellectual matters or course-related issues and discussions about career goals). Similar results were reported by researchers using a variety of academic measures: self-reported intellectual development, general knowledge, math skills, development of problem-solving skills, public speaking skills, and academic performance as measured by the college GPA (Endo & Harpel, 1982; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1978, 1980). Student-faculty interactions had a relatively greater influence on student's overall academic development for seniors than for other students (Terenzini & Wright, 1987). In contrast, Endo and Harpel found that neither formal nor informal student-faculty contact had a significant impact on academic achievement as measured by college grades. But they did report that student progress toward intellectual goals was positively associated with student-perceived helpfulness of the faculty (Endo & Harpel). The contradictory results found in the literature could be due to differences in student characteristics or to differences in the nature of their experiences with

faculty. All in all, the weight of the early evidence points toward beneficial effects.

Recent studies, which have taken student characteristics into account, have yielded additional evidence that academic and non-academic student-faculty interactions enhance academic performance as measured by college grades (Anaya, 1992, 1999; Astin, 1993). Moreover, these interactions appear to facilitate academic achievement as measured by student-reported gains, performance on standardized tests, as well as college grades (Anaya, 1999). Despite contradictory data generated during the 1970s and 1980s, over the last 15 years researchers have observed that a variety of student-faculty interactions appear to facilitate academic achievement (Anaya, 1992, 1999; Astin, 1993; Terenzini & Wright, 1987). However, the studies discussed thus far did not examine the impact of student-faculty interactions on the educational outcomes for minority students.

Very few studies have been conducted on the student-faculty interactions of African American students and even fewer on Latina/o students' experiences. The national longitudinal multi-institutional study conducted by Fleming (1984) is a useful template for a discussion of the relevant research. First, Fleming observed limited out-of-class contact with professors for African American students at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) in comparison to their peers at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Subsequently, in a study on community college transfer rates Nora and Rendón (1990) reported that less than 35% of both Latina/o and White students interacted with faculty outside of class. More recently, Cole (1999) found comparable faculty interaction rates for African American and White students at PWIs: 36% of African American and 32% of White students interacted with a professor after class. The latter studies suggest that similar rates of contact with professors occur for African American, Latina/o, and White students at non-HBCs.

With regard to academic outcomes, Fleming (1984) observed relatively smaller intellectual gains among African American students at PWIs in comparison to students at HBCs and to White

students at PWIs. The lower academic performance of African American students at PWIs was attributed to the absence of strong relationships with professors in comparison to White students at PWIs (Allen, 1992). In fact, researchers have reported that student-faculty relationships positively influence GPA and persistence for both Black and White students (Davis, 1991; Nettles, 1991). However, Davis observed relatively larger gains in undergraduate grades for White students than for African American students as a result of contact with faculty. Could this difference in accrued academic benefits be due to race-related factors?

Student-faculty interactions for Latina/o and African American students are generally interracial, whereas for White students they are same-race interactions. As a salient factor, race can contribute to the dynamics of relationships and, for example, White faculty might expect minority students to have knowledge concerning racial issues and race relations in America (Burrell, 1980). Additionally, minority students often contend with race-related assumptions about their academic ability, ambition, high school preparation, and faculty perceptions of minority students—all of which may hinder the development of significant student-faculty relationships (Kraft, 1991). Regardless of ability level, minority students may experience limited accessibility to faculty (Arnold, 1993; Hurtado, 1994; Turner, 1994). Hurtado reported that among high achieving Latina/o students one in six believed that White students had more faculty access and support. And once access is gained, African American students (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996) and minority valedictorians (Arnold) have related poignant personal narratives about the lack of guidance and support from faculty. Nonetheless, some minority students do enjoy positive relationships with university faculty and staff as well as the related benefits. For instance, having contact with faculty or staff with whom students are able to identify with (role models) has been reported to be strongly associated with high grades for students in several racial groups: African American, Mexican American, Native American, and White students (Mayo, Murguía, & Padilla, 1995). However, meetings with faculty

outside of class for help or advice only enhanced the academic performance of African American and White students (Mayo et al.). The complex and at times delicate nature of interracial associations may be a pivotal factor in shaping the quality of interpersonal contacts (Helms, 1985).

Finally, additional individual and college factors may also impact student achievement and should be taken into account whenever possible. Educational researchers have consistently reported that academic achievement is associated with gender and parent's education (Astin, 1977, 1993; Chapman & Pascarella, 1983; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Trent & Medsker, 1968). The type of college attended and the place of residence while in college can also impact student performance. Students who live on campus are likely to be more involved with the college experience and to enjoy a variety of educational benefits (Astin, 1977, 1984, 1993). The shared educational goals of these living units may promote learning (Blimling & Hample, 1979; Moos, 1979; Winston, Huston, & McCaffrey, 1980). Thus, each of these factors was taken into account in this study.

## METHOD

### Sample and Instrument

The national database for the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) includes data collected annually by universities. The third edition of the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) was completed by 28,556 students in 1997. For this study, the researchers used a sample of 836 undergraduate Latina/o students attending Research and Doctoral granting institutions, 30 colleges. (Table 1). The CSEQ is a 191-item survey on the quality of student effort and educational gains during college. The survey includes items on participation in cocurricular activities, interpersonal experiences, and student-faculty interactions and student-reported undergraduate grades (Pace, 1984). Student background data includes class standing in college, gender and race. However, the race categories used in the third edition do not include Latina/o subgroups.

TABLE 1.  
Gender, Class Standing, and College GPA  
of Participants and Distribution  
by Type of Institution ( $N = 836$ )

	%
<b>Gender</b>	
Men .....	36.1
Women .....	63.9
<b>Class</b>	
Senior .....	18.4
Junior .....	21.3
Sophomore .....	23.4
Freshman .....	36.8
<b>GPA</b>	
A .....	5.9
A-, B+ .....	29.5
B .....	32.3
B-, C+ .....	25.4
C, C-, or lower .....	5.6
<b>Institutions</b>	
Comprehensive college .....	34.2
Doctoral university .....	5.6
Research university .....	60.2

### Variables

The dependent variable in this study was academic achievement as measured by college grades (Figure 1). Two types of independent variables were used. The first group includes student background variables and class standing. The second group includes college environment and experiences variables. The college environment variables include the student's academic major and place of residence. The college experiences variables include student motivational and behavioral variables, and measures of a variety of student-faculty interactions.

### RESULTS

The majority of the Latina/o students in the sample were doing well; approximately 68% reported average grades of B or higher (Table 1). Almost all (98%) had spoken with a professor (Table 2). For discussion purposes, student-faculty interactions are grouped into three general a priori categories: general, academically related, and primary-personal contact. The first category of interactions can be seen as general and possibly more superficial than the other two categories. Table 2 indicates that 36% of the Latina/o students often interacted "briefly" with an instructor after class (selected either "often" or "very often" as their response). This is essentially the same rate that Cole (1999) reported for African American and White students. This general contact with professors can be a precursor to more educationally purposeful academic and interpersonal interactions. In fact, students interacted with faculty more often for academic purposes (e.g., to get information on a course) and much less frequently on a more personal basis (e.g., for coffee, Cokes, or snacks). In the former case, the more academically focused of these interactions occurred only occasionally for most students. Although 56.4% of the students often asked a professor for general course information, only occasionally did they discuss ideas for a term paper (54%) or faculty comments about their work (49.8%). The third category of student-faculty contact was akin to personal counseling or advising, implying more in-depth interactions and communication between student and professor. Actually very few students reported frequent interpersonal contact with faculty (19.7% or less), perhaps because most perceived their professors as neutral (46%) and in some cases remote and unsympathetic (12%). This data supports research indicating that many minority students experienced constrained or unsatisfactory contact with faculty (Arnold, 1993; Feagin et al. 1996; Fleming, 1984; Hurtado, 1994; Turner, 1994). As indicated earlier, because an overwhelming majority of college professors are White, the student-faculty interactions of Latina/o students are most likely to be interracial interactions. Unfortunately, Rendón and Valadez (1993) have noted

FIGURE 1.  
Variables Used in the Study, Coding and Value Labels

Variable	Scale	Code
College grades:	1 = C, C-, or lower; 2 = C+ or B-; 3 = B; 4 = B+ or A-; 5 = A	1-5
Gender of student:	Male, Female	1-2
Either parent graduated from college:	none, father or mother, both	1-3
Classification in college:	freshman, sophomore, junior, senior	1-4
Institutional type:	research, comprehensive, or doctoral university	dummy coded
Major field of study:	business, education, English, foreign & area studies, health-related majors, humanities, physical & biological science, sociology, other	dummy coded
Place of residence:	on campus, with parents or relatives, off campus	dummy coded
Time spent on schoolwork:	1 = <i>less than 20 hrs/wk</i> , 2 = <i>about 20 hrs/wk</i> , 3 = <i>about 30 hrs/wk</i> , 4 = <i>about 40 hrs/wk</i> , 5 = <i>about 50 hrs/wk</i>	1-5
Expect to enroll for advanced degree:	no, yes	1-2
Quality of relationships with faculty:	1 = <i>remote, discouraging, or unsympathetic</i> ; to 7 = <i>approachable, helpful, understanding, or encouraging</i>	1-7
Frequency of interactions* with faculty:	1 = <i>never</i> , 2 = <i>occasionally</i> , 3 = <i>often</i> , 4 = <i>very often</i>	1-4

\* Talked with faculty; visited informally after class; made office appointment with faculty; asked for information related to a course (grades, make-up work, assignments, etc.); discussed term paper or project with faculty, asked for comments or criticisms about work; worked with faculty on research project; discussed career plans with faculty; had coffee, Cokes, snacks with faculty; discussed personal problems with faculty

TABLE 2.  
Percent of Students That Rated Faculty Approachable and  
the Frequency of Different Types of Student-Faculty Interactions

Quality of relationships with faculty (% responding)			
	Remote, discouraging, unsympathetic	Neutral <sup>a</sup>	Approachable, understanding, encouraging
Total	12	46	42
Comprehensive	12	39	49
Doctoral	12	41	45
Research	13	50	37
Frequency of interactions with faculty			
	Seldom <sup>b</sup> or Never	Occasionally	Very often
<i>General</i>			
Talked with a professor	2.5	36.1	61.3
Visited informally and briefly with an instructor after class	14.2	49.4	36.4
Made an appointment to meet with a professor in his or her office	16.4	53.9	29.7
<i>Academic</i>			
Asked your instructor for information related to a course you were taking	4.8	38.8	56.4
Discussed ideas for a term paper or other class project with professor	19.0	54.5	26.5
Asked your instructor for comments and criticism about your work	27.0	49.8	23.2
Worked with professor on a research project	82.4	11.2	6.4
<i>Personal</i>			
Discussed your career plans and ambitions with a professor	32.6	47.7	19.7
Had coffee, Cokes, or snacks with a professor	73.2	20.9	5.9
Discussed personal problems or concerns with a professor	63.6	28.2	8.2

<sup>a</sup> The quality of relationships with faculty was rated on a 7-point scale, ratings of 4, 5 = *neutral*.

<sup>b</sup> The frequency of interactions was reported on a 4-point scale: 3 = *often* and 4 = *very often*.

faculty resistance to structural and psychological changes that might enhance cultural understanding and possibly accommodate culturally diverse student populations.

Multiple regression techniques were used to examine the potential influence of different types of interactions with faculty and in order to take into account relevant student and college factors. A hierarchical blocked regression was used and the student's demographic characteristics and class standing were entered in the first block of the regression. The second block consisted of institutional characteristics, college learning environments, and student behavioral and motivational indicators. The third block included the student-faculty interaction variables. The standardized coefficients for the variables for two points in the regression (the "after inputs" and final regression) are reported in Table 3. The "after inputs" beta was the regression coefficient at the point in the analysis at which student characteristics had been entered: the demographic characteristics and class standing. This provided a statistical control for the effects, if any, of student characteristics on the environmental and outcome variables. These coefficients provided an indication of the potential impact on student performance of each environmental variable, independent of student factors and before other variables were entered into the regression equation (Astin, 1993). College environment and experiences data and student-faculty interactions data were entered in subsequent blocks, and the standardized regression coefficients are reported in Table 3. At this point the influence of all the independent variables had been statistically controlled thus, the final betas provided an indication of the unique contribution of each variable. After controlling for the influences of student factors most measures of faculty contact are statistically significant.

## DISCUSSION

### Influences on Academic Achievement

The students in this study had had different types of interactions with their professors and the frequency and quality of relationships with professors varied for each student. Theory and

prior research suggest that contact with faculty can promote achievement, and student characteristics, motivation, and behavior, as well as institutional factors can play a significant role. For instance, the type of college attended provides a general indicator of the educational environment, as does the student's major. However, to the degree that students select and change their academic program, the major can also reflect intrinsic academic motivation. Recall that student background characteristics were statistically controlled in the first part of the analysis and that institutional factors and student motivational and behavioral factors while in college were controlled in the second and third blocks of the regression. The data in Table 3 suggest that academic achievement is positively associated with having two parents who have graduated from college, as well as the student's motivation (degree plans) and behavior (schoolwork time). The latter appears to have had a relatively stronger impact than the student's background (parent's education) and educational motivation. The standardized coefficient for the time spent on schoolwork (.18,  $p < .01$ ) was relatively larger than the coefficients for parent's education (.13,  $p < .01$ ) and for the student's advanced degree plans (.08,  $p < .05$ ). Although these three student factors contributed to student performance, academic behaviors had a relatively stronger impact.

The type of college attended, undergraduate major, and place of residence were also associated, to some degree, with student achievement. In comparison to students at doctoral colleges, students attending research universities tended to have lower college grades and students attending comprehensive colleges tended to have higher grades. A close examination of Table 3 shows that the "after inputs" beta ( $-.09$ ,  $p < .05$ ) for attending a research university remained significant after all of the college environment and experiences variables had been taken into account (final beta =  $-.10$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In other words, the negative association between grades and attending a research university remained significant after all of the student variables and all of the college environment and experiences variables had been taken into account. On the

TABLE 3.

College Grades Regressed Onto Student and Institutional Characteristics, and Student-Faculty Interactions (With Standardized Coefficients)

Independent Variables	After Inputs Beta	Final Beta
<b>Student characteristics</b>		
Classification in college .....	-.020	-.010
Gender .....	-.050	-.050
Both parents graduate from college .....	.130**	.130**
$R^2$ .....	.016	
$R^2$ Change .....		.016**
<b>Institutional factors</b>		
Research University .....	-.090*	-.100**
Comprehensive college or university .....	.080*	.040
$R^2$ .....	.023	
$R^2$ Change .....		.007**
<b>Student factors</b>		
Major field of study:		
Business .....	.070*	.110**
Education .....	.090*	.100**
English .....	-.040	-.020
Foreign & area studies .....	-.050	-.020
Health-Related majors .....	-.050	-.030
Humanities .....	.060	.060*
Physical & biological science .....	.040	.050
Sociology .....	.060	.030
Time spent on schoolwork .....	.180**	.180**
Expect to enroll for advanced degree .....	.090**	.080*
Live on campus .....	-.070*	-.040
Live with parents or relatives .....	.070*	.040
$R^2$ .....	.089	
$R^2$ Change .....		.067**
<b>Student-Faculty interactions</b>		
Quality of relationships with faculty .....	.170**	.100**
Experiences with faculty:		
Talked with faculty .....	.160**	.140**
Visited informally after class .....	.040	-.100*
Made office appointment with faculty .....	.060	-.010
Asked for information related to a course .....	.070*	-.030
Discussed term paper or project with faculty .....	.090**	.020
Asked for comments or criticism about work .....	.100**	.010
Worked with faculty on research project .....	.090**	.050
Discussed career plans with faculty .....	.100**	.030
Had coffee, Cokes, snacks with faculty .....	.080*	.030
Discussed personal problems with faculty .....	.020	-.040
Multiple $R$ .....	.343	
$R^2$ .....	.118	
$R^2$ Change .....		.029*

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

other hand, the beta for attending a comprehensive college did not remain significant once other college variables were entered in the equation. This suggests that the tendency for higher student grades at these colleges was due in part to attending a comprehensive college and in part to other college environments and experiences.

The student's place of residence was also a contributing factor. Note that approximately 63% of the students in the sample lived on campus and 15% lived with family. The data in Table 3 indicate that living on campus was negatively associated with achievement. The standardized coefficient for this variable was statistically significant ( $-.07, p < .05$ ) after controlling for student inputs but it became smaller and non-significant (.04) after all variables were entered in the analysis. For Latina/o students, living on campus provided no academic advantages over living off campus. Although the coefficients for both place of residence variables did not remain significant at the final step in the analysis, the data is contrary to research that has consistently reported positive educational outcomes associated with living on campus (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

### Student-Faculty Interactions

The general hypothesis that student-faculty interactions are positively associated with student educational outcomes was derived from Pascarella's (1980) informal student-faculty interaction concept. Astin's (1984) student involvement construct allows for a more specific idea: student-faculty interactions focusing on academic concerns are hypothetically positively associated with academic achievement. The data suggest that few of the student-faculty interaction variables had a unique effect on achievement for Latina/o students. Of the 10 student-faculty interaction variables, 7 were statistically significant after controlling for student characteristics. As suggested by the second hypothesis, four of these were academically related interactions with professors. However, at the final step in the equation only three variables maintained statistical significance: (a) quality of relationships with

faculty, (b) talked with faculty, and (c) visited informally after class with faculty. The first variable—students' assessment of the quality of student relationships with faculty—had a final standardized coefficient of .10 ( $p < .01$ ). However, the regression results suggest that after-class visits were negatively associated with college grades; the final standardized beta is  $-.10$  ( $p < .05$ ). Nonetheless, the latter variable was moderately correlated with most of the student-faculty interaction variables (correlations range from .3 to .5) but had a correlation with college grades that is close to zero (.04), thus, it was a suppressor variable (Pedhazur, 1982). The negative value of the coefficient suggests that this variable is reflecting variance associated with other independent variables rather than with the dependent variable. Thus, the change from the "after inputs" to the final coefficient for each of the student-faculty interaction variables was in part due to the magnitude of the correlation with this variable (after class visits with faculty). Nonetheless, the data in Table 3 provide evidence of the positive impact of student-faculty interactions. Specifically, frequent interactions with faculty (talked with professor, final beta = .14,  $p < .01$ ) enhanced student academic achievement. In summary, this study yielded minimal evidence that informal contact with faculty (Coke or coffee with professors) may be fulfilling a socialization function that facilitates academic achievement. On the other hand, discussing course work (paper, project, and feedback), working with a professor on a research project, and discussing career plans appear to be more likely to contribute to academic performance. In essence, student involvement in educationally related and distinctly academic interactions with professors appears to enhance student's academic performance. Additionally, student achievement was enhanced when professors are perceived as accessible and supportive. Finally, unique college effects regarding the student's place of residence may be operating. Prior research has consistently pointed to the positive effects of living on campus; however, similar data for Latina/o or other minority students is absent from the literature.

## Limitations

Student-faculty interactions involve general, academic, and personal matters and the quality of each of these experiences may vary. However, a global indicator of the quality of relationships with faculty was used in the study. Furthermore, an assumption was made that most of the interactions are with White faculty. Additional data on race-related factors that might influence interracial interactions could be useful. Additionally, the survey data does not include information on within-Latino group membership (e.g., Chicano, Puerto Rican), precluding an examination of possible differences for Latina/o subgroups.

## Implications

Learning environments in which students are actively engaged in the learning process and that provide learning opportunities in a variety of settings can optimize academic achievement (Anaya, 1996, Cole, Sugioka, & Yamagata-Lynch, 1999). To the degree that the social milieu of a college campus is malleable, student affairs professionals can play a critical role by creating and facilitating activities and programs in which faculty can engage students outside the classroom. Thus, faculty and student affairs practitioners wishing to direct attention and energy towards student learning should incorporate a three-part strategy to foster student-faculty interaction in and beyond the classroom. First, simply promote and increase the frequency of student-faculty interactions. To begin with, student affairs practitioners can, at minimum, increase the frequency of student-faculty interactions. Professors typically participate in orientation programs and summer programs designed for first-generation college students and minority students. These programs are designed to facilitate the transition to college life and in many ways initiate the collegiate socialization process. However, as students persist beyond the first year, fewer institutionalized support services regularly bring faculty and students together outside of class. This problem can be turned into an opportunity for staff-faculty collaboration in developing and implementing services and activities for continuing students. Second, student

affairs practitioners can focus on interactions that complement classroom learning. Student services and academic departments can enhance students learning and academic achievement through campus forums, debates, and workshops on campus, regional and international issues of interest to minority students in general and Latina/o students in particular. Third, practitioners can work towards facilitating nurturing and mutually satisfying interactions. This may be the more important or difficult strategy requiring attention to interracial and cross-cultural interactions. The quality of student-faculty relationships can be enhanced through, for example, tournaments, field days, faculty fellows programs (hosted by residence halls or student organizations), and other social activities. Although the suggestions made here are not new, the research on minority students underscores the need for creating quality learning environments for all students.

In sum, the results of this study suggest implications for faculty, administrators and student affairs professionals, as well as for future research. Latina/o college students tend to have favorable perceptions of their interactions with faculty. However, the frequency of interactions is low. The role of faculty is critical. Professors have the option to respond to the initiative of an individual student or to formal initiatives presented by administrators and student affairs professionals. The investment of time and energy in out-of-classroom activities, which complement a professor's teaching efforts, can potentially optimize student academic performance. Because a significant portion of Latina/o students view faculty as neutral, perhaps the most challenging task for faculty and staff is to increase the frequency of student-faculty interactions for Latina/o students while ensuring engaging and supportive interactions. Conscientious efforts at improving the institutional and classroom climate for diversity need to be addressed by college faculty and staff. Finally, research efforts should, in addition to examining more closely the nature of student-faculty interactions, make a determination of student's perceptions of the quality of each of these interactions and examine factors that might influence interracial interactions. In

light of distinctly different educational performance and attainment profiles of Mexican American and Puerto Rican students (Pennock-Roman, 1990), an even closer examination of within-group differences may prove fruitful.

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