A Special Note from the Editors

TG and the University of Nebraska–Lincoln are pleased to present this special issue of *Enrollment Management Journal*. We hope you will find the contents—compiled and edited by Laura I. Rendón and Susana M. Muñoz—especially timely and insightful given the ever-increasing focus on degree completion. Because of Dr. Rendón’s contributions to the development of validation theory, the final article of the Scholarship and Research section relates her biographical background and insights into the development of her work.
From the Guest Editors

Prior to President Barack Obama’s administration, the nation’s educational system had been concerned primarily with preparing students to gain access to college. Yet today, education policymakers are speaking less emphatically about access and more explicitly about completion, given the Obama administration’s goal of producing another five million college graduates by 2020. At a time when colleges and universities are stepping up efforts to increase student retention and graduation rates, faculty and staff struggle to ensure that the most at-risk populations—low-income students, academically underprepared students, students of color, first-generation students, returning adult students—find success in college. Their chances of completing a degree are slim given that these students are burdened with meeting the rising costs of college and getting adequate high school academic preparation that allows them to succeed in college.

This issue revisits Laura I. Rendón’s (1994) validation theory as originally conceived with a particular applicability for low-income, first-generation college students. Rendón defined validation as “an enabling, confirming and supportive process initiated by in- and out-of-class agents that fosters academic and interpersonal development” (Rendón, 1994, p. 44). This special issue provides quantitative and qualitative research evidence that over time validation has emerged as a viable theory that can be employed to better understand the success of underserved students, improve teaching and learning, understand student development in college, and frame college student success strategies.

Scholarship and Research

In the issue’s introductory article, Laura I. Rendón Linares and Susana M. Muñoz outline how the theory was developed and how it has been employed by both researchers and practitioners to generate research findings and to frame institutional student success strategies. The authors also offer a review of theories which overlap with validation theory and discuss theory, pedagogic, and research enhancements. Reviewing the corpus of quantitative and qualitative literature on validation theory, Amaury Nora, Angela Urick, and Patricia D. Quijada Cerecer examine the diverse ways validation has been defined since its foundation and review validation in its various proxy forms as well as its impact on students. Two quantitative studies provide empirical evidence on the impact of validation on students and ultimately on how educators can use validation as a way to
frame two- and four-year institutional strategies and learning environments that foster student success. Elizabeth Allanbrook Barnett employs multiple linear regression analyses to examine the influence of faculty validation on urban community college students’ sense of integration in college and intent to persist. Sylvia Hurtado, Marcela Cuellar, and Chelsea Guillermo-Wann examine two validation constructs—student perceptions of academic validation in the classroom and general interpersonal validation—in the new survey instrument, Diverse Learning Environments (DLE).

From a qualitative research perspective, Nana Osei-Kofi employs narrative inquiry to explore the life history of validation theorist Laura I. Rendón. The emphasis is on how Rendón’s identity and life experiences shaped her as a theorist/researcher with an emphasis on the interplay between her life story and work on validation theory. Ryan Evely Gildersleeve employs participatory action research to explore the stories and lived experiences of Mexican migrant students to extend Rendón’s validation theory with the development of a neo-critical validation theory that takes into account struggles of power, agency, and identity.

**From the Field**

This section outlines ways that validation has been employed to frame institutional student success programs in a two- and four-year institution. Rolita Flores Ezeonu describes validation at Highline Community College and discusses how validation fosters a therapeutic learning environment in the college’s ESL-to-Credit intervention. Donna E. Ekal, Sandra Rollins Hurley, and Richard Padilla describe how validation theory has become the theoretical foundation for the University of Texas at El Paso’s (UTEP) student success plan.