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Fostering College Readiness: An Ethnography of a Latina/o Afterschool Program

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Abstract

There are two, related types of college readiness: (a) cognitive—students' test scores and grades and (b) noncognitive—students' academic mind-sets, behaviors, and motivation. This study uses an ethnographic approach to examine how an afterschool program for Latina/o high school youth fosters noncognitive factors of college readiness. Based on over 80 hr of participant observation and 31 semistructured interviews, this work demonstrates how an afterschool program acts as a supplement to students' noncognitive factors of college readiness. The findings also suggest that afterschool programs for high school youth can act as hubs of behavioral nudges toward noncognitive college readiness and access.

Keywords

urban education, students, multicultural education

> Every time I enter HSAP, college is already on my mind, that's the big thing. They're enlightening us about what's good, what we should do, how we should start planning now, what goals we can set, and what can we do to reach them.

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Ten minutes to six in the evening, 2 hr after most students are dismissed from their last class, 23 seniors from various schools listen to a college counselor. "Tell me something good," she asks the students. A girl wearing a collared uniform shirt responds, "I finished my personal statement!" A few students applaud and the counselor smiles. "So today we're going to gather up our armor—build up our positivity to put yourself out there in these college applications." Students are tasked with writing positive adjectives about each person on large sheets of chart paper at their tables. "You seem outgoing. I wouldn't have talked to you if you didn't talk to me," one girl says to another at a table. By the end of the activity, each student's name has five positive adjectives under it. "Before you all go to the computer lab, just realize this, you bring these positive things to campus. Remember what you're bringing . . . good job guys!" the counselor says.

Three students are seated at a table. One girl takes a sheet of paper out of her backpack. Another girl, whom she just met that day, asks what was on the paper. "These are my reach, target, and safety schools. The reach schools, I mean, if I can get my grades up . . . I have a 3.3 now, so if I can get it up, I have a chance." Less than 2 min later, the other girls at the table, without speaking further about it, both make similar college lists.

This short account of a session with seniors enrolled in the High School Afterschool Program (HSAP),[1] which is based in Los Angeles, CA, speaks to the unique position of afterschool programs as well as the potential impact they can have on high school students' college readiness. Occupying a space between the home and the school, afterschool programs can leverage relationships and resources to meet students where they are in terms of college readiness.

In California, afterschool program participation has doubled from 12% of the K-12 population in 2004 to 25% in 2014 (Afterschool Alliance, 2014). This upward trend indicates the increasing popularity of providing supervised activities for students after the school day ends (e.g., Kane, 2004; Vandell, 2013). At least 15% of high school youth in California are involved in an afterschool program (Afterschool Alliance, 2014). High school students can benefit from mentorship, college guidance, and a productive space in afterschool programs (Harris & Kiyama, 2013; Reid & Moore, 2008).

Although Latino/as[2] are making strides toward greater college graduation rates, gaps still remain. In 2013, 15% of the Latina/o population between 25 and 29 years held a bachelor's degree as compared with 40% of their White, 60% of their Asian, and 20% of their Black counterparts (Krogstad, 2015). One obstacle to college access is high school quality. Latino/a students are overrepresented in low-income, underresourced high schools (Anyon, 2014; Fry, 2005). At such resource-starved schools, overburdened counselors cannot provide adequate college guidance to many students (American Counseling

Association, 2013). Afterschool programs then might play a supplemental role in supporting students in students' college application process.

Scholars have studied the academic and socioemotional impacts of afterschool programs (Roffman, Pagano, & Hirsch, 2001), as well as programs focusing on niche groups, such as students at-risk for leaving school (Hollister, 2003), yet little research examines the role of afterschool programs in college readiness. The present study adds to the afterschool literature by looking at a high school level, predominately Latino/a, afterschool program through the lens of college readiness. This research describes the potential of an afterschool program in fostering noncognitive factors of college readiness for underrepresented youth. Although HSAP offers various enrichment activities, mental health services, and recreational activities, this research focuses only on the academic, college-oriented programs that are offered to students. The goal of this work is twofold: (a) to determine whether and how students think of HSAP in relation to college readiness and (b) to examine whether and/or how HSAP fosters noncognitive factors of college readiness.

This article begins with a review of the literature concerning afterschool programs in general and programs for youth in high school. I then describe the college readiness framework employed. Next, I describe the ethnographic research methods used for data collection. Following the description of the methodology, I provide the participants' personal, afterschool, and college-going identities as they relate to college readiness. The article ends with a discussion of findings and argues that HSAP provides a concerted "push" toward college access and readiness.

Literature Review: Afterschool Programs for Low-Income Youth

To define "afterschool programs," I use the standard model of programs Kane (2004) identified in his evaluation of afterschool programs. Such programs were often housed in schools and in community or recreation centers. The programs occurred after school for 2 to 3 hr with a dedicated time for academics/homework. During that time, students worked with staff and receive small group or individual homework help. This work time was then usually followed by another activity involving athletics, the arts, leadership skills, or presentation/workshop aimed at helping with the development of the student. Cosden, Morrison, Albanese, and Macias (2001) identified four roles played by afterschool programs: (a) protection, (b) cultural appreciation, (c) social skills, and (d) academic achievement. Programs usually cover at least one of the roles; however, the foci, pedagogy, and ideology of programs vary and often depend on the unique needs of youth in the community.

Impact

Afterschool programs potentially curb the rate of drug and alcohol use, unprotected sex, and violent crime (Halpern, 2002; Posner & Vandell, 1994; Riggs & Greenberg, 2004). Beyond their preventative role, afterschool programs provide enrichment activities and supplemental academic support for low-income students that they would likely not receive anywhere else (Kane, 2004; Posner & Vandell, 1994; Woodland, 2008). The potential academic benefits of afterschool program participation include higher attendance, greater homework completion, more positive feelings toward education, higher retention, and higher test scores (Vandell, 2013). The literature on Latino/as in afterschool programs is limited, but findings suggest that afterschool participation is associated with academic gains (e.g., Riggs, Bohnert, Guzman, & Davidson, 2010; Riggs & Greenberg, 2004).

Selection bias poses a serious limitation of evaluating the impact of afterschool programs (Apsler, 2008; Scott-Little, Hamann, & Jurs, 2002). Considering the voluntary nature of afterschool programs, differences may exist between the students who opt to participate in a program versus those who do not. Gottfredson, Cross, and Soule (2007) postulated from their research that the students who chose to enroll "are also those who are already on track for prosocial development." (p. 290). Apsler (2008) added that such differences might also be manifested in higher academic achievement. Attributed impacts of afterschool attendance might be biased given the nature of who attends afterschool programs. Therefore, it is useful to consider the characteristics of who attends these programs when examining the usefulness of any afterschool program.

Afterschool Programs for High School Youth

The immediate hours after school are described as a period of opportunity for students—an opportunity for academic growth, for developing skills and habits that will be valuable for college, or for unorganized recreational activity (Gottfredson, Cross, & Soule, 2007). Much of this depends on what, if any, programs a student is involved in afterschool. The high school demographic, however, of afterschool program participants is the least examined in scholarly work. Of the 73 afterschool programs reviewed in Durlak and Weissberg's (2007) meta-analysis, only five studies focused on high school students.

Much of the research evaluating the impacts of HSAPs rely on survey responses and observable outcomes such as grades, attendance, graduation rates, and test scores (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Kane, 2004). Some evaluators have found that youth involved in afterschool programs have lower

dropout rates than students who are not enrolled in like programs (George, Cusick, Wasserman, & Gladden, 2007; Huang, Kim, Marshall, & Pérez, 2005). Hipps, Diaz, and Wingren (2007) found that high school participants in a California-based program scored higher on the math and English state exam. These students were also more knowledgeable about higher education than peers in the control group. Maxfield, Schirm, and Rodriguez-Planas (2003) found that participants in an exclusively HSAP had a greater probability of postsecondary enrollment, but no change in test scores. Although limited compared with the research on elementary and middle school participants, the research concerning high school youth suggests the potential for increased high school persistence and college enrollment.

Some research however takes a qualitative approach to studying afterschool programs for high school youth. Each student in a study of 13 high-achieving, first-generation college students attributed their college matriculation to an afterschool program (Reid & Moore, 2008). Specifically, these students gained college knowledge and guidance from their mentors that they did not receive in the school setting. Other researchers have investigated the role of community-based organizations (CBOs) and their afterschool programs (Harris & Kiyama, 2013; Wong, 2008, 2010) Through a social capital framework, Wong (2008) found that CBOs could provide low-income Chinese youth with academic help, advocacy, counseling, and helpful skills to navigate society. Similarly, Harris and Kiyama (2013) argued that trust, through the form of confianza (mutual trust), with adults who worked in a CBO, aided Latina/o high school students with their persistence rates. Both studies found that afterschool programs at these CBOs provided students with "organizational bridges to additional resources" (Harris & Kiyama, 2013, p. 20). Although varying models of afterschool programs exist and have various impacts, a specific program with a focus on college readiness is the focus here. Previous to this study, no research concerning afterschool programs has qualitatively examined their potential to foster college identities.

College Readiness Framework

Would-be first-generation college students attending underresourced schools may benefit from supplementary college preparatory support that schools and families may not be able to provide. This is the population that HSAP serves: low-income, predominately first-generation, and Latino/a high school students. HSAP's mission is college-centered: "The high school program prepares youth for postsecondary advancement by providing academic support, preparation for college, personal guidance, and pathways to achieve their life goals." Using a college readiness framework, I studied the role HSAP plays in students' lives.

A college readiness framework was useful given high school participants need to understand the application process and prepare for college.

College readiness is the level of preparation a student needs to enroll and succeed in higher education (Conley, 2007). College readiness can be categorized by cognitive and noncognitive factors (Farrington et al., 2012). Cognitive factors are focused more on performance and measurable skills; these factors include the academic content knowledge and research skills necessary to transition into college-level coursework (e.g., Conley, 2007; Wiley, Wyatt, & Camara, 2010). While grade point averages (GPAs), standardized tests, and course records can measure cognitive factors, noncognitive factors are more difficult to assess. Noncognitive factors of college readiness include the mind-sets, behaviors, and motivation students need beyond the cognitive factors to succeed in higher education (Farrington et al., 2012). The behaviors exemplified in the noncognitive factors of college readiness influence academic performance. For example, a growing body of literature has shown an association between cognitive processes, emotional processes (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007) and behaviors (Oyserman & Destin, 2010). Although cognitive factors are integral to college readiness, my central focus here addresses how afterschool programs can foster the noncognitive factors of college readiness.

The noncognitive factors of college readiness can be divided into five categories: (a) academic behaviors, (b) academic perseverance, (c) academic mind-sets, (d) learning strategies, and (e) social skills (Farrington et al., 2012). Academic behaviors include attending class, doing homework, and organizing study materials. Academic perseverance refers to a student's engagement and effort to complete a school-related goal despite challenges. Grit is an example of academic perseverance: "The gritty individual approaches achievement as a marathon; his or her advantage is stamina" (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007, p. 1087). Academic mind-sets are the beliefs one has in relation to academic work. Such mind-sets include self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982) and locus of control (Rotter, 1954). These mind-sets impact academic performance, in that they influence people's belief in their ability to succeed and what they can control in reference to their academic outcomes. Learning strategies are student-directed study skills, such as time management and goal-setting, two skills necessary for success in higher education (Conley, 2007). Last, social skills refer to the behaviors needed to build relationships with professors, administrators, staff, and other students. Such skills include cooperation, empathy, and responsibility (Malecki & Elliot, 2002). Each of these five factors are interrelated with cognitive factors, as they require cognition and impact the cognitive factors measured for college readiness (e.g., test scores or grades).

Within the noncognitive college readiness framework, I also include the contextual awareness as described by Conley (2007). This awareness includes "college knowledge." Such information includes knowledge of admissions processes, financial aid, tuition costs, and other information pertaining to applying and enrolling in an institution of higher education. College knowledge aids students in their transition to college. Through participant observation and interviews, I learned about how, if at all, the afterschool program fostered students' noncognitive factors of college readiness.

Ethnographic Research

In reference to evaluating the usefulness of afterschool programs, Vandell (2013) offered that, "Some of the skills and knowledge that many afterschool programs are designed to promote are, in fact, complex to assess, and research in the field is limited by the inability to use experimental design to identify causal relationships" (p.12). Through ethnographic research, however, one may learn more about the complexities of afterschool programs and the types of students that attend them. In this section, I first describe the research site followed by a description of the methods of data collection. I then describe my analytic process and how I ensured trustworthiness in this study.

The Research Site

HSAP is housed in the first floor of an apartment complex across the street from a park with freshly paved outdoor basketball courts with intact nets. The area is deceptive; one does not immediately feel the poverty until looking closer. On the edges of that same park, I would see pitched tents and middle-aged men lying under the shade of trees, sometimes drinking out of bottles covered in paper or black plastic bags. HSAP stands in contrast with much of its surroundings. On the short walk from street parking to the facility I often saw homeless people lying under trees with shopping baskets full of their belongings near them. Near the entrance, the crisp, colorful sign for HSAP juxtaposes with the patchwork of chipping, discolored white and tan paint that covers the building.

Despite the facade of the building, HSAP touts the academic success of its students. HSAP began keeping record of overall graduation and persistence rates 3 years ago. During that time, 100% of the students enrolled in HSAP graduated from high school. Of the students who pursued a higher education, 93% are still enrolled in their respective institutions. At the time of the study, HSAP was only in the beginnings of making individualized profiles of students and related college-going data. Any information about GPA's and

personal academic information then came from the students themselves in interviews. The demographics of the program reflect neighborhood demographics: 75% are Latino and the remaining 25% is comprised of Filipinos, Koreans, and African Americans. Over 90% of the students' families are living at or below the poverty line. With over 70 employees and hundreds of annual volunteers, HSAP provides athletics, academic services, and enrichment activities such as coding, film, theater, photography, and healthy eating to neighborhood youth. HSAP also comes at no cost to students and is completely voluntary. Given my focus on college readiness, I focused on the high school division of HSAP.

The high school program. Students start arriving to HSAP after 3:00 p.m. when school ends. They come from schools from various parts of the city, but over 80% live within a mile radius of the campus. Arriving directly afterschool, many students are still in their uniforms. Most linger in the high school lounge and catch up with friends. Other students are on laptops provided by HSAP. The mentors and high school coordinators greet the students and engage in leisure conversation. At 4:30 p.m., the atmosphere, still relaxed, eases into productivity, as the students begin their homework with the support of adults. Students are still talking and joking, but more of the talk is related to homework and school at this point.

Members in the high school division range in age from 14 to 19 years. Admittance is granted on a first come, first served basis. HSAP does not have a GPA requirement but the leaders expect commitment from students and their families. If a student is accepted to HSAP, both the student and the parent must sign a contract agreeing to the attendance requirements. Students in the ninth and 10th grades attend HSAP at least 3 times a week. Students in the 11th and 12th grades, who are presumably busier with extracurricular activities, sometimes only have to attend once a week, depending on their particular contract. Over 150 students are officially registered with the high school program, but students attend HSAP on different days to accommodate more people. On an average day, I would see roughly fifteen ninth to 11th graders and 25 seniors, because of involvement in other programs within HSAP, and the staggered attendance. Although students can drop in whenever they like to do homework or just "hang out," the high school division has a college focus.

I focus on the two programs that comprise the academic component of HSAP: academic lab and college prep. During academic lab, students, mainly freshmen, sophomores, and juniors get help from mentors and tutors with their homework. HSAP's residential college counselor leads a college application workshop at least twice a week for seniors and sometimes juniors, focusing on one topic a week. Topics include finding the right college fit,

financial aid and fee waivers, how to apply to California State University (CSU) and University of California (UC) schools, and thinking through personal statements. The high school program also includes free SAT classes, a three-day Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA) workshop, and individual college application/personal statement help from mentors.

Data Collection and Trustworthiness

I conducted 31, one-on-one, semistructured interviews. This included 24 high school participants, two alumni of HSAP, the three high school coordinators, the alumni coordinator, and the executive director of the entire afterschool program. The students were in Grades 9 through 12 and all identified as Latino/a. I began interviews after 1 month on site. During this time, I focused on observations, building relationships with the students, and learning about the organization. After building rapport with some of the students, I began interviewing them.

Most interviews lasted between 30 and 45 min. I faced unique challenges interviewing students, which led to variable time available for one-on-one interviewing. Because of fixed travel arrangements, most students could not meet outside of the time they were supposed to be at HSAP. As a result, I attempted to interview students when they had spare time and were not actively engaging in homework or college preparatory help. Out of respect of the students' time and the work being done during the program, efficiency with questioning was paramount. Although time was limited for one-on-one interviews, I used my volunteer/mentor relationship with students to learn more about them and HSAP.

Participant observation. I acted as a participant observer and through my role of a mentor; I forged relationships with students and staff in addition to gaining an insider's perspective of the program (Becker & Geer, 1957). As a participant observer, the students and staff saw me as a volunteer and a researcher. In my first few of visits, I introduced myself to all of the youth present. Given that a guest once mistook me for a youth participant, I do not think that my age was particularly obtrusive in observing. I came to HSAP least twice a week, from 4:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. I spent over 80 hr in the field conducting research from late August to mid-December. I purposefully did research during this time, as the fall semester is pivotal for seniors in preparing for and applying to college. I worked as a mentor to three ninth and 10th graders and aided them with their homework for the first hour. I also worked as a college mentor and worked with five students on their personal essays and college applications. I forged friendships with many of the students and learned about their lives through conversations and personal statements. Although such a

prolonged engagement is useful for rapport and greater honesty from participants, participant observers run the risk of becoming too close and biased (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Given my closeness to the students and HSAP, I took certain steps to ensure trustworthiness and rigor.

Data analysis and trustworthiness. I would write fieldnotes within a day of my site visits from jottings in a field journal (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Miles & Huberman, 1994). After writing fieldnotes for a day's observation, I would write a memo listing themes, possible codes, personal reflections, and questions that arose from my observations. While I referred to fieldnotes for details, memos were useful as a form of data reduction for data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this manner, I constantly interrogated my assumptions and feelings in an effort to become aware of any biases I held (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

I also used artifacts as a supplemental data source to reach a deeper understanding of HSAP (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). My analysis of artifacts included official documents such as flyers, brochures, emails sent by staff to students, worksheets, and other handouts given to youth. In addition, I became familiar with the interview data by transcribing each interview myself. Throughout the data collection process, I engaged in a constant comparative analysis using artifacts, transcripts, memos, and fieldnotes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I could thereby identify concepts and themes as they developed. After completing data collection however, I revisited and reexamined all of the raw data. Informed by potential codes from memos and the college readiness framework, I engaged in focused coding to identify emergent themes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). Then, through the "member check" technique, I shared my results with the administrators of the high school program, the executive director of HSAP, and high school students present during an afterschool session (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

Data

Field notes from participant observation, interview transcriptions, and artifacts served as the primary data sources. Three identities emerged concerning students' noncognitive college readiness: (a) personal identity, (b) HSAP identity, and (c) college-going identity. I begin with a description of the youth participants, their backgrounds, and motivation to participate in this program. I follow with the data relating to the distinct space HSAP occupies between the school and home environments, as it relates to noncognitive factors of college readiness. I conclude with a description of the findings concerning college readiness and HSAP's college preparatory resources.

Personal Identity

To find out the unique role of HSAP in college readiness, students answered questions related to their noncognitive factors of college readiness. Even when asked about the unique contributions of HSAP on their college readiness, it would be unwise to discount the students' experiences and growth outside of HSAP when examining the program's role in fostering college readiness. As a senior said, HSAP students are similar in that they have some form of motivation or academic perseverance to come to HSAP; because other students "just go home, or do homework, so they kind of don't worry about stuff like this. You know, it's not a priority for them, having another priority besides school." Based on the youth's lives outside of HSAP, they differed in the noncognitive factors of college readiness that they displayed.

Academic perseverance played a factor in student participation in HSAP. If the student did not demonstrate intrinsic motivation to attend HSAP, then the student's friend group or family acted as motivating forces. A junior responded to my question about what he would do if he could not attend HSAP, in a way that showed his academic perseverance: "I mean, I would try to outreach for help because it's really hard to do by myself; like just get support about college and just education in general. It's hard to get support." Students often encouraged their friends to attend; for example, in an interview with a senior in the common room, I asked why she attended HSAP. Before she could answer, her friend, sitting at another table offered: "I'm the reason why she's here." The girl I originally interviewed laughed and agreed, so I asked the student at the other table to tell me more: "I told her about it because they were really into helping us and they were like the only ones who motivate us." Other students, such as a junior who had been involved for 2 years, expressed that although they were initially forced by parents to come to HSAP, they enjoyed continued participation: "my mom forced me to come here, but I kept coming to learn." By enrolling of their own volition, and/or continuing to attend HSAP, students displayed positive academic mind-sets and academic perseverance.

Participants displayed varying levels of academic behaviors and academic perseverance. GPA's of the participants ranged from 2.0 to 4.0 on a 4.0 scale. Some students with higher GPAs expressed that they would likely have similar academic success without HSAP. One student, vice president of his school's student council, stated that he was "an average, normal, nerdy type of dude, the bookworm and stuff," whose GPA was above a 3.5. A senior in her first year at HSAP with over a 3.75 GPA, described herself as "hardworking . . . dedicated to finishing whatever I put myself to finish." However,

another student was very clear that he believed his academic perseverance and behavior were directly impacted by his HSAP involvement: "If it wasn't for HSAP, I'd probably have like a 2.8."

HSAP also seemed to influence students' academic behaviors of doing homework and turning in assignments. While some students stated that they would be doing homework or reading if they were not at HSAP, others explained that they relied on HSAP: "I wouldn't do my homework otherwise; I'm lazy." A sophomore at a charter school commented on his academic perseverance and behavior: "It's pretty bad 'cause I don't focus on school . . . I mean I try to do the bare minimum most of the time. 'Cause I only get B's 'cause I don't feel like studying." Some students indicated that they would do their homework with or without HSAP, but that the mentors and community at HSAP aids in their understanding and successful completion of work: "I'd be home just doing homework, just like being bored, and I don't know, just struggling with more things and probably going to sleep even later because it takes me a long time to work."

The students had varied levels of college knowledge because of the varying college cultures of their high schools. Some students expressed that they learned most about college from HSAP as opposed to their school: "My college counselor, she focused on the go-getters, if you're not on the top 20, good luck you know. Only one college counselor, for probably 500 students." Other students had similar experiences, such as a senior who explained that her school had a positive college-going culture saying, "I know a lot of the kids go to college and my school is like a college preparatory school. So we hear from a lot of colleges. I get the same thing from HSAP."

One student explained to me that "just to be a part of HSAP, it takes a lot, especially to be a high schooler; 'cause not every high schooler is gonna show up constantly every day to work on applications and stuff." Although students vary with regard to their family situations, schools, and GPAs, they all display a level of academic perseverance by continuing to attend HSAP on a consistent basis. This program resides in a space between home, school, and other contextual factors beyond the program's reach. It follows that students develop much of the noncognitive factors of college readiness outside of HSAP. In the next section, I examine how HSAP fosters noncognitive factors of college readiness from its unique position between school and home environments.

HSAP Identity

HSAP's identity—structure, resources, and organizational practices—played a central role in fostering college readiness. Students in HSAP work in three

different spaces: the reading room, a study room, and a common room. The particular structure, or identity, of HSAP engenders noncognitive factors of college readiness. HSAP had the resources to create some elements of a college-going culture and provide college-related opportunities to students. In addition to the physical space, the computer lab, Internet connection, and books, HSAP provides a strong community network. HSAP has partnerships with universities in the city, state, and private institutions around the country. Students would receive weekly emails about what college admissions officers were visiting HSAP that week. At the beginning of Academic Lab and the college workshops, the high school directors read announcements about college-preparatory events (e.g., college fairs, workshops) held by other organizations.

Although HSAP provides resources for the students, the organization functions with the reality of limited financial resources. Because HSAP is located on the first floor of an apartment building, any problems with the facility affect the program. For example, one of the few rooms with air conditioning flooded one weekend and was unusable for almost a month. During some of the college workshops, students fell asleep due to the combination of the heat and the timing after the school day. A junior in his first year of HSAP recounted the two main critiques students held of the program:

> A more free space you know, 'cause I feel a little bit crowded. Especially when it comes to like finals, like students really come through and I'm like damn where do I sit at; and probably more tutors, and they're like, "hold on I'll come back" and they probably never come back to you.

HSAP also had a shortage of mentors so although I started with three senior mentees to guide along the college application process, I ended up adopting two more students as mentees. Resources, or lack thereof, in the form of mentors, space, technology, and peer support aid in developing students' noncognitive college readiness.

HSAP acts as a supplement to the varying levels of students' college readiness. Given that students had different academic needs and came from different schools, students often value HSAP for different things. Some students, such as one sophomore boy, needed HSAP's Wi-Fi and laptop access; he explained that HSAP has "resources like if I need to work on a project I can go on the laptops and also if I need the help they'll help me too." A freshman that moved to America from Guatemala three years ago, still learning English, learned about self-advocating from the director of HSAP. The freshman explained to me that one of her teachers would not help her with her work. After explaining the situation to the director, she told the freshman to tell the

counselor. She followed up with me exclaiming that her teacher finally gave her extra support after class. Students would often ask their mentors and other adults for advice concerning their classes or teachers at school. In this way, students would learn how to advocate for themselves and other soft skills useful for college.

Noncognitive factors of college readiness are also built into the rules of HSAP. For example, during one orientation for new HSAP participants, the high school directors spoke of academic behaviors and social skills. One leader began, "As you develop your college prep skills, we expect you to check and respond to emails quickly." She also mentioned that students would have to check the HSAP Facebook page for updates. Through these guidelines and rules, HSAP helped provide a space for students to practice such tacit skills related to college readiness such as responding to emails and checking pages for updates.

Many of the students emphasized the supportive role that the mentors and directors play in pushing them. One student, for example, explained how mentors supported her:

> They'll say, "That seems like a lot of work, but you know you can do it," or "We're here to support you." And if I was at home no one would be there to tell me that, so I would just put it to the side.

One participant even likened the environment to that of what she imagined college might be like:

> HSAP is like a second home slash school where you can just come and kinda relax where you can learn and do new things. And also college, like college is like home and then school, and you meet new people so you're learning something from them. So kinda like college but not exactly.

In addition to a push toward academic achievement, students also learn more social skills about how to interact with adults. While interviewing one of the high school coordinators in their office space, I noticed she greeted each student that walked by us. Without me asking, the coordinator explained why she addressed everyone who came into the office during our interview: ". . . when the students came in, I made sure to stop and talk to them, and I'm not ignoring you," she said motioning toward me, "but I'm always making sure that like I'm addressing them. Like, 'we're having a conversation but your presence is equally important to this place.'" The students are at the center of HSAP and engage with adults respectfully as equals. One student, a junior who I would often see joking with friends, told me that he did not talk

much at school. He explained that, "Adults here treat me like I'm their age or whatever; we just talk like we're having coffee. I feel mature. And I feel smarter here I swear to God, I feel so smart here . . . they push me to achieve."

While students valued the mentor–student relationship, they also highlighted the student–student relationship. On one occasion, while helping a student with homework, I overheard a 10th grader say he did not want to do his homework, and the student sitting next to him replied, "Don't you want to have a future? Get an education! Education first." They both laughed, and the boy who previously complained started his homework, displaying a positive academic behavior. I often observed students demonstrating and cultivating positive academic mind-sets, using each other as resources by asking each other for help sometimes before asking the mentors. A student explained to me once that his friend in the program "is really into math, so when I need help with math or something I ask him for it, and when he needs help with English he'll ask me for it, 'cause I'm pretty good at it." In another instance, a sophomore student explained why it was beneficial to be in an environment with her friends working: "I guess because I see everybody here doing their homework; it makes me want to work. They're making learning cool. But at school, everyone's like, 'I don't wanna be there' so I guess it's the vibe." A first-year senior described the "vibe" of HSAP as "a place to like chill but to do work." The communal aspect of HSAP created an environment where students could motivate each other to do homework, work on projects, and demonstrate other academic behaviors.

The space that HSAP provides is limited but provides support for the development of non cognitive factors of college readiness. HSAP's identity as an organization allows students to practice the social skills of communication with adults and peers. From the "push" they received from tutors and mentors, students gained learning strategies and developed more academic perseverance. In the following section, I discuss data concerning college knowledge and fostering college identities.

College Identity

College identity refers to students' academic mind-sets in relation to college as well as their levels of college knowledge. Every student I interviewed displayed a positive college identity and wanted to pursue a higher education. "College" is literally part of the password students use to access the Wi-Fi at HSAP. The program also celebrates the alumni of the past 2 years by posting their institutions of higher education and pictures on two different maps in the hallways of HSAP. Just outside of the Academic Lab hangs one of the maps with polaroid-sized pictures of seniors who graduated the previous year

with their university emblems. Another section of that board featured a section for scholarships, announcements, and news. Although college can be seen throughout HSAP and is involved in different ways, I pay close attention to the college workshops attended by juniors and seniors.

Seniors file in the reading room between 5:30 p.m. and 5:45 p.m. The college counselor greets the 24 students by saying, "Hey I know it's a long day, I can tell you all are tired, but let's get into this college world." HSAP provides application and personal statement workshops that are led by a college counselor and two of the high school directors. In addition to small groups and mentor support, students have access to the computer lab to research schools, scholarships, and other college information.

The HSAP college counselor emphasized college fit and the power students have in the application process. During one of the first workshops dedicated to researching colleges, the counselor said, "If you feel like you know what you're doing and can search through the colleges, you can go to the computer lab. If you want me to go over the search process, you can stay in here with me." On most occasions in the computer lab, every student had a college web page or college-related website on the screen. Sometimes students took out their phones, but never longer than a couple of minutes. Students also received adult support, as anywhere from two to five adults would be in the room helping students with their college research.

Even in casual conversations, college talk would occur. Conversations between students ranged from gossip at school to talk about the application process to college fit. For example, I heard a senior joke with her friend about a school she was interested in, saying, "Gimme a fee waiver, I really want to apply to your school, gimme the dough." This student showed enough college knowledge to joke about fee waivers, thus showing nuanced and relevant college knowledge for her situation.

Students received nuanced and relevant college knowledge. Most students expressed that their schools would only provide basic information about colleges: "At school they talk about it, but they do it at like a minimum. Here they go in depth into it, like they'll give examples of a good application and tell you how to write it." Students gained more college knowledge in HSAP by asking questions during workshops, about topics they might be embarrassed to ask questions about in school; for example, one girl asked, "What about our roommates? How do we like click?" I saw that some people quietly laughed but nodded and looked to the speaker for answers. The counselor often tried to make the college application process relatable. For example, she likened researching schools for the perfect fit, to dating by saying, "You want to find out information about 'em. You're dating the school. Four years right?"

The nuanced, regional college knowledge also covered the CSU and UC school systems. HSAP had its own CSU deadline ahead of the actual deadline to ensure participants finished it early. The counselor spent time explaining CSUs to the students and asked on one occasion, "How many Cal States are there?" Three students in the room yelled out, "Twenty-three!" The counselor replied, "Great, now what are your local Cal States? Those are the only three that you have priority in?" Students were more equipped to apply to college because of the specific information about colleges and the application process they learned in HSAP workshops.

HSAP fostered an academic mind-set that empowered students in both the application process and in the classroom. The college counselor, for example, often pointed to the fact that students could exercise their power by deciding which schools were a good fit for them: "colleges don't have all the power. You do too! You have a choice." In another instance, a visiting graduate of HSAP provided insight on the academic mind-set she gained from HSAP and said,

> I felt like being here at HSAP, helped me learn the importance of learning self-efficacy, like going for things that really aren't given to you, but you have a right to; like a right to get an education, a right to get a professor's help; I think that's what I really got from being here at HSAP.

Through participation in HSAP, students receive the resources and help to knowledgeably apply to schools that are good fits for them. In addition to the one-on-one guidance of mentors, students feel comfortable asking detailed questions to gain more college knowledge.

Discussion

In addition to supporting previous research on afterschool programs for high school youth, I argue that although students and families seem to self-select into enrollment, HSAP acts as a supplement to students' noncognitive factors of college readiness. As postulated by researchers however (Apsler, 2008; Scott-Little et al., 2002), self-selection plays a role in student success. Some students at HSAP had the academic mind-set or the parental support necessary to attend such a program. As Apsler (2008) suggested, the characteristics of students who attend an afterschool program may have a higher chance for higher academic achievement. However, students in this sample varied greatly in GPAs. The diversity in student makeup can be seen in the myriad of institutions students attend, from community colleges to Ivy League schools. Although students were similar in their drive to attend college, the

self-selection is more nuanced than simply stating that high achievers are more likely to attend afterschool programs. Considering the similarities and differences of the students, I discuss findings concerning the qualities of the program that seem to aid in fostering college readiness. In what follows, I describe how the interaction between the student and the afterschool program environment fosters noncognitive college readiness. I conclude with possibilities for future research.

Space and Resources for College Readiness

Findings from this study supported previous claims concerning afterschool programs for high school youth. The presence and connection to adult mentors played a positive role in college readiness (Reid & Moore, 2008). In addition, in this case, the interactions with adults were valuable because of how adults treated the students—as equals and with respect. Recall the student who imagined the environment in college to mirror that of HSAP's; from their experience at HSAP, students will be prepared to interact with professors as responsible young adults. In addition to fostering positive academic behaviors and mind-sets, students interpreted this as being treated in a mature way and would often self-regulate in finishing their own work. Academic behaviors such as completing homework and projects on time are also encouraged at HSAP. Refer to the mentors who tutor the students one-on-one or the examples of students being motivated to do their homework by seeing other students working. In college, without the structure of a high school, they will have to organize their time themselves and have the motivation to complete their work themselves.

The relationships students built with other students and adults were also crucial to fostering social skills. Harris and Kiyama (2013) found that the trust students had with adults in their program aided in their high school persistence rates. In the case of HSAP, trust led to students feeling comfortable to ask questions about college that they would not ask in the classroom. The importance of such an affirming space for Latina/o students cannot be overlooked (e.g., Cooper, 2013; Valencia, 2002). The mutual trust, or "confianza" as Harris and Kiyama (2013) call it, created an affirming environment where students could ask the questions and show the interest in college that they might not be able to show at school. Through the relationships the mentors fostered with the students, HSAP provides that space which was beneficial for learning about the college application process and fostering college readiness.

In many ways, HSAP acts as a college knowledge/college readiness hub. College admissions officers and representatives from other college preparatory organizations would present at HSAP. These "organizational bridges"

(Harris & Kiyama, 2013) to college resources aid in fostering a college-going culture (Jarsky, McDonough, & Núñez, 2009). The seemingly small obstacles to college such as filling out FAFSA, the Common Application, complex state university applications, and other forms can pose problems to first-generation students (McDonough, 2005). With the access to both computers and Wi-Fi at HSAP, students could work on personal statements and maneuver through applications with the help of an adult mentor.

The Push to Foster College Readiness

Graduates of HSAP attend community colleges, private universities, and state universities. Achievement is varied because student backgrounds are varied. A program like HSAP develops what the student already has—his or her level of achievement, perseverance, or mind-set—and gives the student a "push" toward noncognitive factors of college readiness. HSAP might be seen as a comprehensive source of "nudges," or interventions used at strategic times to influence decision-making (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). Behavioral nudges can "prod students and their families to take small steps that can make a big difference in learning" (Dynarski, 2015). Nudges for college access can take the form of text messaging or mentoring interventions that have positive results on college applications and persistence rates (e.g., Bettinger & Baker, 2014; Castleman & Page, 2015). Students who attend resource-rich schools and/or have parents who attended college receive behavioral nudges toward higher education from counselors, family, and teachers. Participants in HSAP do not fit this mold. Recall the student who commented on the large caseload of the college counselor at his school. Although the recommended student to counselor ratio is 250 to 1, the California average is 800 to 1 (American Counseling Association, 2013). For many of the participants in the sample, HSAP was the only place where they received individualized college support.

Students bring different experiences, skills, and knowledge; it follows that students who attend HSAP benefit in different ways. Some students needed the workshops on college applications and college knowledge, others may need the camaraderie of students, others may need laptops—whatever the reason, HSAP aided in building upon students' college readiness. HSAP is a place where a student with a 2.0 GPA who originally joined because his mother made him, and another student in the top 10% of her class and sought out HSAP herself, can both benefit. Their levels of college readiness will likely differ and have different trajectories. But with the contextualized support and college workshop activities that HSAP provides for students, they will both likely be further along in terms of their college readiness as a result of their involvement.

Directions for Future Research

Afterschool programs are useful sites for studying educational implications of how students spend their out-of-school time. My research, however, was limited in that I was unable to see growth of students' college readiness beyond the months of my participation from my perspective as a researcher. As little research explicitly focuses on the intersection of college readiness and afterschool programs, future work might use longitudinal survey data to examine students' college knowledge and self-reported data of noncognitive factors of college readiness. Although this study mainly focused on students' perspectives, adults were central to HSAP. Future research might also explore how employees and volunteers at afterschool programs act as empowerment agents for underserved youth and their college readiness (Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

Conclusion

From this ethnography of an afterschool program, we have learned that afterschool programs such as HSAP can act as a supplement to a student's level of noncognitive college readiness. The malleable nature of HSAP lends itself to meeting students where they are, for their particular college readiness needs. HSAP, and other programs like it, can leverage their resources, flexibility, and position to foster some of the noncognitive factors of college readiness. These students, however, are like-minded in that they had the motivation or parental support to enroll or continue attending sessions.

The convenience of having HSAP in the community where students lived may have drawn students who otherwise would not have sought out college help. HSAP's role as a second home is important, considering that the majority of the participants are first-generation students. While their parents may not have attended college, these students can rely on their second family in HSAP for college help. Similar programs can potentially bridge a student's unique personal identity with a positive college identity.

The possible influence of any afterschool program will be limited given time constraints. Resources also prove to be a challenge. Crowded study rooms, air condition-less summers, reliance on volunteer mentors, and limited technological capabilities are tangible constraints that impact afterschool programs like HSAP. With limited funding, programs cannot afford some of the conditions where prime learning occurs. Although not as cost-effective or scalable as behavioral nudges directed toward college readiness, HSAP is a familial place where countless nudges and a concerted push toward college occurs. Afterschool programs will not be the panacea with regard to access to higher education, but they can play an influential, supplemental role in the development of college readiness.

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1. The names used in this article are pseudonyms.
2. The author recognizes the heterogeneity in the term Latino/a. The Latino/a population in this sample was comprised of varying groups, including Guatemalans, Mexicans, and El Salvadorians.

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