The Hispanic community has become the fastest growing ethnic group in America, projected to represent one out of five Americans by 2030 (de los Santos & Cuamea, 2010). One of the current education reforms taking shape in the U.S. to help low-income and first-generation students of color gain access to four-year colleges and universities is the creation of dual enrollment high school programs (Hoffman, 2003). Proponents of this model believe that by changing the structure of high schools, from the current K-12 system to a K-16 system, educators would be better situated and more readily accessible to help low-income and first-generation students of color gain access to four-year colleges and universities. While access to higher education is the first step in improving the number of college graduates, especially for Hispanics, there is little research exploring the lived experiences of students who enter the university with a substantial amount of college credit hours earned through their dual credit program. These students occupy a liminal space because they are classified as first-time freshmen but hold enough college credit hours to be considered a sophomore or junior. Through this study, I explored how these students experienced living in this liminal space. Nora’s (2006) Model of Student Engagement was the guiding framework used to describe student experiences of their
first-year and their decision to persist to graduation. Findings suggest that despite their experiences in dual credit programs, students encounter all of the same obstacles/issues first time freshmen experience. However, students’ experiences in dual credit gave them the tools to meet those obstacles and overcome issues to complete their first year and plan for early or on-time graduation. Recommendations were made to universities, the K-12 sector, and community colleges to improve dual credit programs to continue to ease the transition to the university.