



## Student Reflections on the College Assistance Migrant Program Experience

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### Abstract

College students from farmworker families are considered to be ill-prepared to take on the rigors of higher education. It is thought that because of interruptions in their primary and secondary education they will be so behind that they would never catch up with college requirements. However, persistence appears to be a quality common to this population and a resource for completion of the undergraduate degree. The millennial students studied here show more information about college prior to starting than previous farmworker students. Working in groups of other farmwork students also supports their efforts in post-secondary education. Family support was limited to reminders of their goals as opposed to hands on assistance with their studies. They wanted to have a connection with their families rather than focus on independence.

**Key Words:** Migrant Farmworkers, Persistence, Self-motivation, Millennials

### Introduction

Americans have become comfortable with the easy availability of farm produce. Seldom is there awareness of the people that are picking that produce and preparing it for consumption as the grocery store or the restaurant. In order to feed the United States, it is estimated that 2 million farmworkers handpick fruits and vegetables. (National Farm Worker Ministry, 2008). The average number of hired farmworkers has steadily declined over the last century, from roughly 3.4 million to just over 1 million. This may be due to “relatively high U.S. unemployment, improved economic conditions in Mexico... and greater levels of border enforcement” (Hoefler, Rytina, & Baker, 2012)

These farm workers and their families have many barriers to equally accessing opportunities for education. Seventy-six percent of all farmworkers identify as Latino/Hispanic. Eighteen percent are

between the ages of 14 and 24 Farmworker justice, 2014. The majority of farmworkers are married with children. Interruption in their school schedules may prevent them from being successful as students. “Hired farmworkers who migrate between work locations are disadvantaged in the labor market and earn less than settled farmworkers. Disadvantages include poorer health and challenges to migrant children attending school” (United States Department of Agriculture [USDOE], Economic Research Service, 2006).

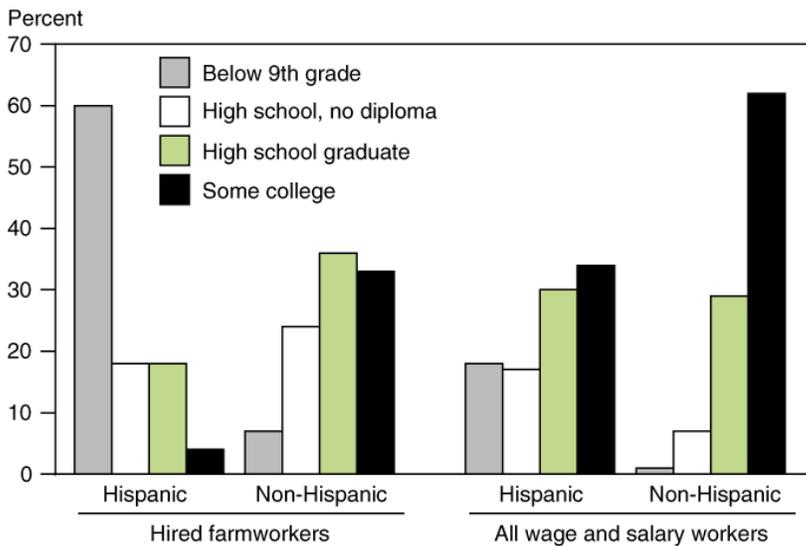
Farmworker students in higher education also face language barriers, the pressures of maintaining family ties and also having to work while completing degree programs, and the biases from educators who assume that they lack the ability to succeed in higher education. (Graff, McCain, & Gomez-Vilchis, 2013). Current political climate also contributes to an

assumption that farmworkers are undocumented immigrants. This may influence the student’s sense of safety (Perez, & Zarate, 2017) and therefore their willingness to risk leaving their home environments for higher education opportunities.

migrant farm work students financially, educationally and socially through their first year of college.

Persistence has been said to be key in completion of degrees in higher education for ethnic minorities including Latinos and Hispanics (Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003). However, it has also been found that cultural incongruity in predominantly white academic institutions has been associated with risk factors of depression and stress (Castillo & Hill, 2004). Therefore, it would be expected that this population struggles and may not be successful in completing their degree plans. Most of those interviewed for the following study were Latino or Hispanic farm work students. This population of farmworker students enrolled in the CAMP programs remain uniquely more successful in higher education when compared to the general population of students at this institution of higher learning in central Texas. The following table shows number of students in CAMP by year.

Figure 7  
Educational attainment by Hispanic ethnicity, 2006



Source: ERS analysis of annual averages from 2006 Current Population Survey Earnings File data.

Kandel. (ERR60) [USDOE]. Profile of hired farm worker. [Economic Research Service](#)

Table 1. Degree seeking students in CAMP by year

2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
37	37	46	35	29	37	35	36	35	38

However, many children of farm workers are now being allowed to stay at a home base, with relatives or by themselves as teen-agers so that they can attend school regularly. Therefore, the trend may be changing in that some of these students graduate from high school and go on to higher education. An important program in existence for many years is the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) which supports

Of these same students 57.9% were retained 3 years later and 65.7% graduated in 6 years, 63.2% in 5 years, and 34.2% graduated in 4 years. The following table shows graduation rates for CAMP students as compared to the general population of students. This illustrates rate of graduation in 4 years, 5 years, and 6 years.

Table 2. Graduation rates general population as compared to CAMP for 2009

	4 years	5 years	6 years
General population	50.7	61.3	63.3
CAMP	28.6	62.9	65.7

The rate of graduation in 5 and 6 years respectively is slightly better than the general population. At this particular university CAMP students are assisted financially beyond the first year by support from financial aid counselors in finding resources for tuition during the 5 years of education. Many CAMP students take developmental skills classes the first year that give them credit, but delay the taking of major coursework. In addition, many students work on and off campus to pay for their own room and board. Therefore, finishing beyond 4 years is understandable. Their success warrants closer examination.

Similar to other Latinos, access to support services within their protective environment serves to enhance their navigation while giving them the tools necessary for functioning beyond higher education (Escamilla & Trevino, 2014). However, they have more obstacles than the population of Latinos in general. It is not uncommon that farm work students have interrupted classes due to having to help their families in the fields. Some work only in the summer, if their families can financially afford it. As mentioned previously, the trend is changing to allow students in high school to stay at a home base or with relatives while the family works the fields. Some come from immigrant families that cannot qualify for federal or state support and need their children to help with the family's income. Language barriers are also more specific to farm work students as families tend to be recently emigrated from Spanish speaking countries. Another obstacle is that when applying to college

participation in volunteer community and leadership activities adds positive points to an admission decision. Because of family responsibilities they cannot participate in volunteer or after school programs (Duron, 1995). Given these obstacles, what are the characteristics of students who succeed in higher education? This study will provide some insight into this population.

### Review of Relevant Literature

Review of current literature on the CAMP program is limited to reports to the U.S. Department of Education's (DOE) Budget Service Program Performance Report for CAMP (DOE, 2015) and limited journal articles specific to CAMP. Other research that explores college populations that are non-traditional will also be explored when it relates to issues affecting students from farm-work backgrounds.

The latest information from DOE reports on CAMP programs for 2014 shows that for all objectives have exceeded their targets including 1) completion of their first academic year at a postsecondary institution in good standing, 2) majority of CAMP students who successfully complete their first year of college will continue in postsecondary education, and 3) measures that target cost of 1<sup>st</sup> year CAMP completers. (Higher Education Act: College Assistance Migrant Program [Office of Elementary and Secondary Education] Program Performance Report, 2015). This data clearly indicates successes for the CAMP program.

Critical Race Theory expands our understanding of how race, racism, and power intersect (Delgado, R. & Stefancic, 2012; Yosso, Villapando, et al., 2001). Given that the majority of migrant farmworkers are of Latino/a ethnicity, it is important to look at this intersection to understand barriers and openings for the success of migrant farmworker students. Araujo, 2011 uses Critical Race Theory to demonstrate a concept of community

cultural wealth which is provided in large part by the CAMP program for migrant farm work students in higher education. The program helped students with “social and navigational capital.” (Araujo, p. 258) necessary to succeed in college. She explains that navigational capital has to do with the ability to navigate through institutions including those of higher learning. Social capital involves skills that help students understand the college culture that includes friendships, student organizations, and other non-classroom activities (Araujo). Students from farm work backgrounds grow up with a different type of social support that enables them to function in their home environments. However, it is this unique social capital that is often ignored as an asset for the success of farm work students in higher education. This is also supported by other research on the CAMP program (Escamilla & Trevino, 2014).

Ramirez (2012) provides a longitudinal look at the CAMP program at California State University. He focuses on the impact the CAMP program has on academic achievement for migrant students. This research indicated that there is a higher rate of persistence for CAMP students when compared to Latinos and other students. **Persistence** in this study is measured by the completion of an undergraduate degree within 6 years of initiating college education. In addition, CAMP students with financial aid such as Pell Grants (do not require repayment) are much more likely to graduate than Latinos and other students also receiving Pell Grants (49.1% compared to 47.5% and 48.1%). Additional current research on CAMP is limited to pilot studies at this time.

Escamilla & Trevino (2014) study CAMP students and suggest that there are some unique factors that in essence help to cultivate a student’s motivation to finish their undergraduate degree. Those include the dedication to finish a task whether it is in

the fields or in a college class. Other factors include a responsibility to family to finish their education and the support of friends and family. Other research on non-traditional students that could include the population of farm work students may provide important ideas worth exploration.

Research dealing with non-traditional students was reviewed to expand the study of factors contributing to challenges in achieving higher education for this population that may include farm work students. Kaufman, et al. 2007, addresses personality and motivation in students at Hispanic-serving institutions. Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI’s) are defined in Title V or the Higher Education Act. They are “not-for-profit institutions of higher learning with a full-time equivalent undergraduate student enrollment that is a least 25% Hispanic” ([www.HACU.net](http://www.HACU.net)). Using the Kaufman-Agars Motivation-orientation Scale and the International Personality Item Pool they found that intrinsic motivation, and extrinsic motivation were significant predictors of early college success. These results indicate that a non-traditional student’s own motivation and external influences both have some impact on how students perform in higher education during the first quarter of their college experience (Kaufman, Agars, & Lopez-Wagner, 2008).

#### Method

A qualitative method of study was used in this pilot study to enhance understanding of the characteristics of this unique population of students. Some information was emphasized by using Spanish or cultural nuances by the interviewees. The researcher is bilingual in Spanish and English and has a Latino background. The University’s Institutional Review Board approved the study methodology. This study was done at a private, non-profit university in the Southwest of the United States. This CAMP program

has been in existence since 1972 and has served more than 2800 students during its existence. Most CAMP students enrolled in the program are in residence on campus during the first year. After the first year, CAMP students tend to move off campus and become commuter students.

#### *Sample*

Finding subjects for this study has been challenging. It is clear that the lack of knowledge about the researcher has contributed to this. Efforts have been made to work with CAMP staff to encourage students to participate, but they remain very elusive. Small monetary incentives have been offered, however, that has failed to produce many more interviewees. A snowball convenience sample produced 2 interviewees. Approximately 90 e-mail requests were sent out to students who are in their 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> year of undergraduate study. Characteristic of this population of students is that they have built a strong community that requires certain credentials to enter. The main credential is that you have a farm work background. This researcher has a Latino background but is not a farm worker. Therefore, she may have been considered to be an outsider. Finally, only five participants were available for this study.

#### *Interview Guide*

The interview guide used in this study is similar to the one used in a prior study of CAMP graduates by this researcher (Escamilla & Trevino, 2014). Some of the questions in that guide were weaved into other questions so as to appeal to this younger population than previous samples. This "emic perspective allows for richer content during the interview" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 144). The review of other research done on this population produced ideas for expanded exploration during interviews.

The guide consisted of 10 open-ended questions. As appropriate for qualitative research,

some questioning uncovered areas of importance to the interviewee. Some expressed importance in assisting the CAMP program by participating in this study. It was explained to them that there would not be direct benefits to the program and they agreed to continue the interview. Finally, students currently in their undergraduate program may not have the time to reflect on their experience as did graduates in the prior study. Thus, interview time was usually 30-45 minutes.

#### *Data Collection*

Contact with potential participants occurred by e-mail, sometimes followed up by phone calls or other e-mails. The researcher arranged an interview in her office or on the phone. Four out of 5 interviewees were interviewed in the researcher's office on campus. One participant was interviewed by phone. All interviews were audio-taped. The researcher also took field notes during the interviews. The researcher conducted all interviews and transcribed all the audio-taped interviews.

#### *Analysis*

The question guide was based on previous research done on graduates of the CAMP program in a previous study (Escamilla, 2014). A list of these questions is found in Appendix A. Unstructured questions were used to allow for exploration of the answers to produce a more accurate picture for analysis.

The researcher used content analysis in reviewing the transcripts with the use of NVivo software to organize and develop themes. Analysis was informed by the research done previously, literature review on non-traditional college students, review of research using critical race theory applied to the CAMP population, and demographics gathered on the current CAMP seniors.

#### *Results*

This study supported previous results and provided more in-depth information about four themes. These

themes include family support, support from other than family, overcoming problems while in school, and thinking about leaving or quitting school. Another theme was different for this group which was knowledge about the program in high school prior applying for admission.

*Knowing about college in high school*

Three out of 5 interviewees had knowledge of college and specifically the CAMP program because of relatives or friends who had enrolled previously or who had heard about the program.

“my older brother was actually the first one to go to college and he went through the camp program” Interview 2

One interviewee was brought to the college campus where the CAMP program is housed with a high school migrant program. It wasn't until she arrived that she was told that she would qualify for the CAMP program. After several applications and acceptance to other universities and other CAMP program this person chose a small university with financial support throughout her 4-5 years of college. Another interviewee received help from her sister who used the internet to search for programs.

It is interesting that as the CAMP program becomes more popular throughout the country; that more students are being informed about it and encouraged to apply. It is also interesting and positive that high school counselors particularly in specialized programs are aware of these programs and are encouraging qualified students not only to go into college, but to also look into the CAMP program.

*Support from family*

Family offered support to all interviewees, however, the type of support differed. Family encouraged students to go to college, but also expressed the sadness of having the student leave home.

“they missed me a lot, but they preferred me to be here than over there...and they wanted a better life for me...I guess compared to what we were living like they had migrant work, they didn't want that for me. They actually didn't want me involved in migrant work so at a young age, I went to school, I didn't work at all.”

Interview 1

The encouragement to get education was very powerful for this student and it seems that families in general wanted their sons or daughters to have a better life than a farm work life. The family support was tough, yet came from a place of caring. Much like any beginning college student, these students were scared to be in an unfamiliar environment. However, they soon overcame that fear.

Once I got started I realized I don't depend on them as much as I thought I would”(Interview 3)  
Other students mentioned that their parents reminded them of their decision to attend college and reported that that was a way of encouraging them.

I always call my mom, and she says you wanted to do that, you didn't have to do that, but you decided to do that (Interview 3)

One interviewee was very focused on making it on her own and not troubling her family.

there's no way I can tell my family that I'm failing a class or that I'm struggling with something. I need to figure it out...to make it work” (Interview 2)

Family support meant encouragement rather than specific problem solving about studies or college-related issues. Much of this was likely due to most parent's lack of education and unfamiliarity with types of issues that arise for students. However, at least one student explained the need to protect her family from any additional stressors.

*Support from others*

I had a family friend who lived in Austin...he's somewhat of a mentor (Interview 1)

One student mentioned that the CAMP program itself gave many supports to its students.

I was surprised a little bit because I had heard so much of how college a lot of people just show up, and so there you are, you're in college, just figure it out. We got here a week early and we got to know other students, your classmates that were part of CAMP...you start to feel that that is important (Interview 4)

Another interviewee said that students who were here with different backgrounds, were similar because they came from the same areas of Texas even though they were not CAMP students. They said they understood each other and some shared the same language background. When student felt conflicted about their choice to come to college they would also turn to their professors or advisors.

talking to the professors about whether I had too much on my plate, they told me the same thing...you decide, it's your decision (Interview 3)

### *Thinking about leaving or quitting*

Due to a parental death one interviewee had doubts about being there. She was given contacts for counseling from CAMP staff, but chose not to use that. Instead she relied on friend from her hometown.

and I so relied on my my friends from back home, they were very supportive and they would come to visit me often. I had friend here, but there was no personal connection like I had with my friends back home (Interview 3)

### *Overcoming problems while in school*

Some problems these students faced are common to new college students. The biggest difference is about how these are handled. These students relied on programs set up for all students such as a tutoring center and some remedial courses to prepare them for

their regular college courses. While these are available to all students at this University, the CAMP program has created their own services geared toward students working in a group and supporting each other.

We were taking college remedial classes so we would start on time or on the same level as other students. St. Eds professors were teaching those classes so we had a sense and we knew people already, by the time this program ended, we knew if we had any...if we needed any assistance we could count on these people and just being able to be ahead of others, that's how I felt, like ahead of others in terms of knowing the place. That was a big, a big step. (Interview 2)

Other common concerns include not knowing anyone prior to getting to the college. Others felt somewhat isolated into a CAMP social arena and not having access to others on campus as readily.

I didn't really have any friends and I really didn't have any social life, so it was difficult to come out of the bubble of just having Hispanic friends or CAMP students be my friends and going beyond that. (Interview 2)

Students also had common issues regarding roommates. Getting into living situations off-campus and on-campus where housekeeping is shared and personalities are not compatible can present stressful situations for many students. However, because CAMP students are like family members, these situations take on more meaning.

I was in a situation where I was living with a couple of other people I knew, and things didn't turn out the way we expected them to and we ended up not getting along...it got pretty bad, it made me want to go home and like, not come back anymore, but I had a room change. (Interview 1)

### **Discussion**

The results of this study point to students that are independent yet require support only as reminders of their goals. In consideration of contributing factors, the age of the students in this study may have an impact. Students in this study were all from the millennial generation. The millennial generation of students may be “needing to check in and feel connected to someone” Branscum & Sciaraffa, 2013. According to Branscum et al. other ideas on attitudes in this generation include the need to be coached, not mentored. In coaching, the focus is on the completion of certain tasks or goals. This attitude seems to support farm work students in their focus on working until completion of tasks. While the interviewees seemed self-motivated, they also felt supported by parents, professors and CAMP program staff toward completion of their degree. This level of support allowed them to stay true to their original goals of completing their degrees. However, the support was not specific to their issues but offered focus on completion of a task, in this case, finishing their degrees.

Other results point to how students were left in a home base to complete their education. They were informed of college preparation and options in high school. In some cases, they were brought to various universities to tour. It is possible that these programs in high schools are being effective in reaching out to colleges and universities about available programs for their students. In previous generations information was limited and chance accounted for information on programs like CAMP (Escamilla, et al, 2014).

This study has limitations including the number of interviewees. Therefore, generalizability to this population is limited. In addition, the information was limited to students from one university with the CAMP program. Programs throughout the United States may have some regional differences worth exploring.

Strengths were also noted in this study. This population of college students are from the millennial population. While previous studies have focused on the commonality of farm work backgrounds, this sample begins to show more relationship to other millennial students. There are fewer farm workers in the United States as mentioned previously. Since illegal immigration appears to be limited due to tightened security at the border, many farm work families have been in the United States for a while and are more culturally aware than in previous generations. Finally, results of this study may be used for further research with larger sample sizes including other CAMP programs throughout the United States.

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**Appendix****Interview Question Guide**

1. How did you first hear about the CAMP program?
2. Was there ever a time when you thought you should quit?
3. When was that and why?
4. Who or what kept you going?
5. What was the hardest part of the college experience for you?
6. Did your family know of any of what you have described in the previous question?
7. Were there certain people or things that made your experience successful?
8. Were there people or things that caused you difficulties? Explain please.
9. Would you recommend the CAMP program to someone?
10. What type of student do you think gets the most benefit from a program like CAMP?