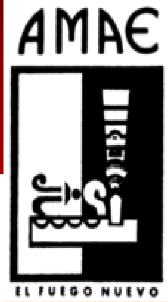

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Latinx and the Community College: Promoting Pathways to Postsecondary Degrees

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Supporting Latinx/a/o Community College Leaders: A Geo-Spatial Approach

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Abstract

Community colleges play a significant role in guiding pathways to postsencondary degrees for Latinx/a/o students. To gain a greater understanding of ways Latinx/a/o students utilize community colleges as pathways to degrees, this article focused on institutional leaders, members of one community college professional assocation. An original survey instrument was administered and an exploratory spatial data analysis (ESDA) using a geographic information systems (GIS) database was conducted. Findings suggest greater proportions of Latinx/a/o community college leaders may be found in metropolitan areas with large Latinx/a/o populations. Author reflexivity and implications for research and practice are presented.

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Introduction

Pathways to postsecondary degrees for Latinx/a/o students are guided by community colleges' significant role in U.S. higher education (Bailey & Morest, 2006; Chapa & De La Rosa, 2004; Chapa & Schink, 2006; Kurlaender, 2006; Rendón, 1993). Community colleges help students gain access to a postsecondary education, but decades of research have shown that while access is necessary (Dowd, 2007; McDonough, 1994), access alone is not sufficient for transfer and baccalaureate completion for Latinx/a/o and other Students of Color (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Harris & Wood, 2013; Laanan & Jain, 2016; Vasquez Urias, Falcon, Harris, & Wood, 2016; Zamani-Gallaher, 2007). This paradoxical relationship between access and success remains a significant factor when considering Latinx/a/o community college students' intent to utilize the transfer function as a pathway to a baccalaureate degree. For decades now, researchers have shown Latinx/a/o students' 1) high enrollment figures in community colleges (Rendón & Nora, 1989; Hagedorn, Chi, Cepeda, & McClain, 2007); 2) intention to transfer and persist to complete a bachelor's degree (Crisp & Nora, 2010; Tovar, 2015); and 3) low transfer rates from community colleges (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Rivas, Pérez, Alvarez, & Solórzano, 2007; Solórzano, Acevedo-Gil, & Santos, 2013).

To gain a greater understanding of ways Latinx/a/o students find support in community colleges as pathways to degrees, this article focused on institutional leaders. Specifically, attention was given to members of one professional assocation for community college leaders. The professional association is explicit in its mission to promote Latinx/a/o leadership for community colleges, however, the association is open to any individual regardless of racial identity. In this article, community college leaders are defined as members of the professional assocation between 2012-2015. This included community college faculty, student affairs professionals, and administrators.

The purpose of this article is to challenge the racial homogeneity of higher education leadership research by sharing the results of a multi-year study of Latinx/a/o leaders in community colleges. This article is guided by the following research question: *What are the profiles of Latinx/a/o community college leaders in the United States?*

The literature reviewed and results of the study suggest a significant void of Latinx/a/o perspectives in both higher education leadership research and practice. As a researcher and professor of educational leadership my goal in studying Latinx/a/o leaders in community colleges

is to contribute to my colleagues' conceptualizations of leaders (as individuals) and leadership (as a practice). To achieve these objectives, members of the professional association provided data by responding to an original survey instrument developed by the author for the research project. The instrument collected data to understand *whom* the higher education community is preparing as leaders as well as *where* professional associations play a significant role in these efforts. An emphasis on where professional associations are—or are not—working is important because place matters to the relationships between people in geographies with growing inequalities (Dorling, 2012).

The continued growth of Latinx/a/o in the U.S. population suggests there should be Latinx/a/o community college leaders across the nation. For decades now, Latinx/a/o population centers have predominated in states such as California, Texas, and Florida (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011), however, demographers have found that many Latinx/a/o subgroups are moving into historically White communities in the Midwest and South (Logan & Turner, 2013). By collecting georeferenced data points on Latinx/a/o community college leaders, this study adds an understanding of socially-constructed space to the research on higher education leadership.

The literature review suggests that professional organizations are major driving forces in establishing the desired competencies of community college leaders (González Sullivan & Aalsburg Wiessner, 2010; Hull & Keim, 2007; Kezar, 1998; Kezar & Carducci, 2009; Laden, 1996; León, 2005; León & Nevarez, 2007; McCurtis, Jackson, & O'Callaghan, 2009). Many professional organizations, such as the American Council on Education (ACE), the American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education (AAHHE), and NASPA, sponsor a series of selective leadership development programs for faculty and adminstrators in higher education. According to León and Nevarez (2007), search committees and Boards of Trustees expect community college leadership candidates to be selected and have participated in national leadership development programs. The curricular foundation of many community college leadership development programs, as well as university-based graduate degree curricula, have been the American Association of Community Colleges' (AACC) *Competencies for Community College Leaders* (AACC, 2005, 2013; Eddy, 2010; Friedel, 2010). Although the AACC competencies are popular, they fail to live up to the open-access mission of community colleges as both iterations do not overtly state leaders' need for respect of racial diversity, gender

equality, and multicultural competencies (AACC, 2005, 2011; Wilson & Cox Brand, 2012). This is troublesome since advancing and respecting diversity are characteristics community college leaders are purported to have deemed important for more than two decades (AACC, 2011; Gibson-Benninger, Ratcliff, & Rhoads, 1996; Kezar, 1998; Laden, 1996). Community college leaders play a significant role in broadening pathways to postsecondary degrees and increasing Latinx/a/o student success.

Review of the Literature

Community Colleges

Literature on community colleges' leaders and leadership holds a distinct, and sometimes conflicting, position in the U.S. landscape of higher education because of two predominant schools of thought. Some scholars argue that community colleges are well-suited to counteract the United States' legacy of racism in educational structures (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014; Vaughan, 2006) while others argue that community colleges serve to exacerbate the very same social inequities they attempt to improve by contributing to a stratified system of public education (Beach, 2011; Brint & Karabel, 1989; Dougherty, 1994; Jain, Herrera, Bernal, & Solórzano, 2011).

The work of Cohen, Brawer, and Kisker (2014) and Vaughan (2006) presents the mission of community colleges somewhat idyllically. To these scholars, community colleges' affordance of access to higher education for all members of the local communities they serve, ameliorates race-based exclusion from full participation in higher education. Other scholars take a more critical view, in particular Beach (2011); Brint and Karabel (1989); Dougherty (1994); and Jain, Herrera, Bernal, and Solórzano (2011). These scholars' critical perspectives uncover the multiple ways institutions fail local communities, the students they enroll, and the faculty and staff they hire—especially People of Color. Irrespective of the philosophical perspective one ascribes to in making sense of community colleges' position, there should be no doubt that inequitable outcomes persist for many faculty, managerial staff, and Students of Color in community colleges (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Harris & Wood, 2013; Jain et al., 2011; Rendón & Nora, 1989; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009; Tierney, 1999; Wood, 2012).

Race and Leadership in Higher Education

Because community colleges were founded as extensions of high schools, many secondary school principals and district superintendents were the first leaders of the first junior colleges (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014; Eddy, 2009; Koopke, 1978; Nevarez & Wood, 2010, Vaughan, 2006). Vaughan (2006) noted that over a quarter of community college presidents in the 1960s were former K-12 district superintendents. According to Koopke (1978), this statistic meant community college presidencies were predominantly filled by White males. According to the AACC's *CEO Characteristics* webpage, 81% of communty college presidents are White, non-Hispanic (AACC, 2017). With extreme under-representation of Leaders of Color in U.S. schools at all levels, studies focusing on leaders' race provide rich contexts to study the stratified and marginalized condition relative to institutional leadership (Brooks, 2012; de los Santos & Vega, 2008; Ospina & Foldy, 2009). Much of the literature on leadership and race focuses on identifying, recruiting, and retention of diverse leaders but it excludes references to how leaders are prepared (McCurtis, Jackson, & O'Callaghan, 2009).

A general theme in the literature speaks to Leaders of Color capacity and need to morph mechanisms of oppression into effective vehicles of social change (Alston, 2005). Similarly, Dillard (1995) and Case (1997) each found that Leaders of Color were keenly aware of others' perceptions in a social system where race matters, which in turn enabled leaders to transform ascribed deficits into strengths. This ebb and flow within cultures is advanced in Bell's (1990) study which found that Leaders of Color needed to be bi-culturally fluent as a means of leading in ways that resonate with their own racial group while connecting with the dominant ways of working in white-majority contexts.

On the topic of leadership and social change, Alemán (2009) utilized Critical Race Theory (CRT) to problematize the discourse and politics of education. Alemán argues that liberal ideology and Whiteness serve to reinforce the status quo by privileging leaders who use niceness, civility, and consensus building in their leadership practice. Research by Alemán (2007) and Parker and Villalpando (2007) detailed the tension between educational leaders when Latinx/a/o educators and students have challenged the status quo of leading schools and school districts.

Latinx/a/o leaders offer a shift from mainstream leadership theory and practice by relying on their cultural heritages and the extent of their life experiences (Alemán, 2009;

Bordas, 2001; de los Santos & Vega, 2008; Haro, 1995; Ospina & Foldy, 2009). What was often viewed as a constraint to leadership has shifted and become a source of strength and influence to carry out leadership practices. For Latinx/a/o leaders in higher education, race often not only shapes their socio-psychological makeup, but it is also a large part of the collective identity which leadership emerges from and is enacted (de los Santos & Vega, 2008; Haro, 1990, 1995). Recent research on Latinx/a/o educational leadership, inclusive of K-12 schools and higher education, advances the vision of leadership practices and beliefs that are inclusive of the communities they serve (Rodríguez, Martinez, & Valle, 2016).

The literature on Latinx/a/o leaders in higher education, while sparce, has centered on college presidents and/or chief executive officers (Ballesteros, 2008, de los Santos & Vega; 2008, Esquibel, 1977, 1992; Hernández, 2012; Haro & Lara, 2003, Ruiz, 1990). This strand of research suggests Latinx/a/o leaders must do additional work, beyond learning the traditional competencies and earning terminal degrees, to achieve upward career mobility. For Latinx/a/o leaders in community colleges, these additional responsibilities and career stressors often lead to role conflicts of their professional identities and social realities within their communities (de los Santos & Vega, 2008; Esquibel, 1977, 1992).

Geo-Spatial Approaches to Higher Education

Lefebvre (1991, 2009), Massey (1995), and Soja (1996, 2010) have each made significant contributions to academe's collective understanding of the social relations and spatial organization of society. Morrison, Annamma, and Jackson (2017) move this collective understanding to the racialized place-based context of education. Collectively, this spatial turn (Soja, 1996) informed how this study made sense of the concepts location, place, and region. Observed variables used in empirical studies are overwhelmingly spatial. For example, discussing Latinx/a/o population variance must be georeferenced by comparing two or more cities, counties, or states. Famously, Tobler's (1970) First Law of Geography states "everything is related to everything else, but near things are more related than distant things" (p. 236). This locational and value similarity is what Anselin (1998) defines as spatial autocorrelation.

Geo-spatial analyses have gained popularity as scholars leverage Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technologies and research methods across multiple disciplines (Steinberg & Steinberg, 2015; Pacheco & Velez, 2009). Vélez and Sólorzano (2017) propose GIS mapmaking

as an important methodological and conceptual tool to explore, analyze, amd visualize relationships between schools and their geographic space. Sohoni and Saporito (2009) used GIS to show that public schools would be less segregated if children attended local schools, rather than charter or private schools. Similarly, Tate (2008), in their Presidential Address to the American Educational Research Association, noted how geo-spatial approaches to making sense of educational opportunity were necessary to consider the multiple roles space plays in the lives and education of Students of Color and their families. Dache-Gerbino and White (2016) concluded that community colleges and their open access mission, must be studied considering their location by attending to residential segregation and the criminalization of students of color. Similarly, Hillman's (2016) geography of college opportunity found that the number of local colleges varied along lines of race and class resulting in educational deserts. These spatial and geographic approaches to understanding social structures influenced the study's methods and data collection procedures.

Methods and Data Collection

The review of literature highlighted multiple ways of understanding the role of community colleges, Latinx/a/os position in the higher education leadership canon, and geo-spatial approaches to understanding higher education. As a first step toward answering this study's research question: *What are the profiles of Latinx/a/o community college leaders in the United States?* I designed, pilot tested, and administered an original cross-sectional survey instrument—Latinx/a/o Community College Leaders Survey (LCCLS). Primary data for this study was collected using a survey research design to report the incidence, distribution, and relationships of variables in a non-experimental setting (Creswell, 2013; Tourangeau, Rips, & Rasinski, 2000). Secondary spatial data was collected from publically available sources hosted by the United States Census Topologically Integrated Geographic Encoding and Referencing (TIGER) databases. Latinx/a/o community college leaders and the professional associations that suport them deserve more attention from higher education researchers and policymakers. As a non-experimental ex post facto study, responses to the LCCLS were disaggregated to study the subpopulation in the sample that participated in the professional association's leadership development program (Creswell, 2013; Fowler, 2009; Lohr, 2010).

Survey instruments provide opportunities to describe trends or characteristics of a population (Creswell, 2013) while serving as data collection instruments for research questions about subjective beliefs and behaviors (Newman & McNeil, 1998). In particular, LCCLS was developed by a combined synthesis of the research literature on educational leadership and the intersection of race and leadership.

Univariate data analysis was performed in order to develop descriptive profiles inclusive of demographic, institutional, educational, and leadership characteristics of LCCLS respondents. This analysis offered descriptors of the frequency and percent distributions of variables in the study. Each distribution was necessary to understand the respondents' descriptive profiles as well as to assess item nonresponse rates in the dataset.

To uncover the geo-spatial distribution of Latinx/a/o community college leaders, an exploratory spatial data analysis (ESDA) using a GIS database following Anselin (1998) was conducted. ESDA is defined as processes used to describe and visualize spatial distributions; identify atypical locations or spatial outliers; discover patterns of spatial association or spatial heterogeneity (Anselin, 1998; Steinberg & Steinberg, 2015). The GIS database was built using the self-reported ZIP codes from the LCCLS survey instrument administered for this study. Steinberg and Steinberg (2015) identify ZIP codes as appropriate geographic identifiers for researchers developing their own databases.

The first step in this procedure involved building a GIS data file using the ZIP codes provided by LCCLS respondents. The ZIP codes served as georeferenced spatial datapoint to match the location of the college where a respondent was employed. Each ZIP code was cross tabulated with three survey items—leadership program participation, community college attendance, and racial identity. These spatial analyses produced maps showing the spatial association of the three cross-tabulated variables. A GIS data file can be used both as an analytical system as well as a decision support system (Eastman, Fulk, Toledano, & Huthchinson, 1993; Steinberg & Steinberg, 2015). Thus, analysis of the maps to make inferences can be accomplished through the GIS data file (Pacheco & Velez, 2009). Each map is a visual display to help produce a better understanding of Latinx/a/o leaders across the U.S. which may contribute to decisions that initiate some action to empower professional associations to understand the spatial characteristics of Latinx/a/o leaders in community colleges.

Sample Size and Response Rate

The professional association's Executive Director provided a listing of 482 individual members, seven of which had incomplete contact information and were deemed not eligible for the study. Thus, the eligible sample consisted of 475 members of the professional association. Partial responses of the LCCLS were received from 161 individuals of which 133 identified as Hispanic, Latinx/a/o, or some other Hispanic/Latinx/a/o identity (*i.e.* Chicana, Puerto Rican). Each survey item was answered by at least 95 percent of the sample. Table 1 provides a summary of the final response rate based on 161 submitted surveys from an eligible sample of 475.

Table 1

LCCLS: Eligible Sample and Response Rate

	Cases
Sample	482
Not Eligible	7
Eligible Sample	475
No Response	314
Submitted Surveys	161
Submitted surveys by Hispanic or Latinx/a/o Individuals	133
Overall Response Rate	33.9%
Response Rate of Hispanic or Latinx/a/o Individuals	28%

Results

Demographic Profile of Latinx/a/o Community College Leaders

Results for this study showed 161 respondents shared their gender identity, 55% female (n=89), 45% male (n=72), and 0% prefer to self-describe (n=0). Since the study's sample frame was composed of members of a professional organization I expected a majority of the sampled population to be over the age of 30. Educational attainment statistics suggest this age is an appropriate estimate for individuals to have completed the requisite graduate degrees for

leadership in higher education (Ryan & Siebens, 2012). My hypothesis was incorrect as a majority (76%) of the sampled population were in fact 40 years or older (*n*=122).

A large proportion (83%) of respondents identified as either Hispanic or Latinx/a/o. The professional association is open to anyone, but given the association's purpose and mission it is very likely to attract more members who identify as Hispanic or Latinx/a/o. Non-Hispanic or Latinx/a/o members of the association are welcomed as allies in support of advancing Latinx/a/o leaders for community colleges. The LCCLS contained a two-stage question where the sampled population could indicate whether they identified as Hispanic or Latinx/a/o. If they selected *yes* the survey program directed participants to choose their primary identity: *Hispanic*, *Latina/o*, or *Some other identity: please state*. If they selected *no* the survey directed participants to choose from five major racial categories: *Asian, Asian Pacific Islander, or Native Hawaiian; Black or African American; Multiracial; Native American; or White*. Overall, 157 individuals provided responses to this survey item with 85% (*n*=133) identifying as Hispanic or Latina/o. Table 2 provides a complete demographic profile of LCCLC respondents' gender, age, and racial identity.

Table 2

Demographic Profile of LCCLS Respondents

Variable	Total	Percent
Gender (n=161)		
Female	89	55.3
Male	72	44.7
Prefer to self-describe	0	0
Current Age (n = 163)		
29 and under	5	3.1
30-39	36	22.1
40-49	53	32.5
50-59	39	23.9
60 and over	30	18.4
Racial Identity (n=157)		
Hispanic	48	30.6
Latinx/a/o	61	38.9
Other Hispanic or Latina/o	24	15.3
Asian Pacific Islander	1	0.6
Black	2	1.3
Multiracial	1	0.6
Native American	1	0.6
White	19	12.1

Educational Profile

Table 3 reports the educational profile of the professional association's membership. I hypothesized that this profile would demonstrate high rates of educational attainment given the previous study on this population by Hernández (2012). This hypothesis proved correct, as over 94% of respondents completed a graduate degree. Over 60% of the respondents attended a community college along their educational pathway confirming the findings of Solórzano, Rivas, and Vélez (2005) who found one of four Chicana/os with doctorates attended a community college. Respondents also had very low rates of completing their highest degrees in K-12 leadership and administration, in contrast to the literature (Koopke, 1978).

Table 3

Educational Profile of LCCLS Respondents

Variable	Total	Percent
Attended Community College (n=161)		
No	59	36.6
Yes	102	63.3
Highest Degree Completed (n=161)		
Bachelor's	9	5.6
Master's	76	47.2
Ed.D.	35	21.7
Ph.D.	39	24.2
J.D.	2	1.2
Major Field of Study in Highest Degree Earned (n=161)		
Higher education leadership/administration with Community college emphasis	39	24.2
Higher education leadership/administration with other emphasis	31	19.2
K-12 leadership/administration	4	2.5
Other educational field	42	26.1
Non-educational field	45	27.9

Professional Profile

The professional profile of the association's members indicated that 21% (n=34) hold executive level positions such as Vice President, Provost, President, or Chancellor. Table 4 shows the various job classifications of the study's respondents. These results suggest many of the association's members hold middle-to-upper level positions and may be poised for further leadership opportunities and career advancement. The mean years in their current position, 6.3 years, is another result that indicates respondents are primed for promotion given that the median number of years workers have been with their current employer is 4.2 years (United States Department of Labor, 2016).

Teaching in community colleges was also a common job classification for respondents. This finding suggests that Latinx/a/o leaders may open postsecondary pathways for students through their teaching, citing the importance of student interactions in and out of the classroom. Teaching in community colleges is one likely way the leadership program

participants weave the connections necessary for them to remain connected to their students (Cooper & Pagotto, 2003). These connections are part of what Tagg (2003) defined as the Learning Paradigm.

Table 4

Professional Profile of LCCLS Respondents

Variable	Total	Percent
Job Title or Classification (*n*=160)		
Advisor/Counselor	20	12.5
Director	36	22.5
Faculty member	21	13.1
Department/Division Chair	4	2.5
Dean	28	17.5
Vice President	16	10.0
Provost or CAO	3	1.9
President	12	7.5
Chancellor	3	1.9
Other job title or classification	17	10.6
Years in current position (*n*=160)		
Mean	6.27 years	--
Has been a community college instructor (*n*=161)		
No	56	34.8
Yes, as a full time instructor	43	26.7
Yes, as a part time instructor	26	16.1
Yes, as an adjunct instructor	36	22.4
Currently in a mentor/protégé relationship (*n*=161)		
No	92	57.1
Yes, as a mentor	25	15.5
Yes, as a protégé	8	4.9
Yes, as both a mentor and protégé	36	22.4
Has Latina/o mentors in community colleges (*n*=161)		
No	51	31.6
Yes	110	68.3
Has Latina/o protégés in community colleges (*n*=161)		
No	46	28.6
Yes	115	71.4

The final pieces of the professional profile had to do with multi-directional postsecondary pathways—being a mentor and a protégé. Mentor-protégé relationships resulted in somewhat of a paradoxical result. Turner and González (2015) defined the mentoring relationship as "built on trust and bidirectional benefits" (p. 2) between participants. A significant aspect of the professional association's goals is to provide mentoring opportunities to its member, therefore I hypothesized respondents would be in some form of a mentor-protégé relationship. Fifty-seven percent (n=92), indicated not being in a mentor-protégé relationship. Conversely, when asked if they had Latinx/a/o mentors in community colleges 68% responded yes. In analyzing this counterintuitive result, Hernández' (2012) study of Latinx/a/o community college leaders offers some insight. Participants in that study indicated that connection with senior Latinx/a/o leaders was a benefit of participating in a leadership development program, while simultaneously feeling disconnected with supposed mentors who did not display caring or nurturing traits, even if they were paired together by some formal mentoring program or structure.

Spatial Analysis

Table 5 shows the state-by-state distribution of all respondents. The southwestern United States and Florida have historically been Latinx/a/o population centers and the professional association membership data aligned to this trend (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011).

Table 5

LCCLS Respondents' Distribution by State (n=161)

State	Total	Percent
AZ	39	24.2
CA	34	21.1
FL	24	14.9
TX	23	14.2
MN	8	4.9
IL, OH	3	1.9
CT, OR	3	1.9
MD, NJ, NM, NY	2	1.2
CO, DC, IA, MA, MI, MO, NC, ND, NE, OK, WA, WI	1	0.6

Figure 1 shows the geo-spatial distribution of leadership program participants as a proportion of the total sample in relation to the United States population over the age of 25 who has completed a bachelor's degree. In all 56 leadership program participants provided the ZIP code of their institution of employment. Roughly three quarters (76%) of leadership program participants work in four states: Arizona, California, Florida, and Texas. Even more, the concentration is around three urban centers: Los Angeles, Miami, and Phoenix—observations in Texas were much less clustered around one city or region. As the map layers make evident, these leaders work in regions where more than 25% of the population has completed a bachelor's degree. The predominance of leadership program participants working in four states may have to do with the institutional classifications and leadership currently in place in these colleges and districts. Southern California, South Florida, and Maricopa County in Arizona are home to multipe community colleges designated as Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI). Community colleges in these regions also have positional leaders who historically have demonstrated support for the professional association and the leadership program. In fact, some of the organization's founding members are still employed in their colleges throughout these four states (de los Santos & Vega, 2008).

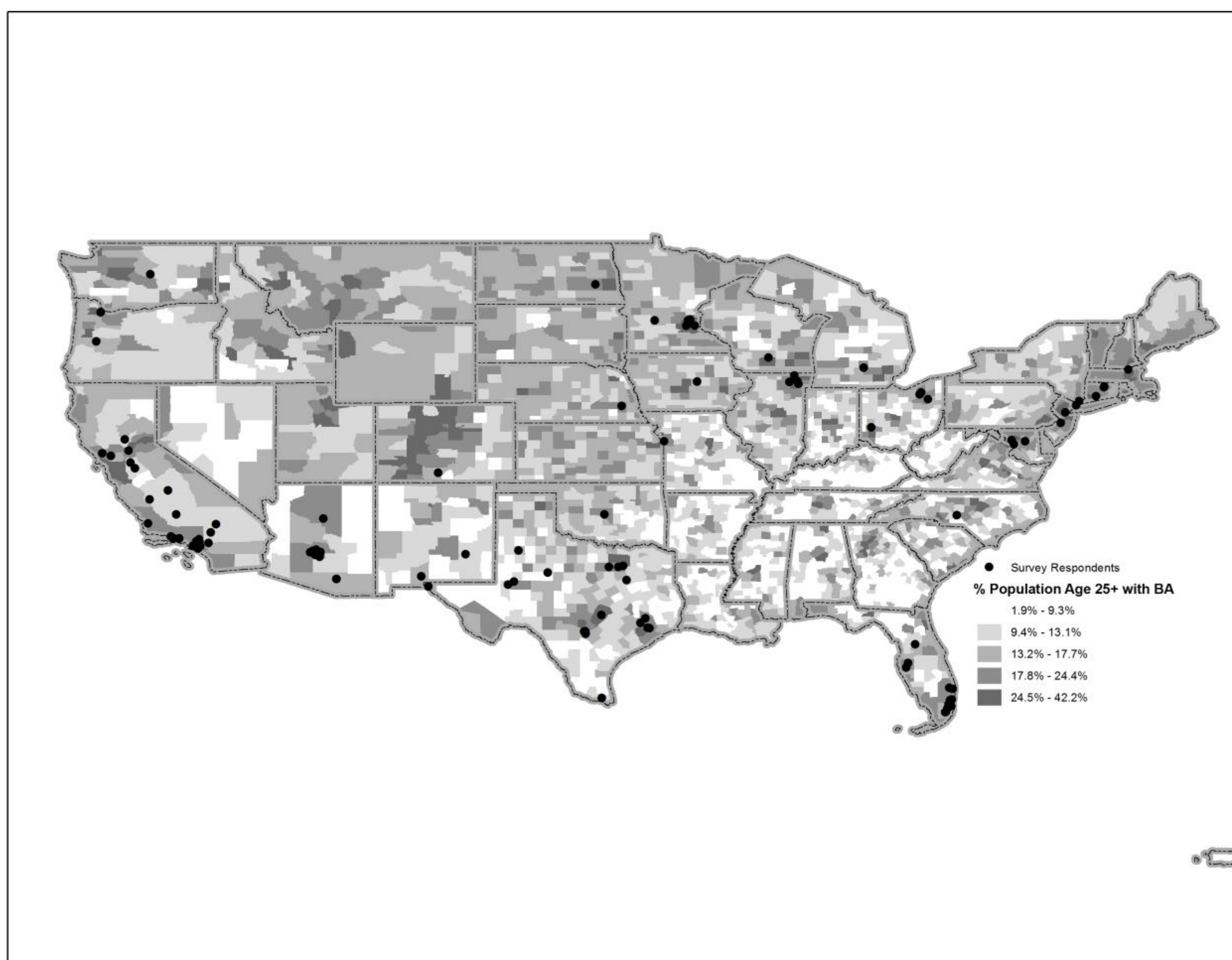

Figure 1. Leadership program participants in relation to US population with bachelor's degrees

This generational support is evidence of what Bordas (2001) called weaving connections. Weaving connections is related to the time elders offer to support future leaders and is a valued characteristic commonly left out of mainstream community college leadership research and practice. The results of this geo-spatial analysis suggest community college leaders in Arizona, California, Florida, and Texas are moving beyond the AACC competencies and enacting a great deal of community based support structures.

Millions of students attend community colleges year after year. Estimates vary, however, most figures suggest about half of all Latinx/a/o students enter higher education through a community college (Provasnik & Planty, 2008; Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2016). Results of this study showed over 63% of respondents attended a community college along their pathway to a postseondary degree. The geo-spatial analysis in Figure 2 shows community college attendance of the respondents layered in relation to the United States Latinx/a/o population. The map

shows high concentrations of community college attendance for leaders working in Arizona, California, Florida, Illinois, and Texas—states with significant Latinx/a/o populations. The upper Midwest, represented by Minnesota and Illinois, shows promise as a region from which to draw Latinx/a/o leaders who understand and support community colleges and their students.

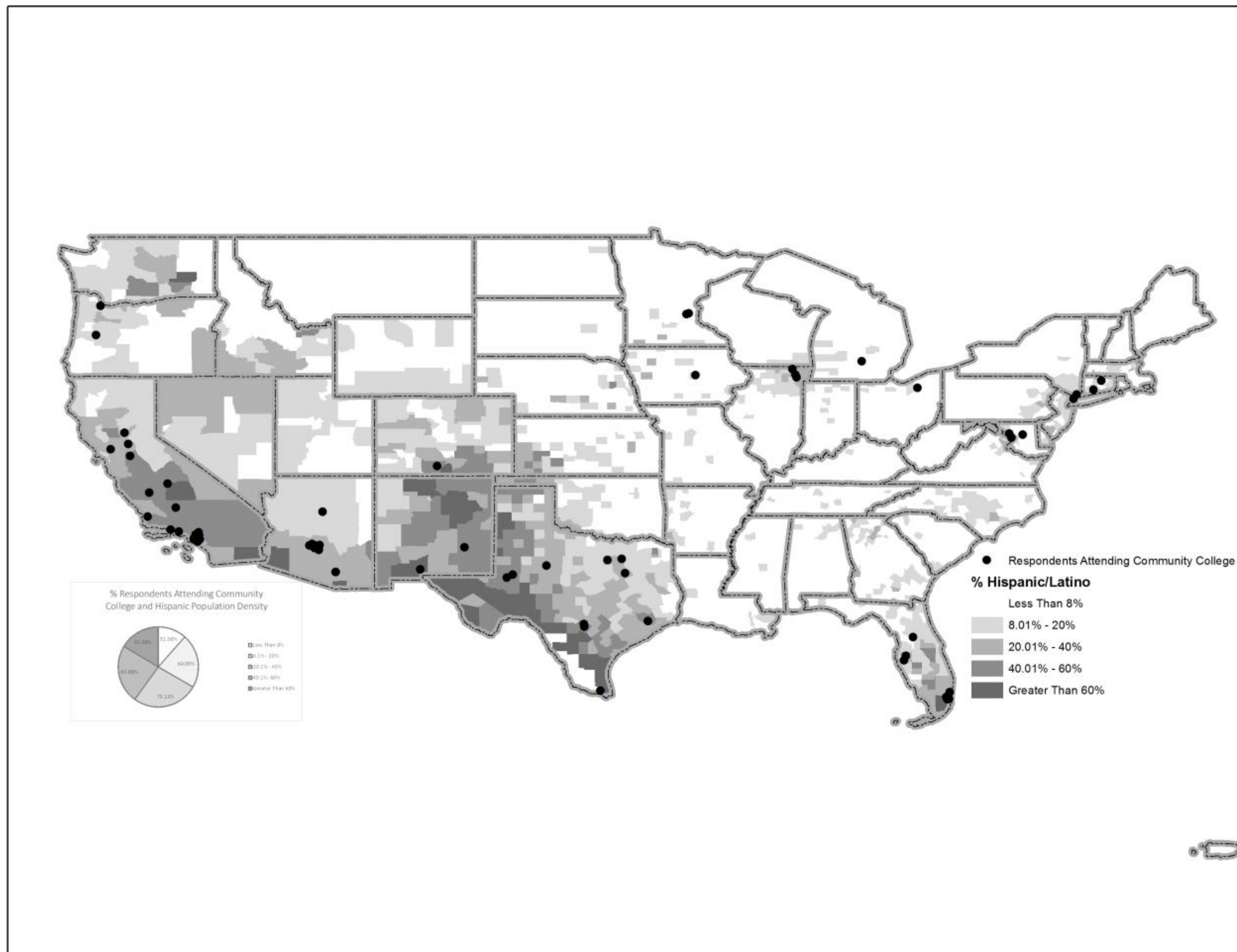

Figure 2. Community college attendance in relation to US Latinx/a/o population

Respondents of the LCCLS were allowed to select their primary racial identification under the Hispanic and Latina/o categorization. Considering the terminology described by Hayes-Bautista and Chapa (1987) persons native to the Southwest and immigrant laborers from Latin American countries have historically been considered as Hispanics under federal laws. Indeed, the fluidity of terminology remains unsettled as the prolonged search for operationalizing what comprises the Latina/o identity in the United States. The results in Figure 3 are consistent with analyses of the 2010 Census and the 2010 American Community Survey

each showing over half of the Latinx/a/o population in the United States lived in California, Texas, and Florida (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011). The specific differentiation in the nomenclature between Hispanic, Latina/o, or some reference to national origin can also vary by state and region (Hayes-Bautista & Chapa, 1987). Figure 3 is significant because it provides a visualization of the distribution of Latinx/a/o community college leaders relative to the United States' Latinx/a/o population.

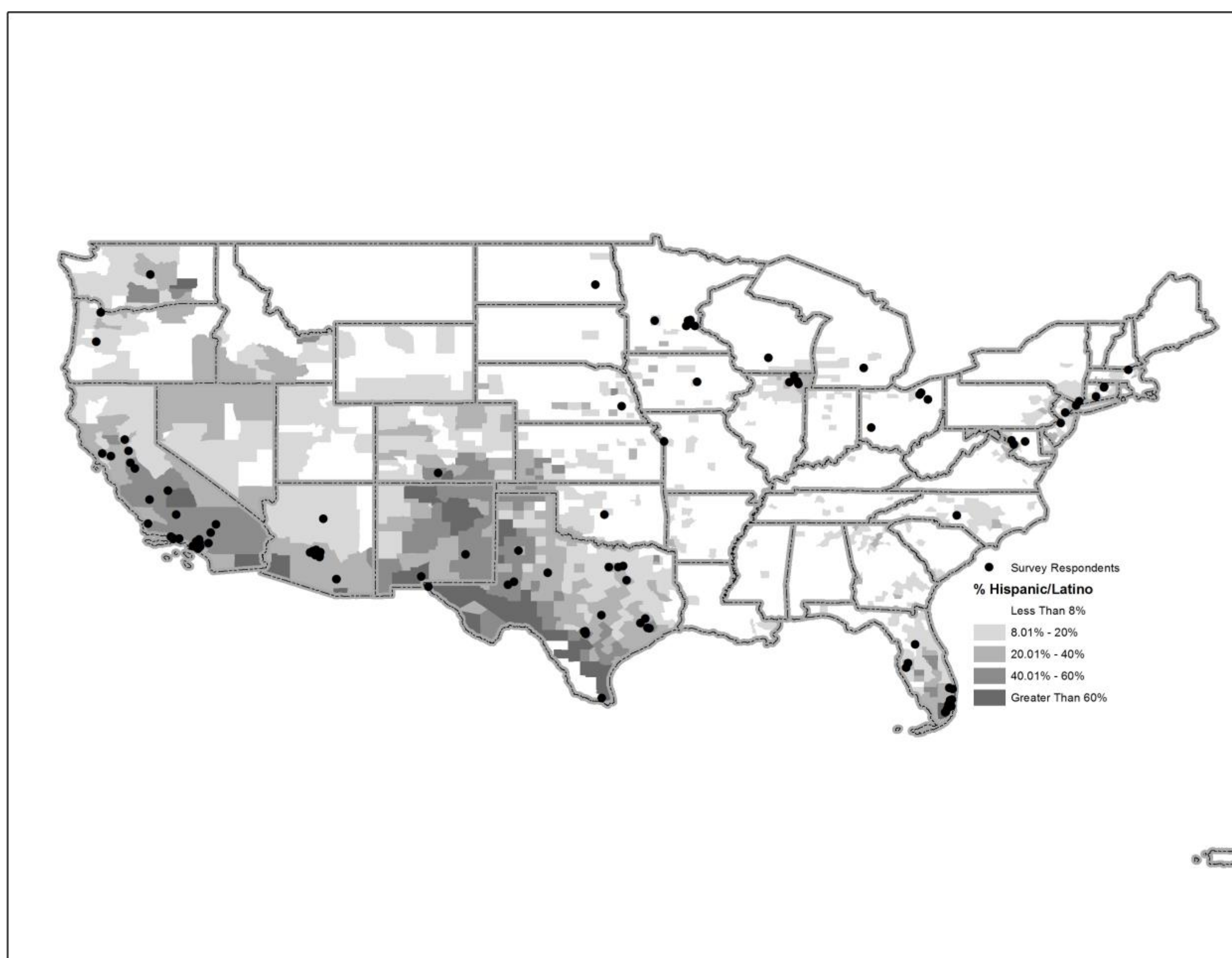

Figure 3. Latinx/a/o distribution of respondents in relation to US Latinx/a/o population

Discussion

As an attempt to understand Latinx/a/o leaders in community colleges, this study's large proportion of Latinx/a/o leaders who attended community colleges is noteworthy. It is imperative to note the number of respondents who began their own postsecondary degree pathways by accessing a community college. The search for the next generation of community

college leaders should begin by helping students consider professions in higher education leadership, especially those in the community college transfer pathway. The geo-spatial results of this study offer significant contributions to regional efforts in the identification and preparation of the next generation of leaders to transform and strengthen community colleges as pathways to degrees for Latinx/a/o students. The institutional profile reflected the national trends of community colleges enrolling high proportions of Latinx/a/o students while simultaneously having low numbers of Latinx/a/o staff, faculty, and administrators. This profile was a significant finding as it relates to making connections in local communities. As leaders on campus, Latinx/a/o individuals serve in many roles, not the least of which encompasses being a community scholar and advocate who identifies needs and shapes a vision of what may be (Rodríguez et al., 2016; Turner, 2007). Working in colleges and universities with high Latinx/a/o student enrollment and very few Latinx/a/o staff, faculty, or administrators can have significant challenges, but may hold promise as one way to positively impact students.

Latinx/a/o leaders may likely find themselves as the sole committee member or faculty liaison to provide some form of continuity and advocacy for the high proportion of Latinx/a/o students on campus (Turner, 2007; Valverde, 2003). This finding has significant implications on the diverse range of students Latinx/a/o leaders can serve in the broad range of colleges and regions across the country. The geographic distribution of this professional association showed where Latinx/a/o leaders are working across the country. This mapping followed the national trends of Latinx/a/o populations living in the Southwest and Florida, while slowly moving towards the Midwest and South (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011).

Conclusion and Reflexivity Statement

The construct of educational leadership moved me slowly away from a positivistic view inherent in statistical and geo-spatial research and closer towards an undertstanding of the power imbalances in the research on higher education leadership. My personal experiences at conferences and other events sponsored by AACC and the professional association in this study helped me come to understand community college leadership as something that should not be summed up by a list of competencies (Hernández, 2016). I do not argue against the usefulness of a list of skills community college leaders should know or that some individuals find the competencies to be useful. Instead, I argue that it was impossible for me to carry out

research on the social oppression and exclusion of Latinx/a/o community college leaders in a detached, objective manner.

It is necessary to make apparent my positionality as a Latino, former community college student, and higher education scholar and researcher because the answers to the study's research question have to do with my epistemological approach to educational opportunity and equity. I support inquiry on Latinx/a/o leaders in community colleges as one way of building counterstories to challenge master narratives and unchallenged stereotypes (Croom & Marsh, 2016; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) of Latinx/a/os leaders and students in community colleges. From a spatial perspective, Gildersleeve and Kuntz (2011) helped my thinking move from the temporal closer to the spatial in order to achieve a layered, dynamic, and nuanced investigation that moves towards representations of meaning making. Since LCCLS is a temporal, cross-sectional survey instrument, applying a GIS visualization as a spatial method produced cartographic displays that transformed the collected data to map outputs as a means of enriching the study's analyses and meaning making on Latinx/a/o leaders in community colleges in the U.S.

In undertaking this multi-year research project on Latinx/a/o leaders in community colleges, I came to understand my role as a scholar had a larger aim and scope. I urge other Latinx/a/o higher education leaders to produce scholarship about our experiences in academe. Even a cursory review of higher education and community college research journals would reveal AACC's competencies as a ubiquitous leadership framework (see Eddy, 2012; Ottenritter, 2012). I see an over-reliance on the AACC competencies as problematic since they make only vague references to advancing diversity and are void of any epistemological and ontological considerations of Latinx/a/o leaders in community colleges. This challenge is not easily overcome. The professional association in this study also uses the AACC competencies as a guiding framework, while advancing culturally-relevant ways of leading that can often feel misaligned and subtly out of step. Given this gap in accounting for the different ways of knowing about higher education leadership, the AACC competencies alone are an ineffective framework to guide leaders towards broadening pathways to degrees for Latinx/a/o students. The resilient histories of Latinx/a/o communities in the United States must be accounted for while valuing the contributions of Leaders of Color in the ways community colleges think about their leaders. The profile of Latinx/a/o leaders presented in this study challenges the mainstream ethos of

individualism and positional leadership by recognizing that no one individual can accomplish anything worthwhile.

Results of the study showed participants' high rates of graduate degree completion as well as leadership development program participation. This finding underscored a mutually beneficial relationship between Latinx/a/o leaders, university-based programs, and professional association's leadership programs. The important role of these programs for community college leaders should not be minimized. As community colleges rely on universities to train and prepare emerging leaders for future leadership, universities rely on community colleges to maintain student enrollment through robust transfer pathways. Universities must acknowledge and leverage their symbiotic relationship to the study of community college leadership. This study shows community colleges incubate educational potential while leveraging academic aspirations of both leaders and students. Researchers should engage in inquiry that seeks to determine the institutional roots of doctoral degree recipients to learn more about community colleges' role in doctoral degree production.

Universities' roles in advancing Latinx/a/o leaders for community colleges are important and urgent as they also work to diversify the student bodies that enroll and complete their Master's and doctoral programs (Duvall, 2003). Research studies on university-based programs for community college leaders should continue emphasizing how universities are the main providers of the requisite graduate degrees (Friedel, 2010). Advocacy groups and scholars that track presidents have noted that as many as 70% of college presidents completed a doctoral degree (American Council on Education [ACE], 2012; Romano, Townsend, & Mamiseishvili, 2009). In this study 94% of participants had completed a master's degree and 47% had completed a doctorate (Ed.D, Ph.D. or J.D.). These statistics are indicative of the important role universities play in the context of community college leadership (Friedel, 2010), and researchers should communicate this reality to interested stakeholders in both community colleges and university sectors.

Professional organizations will continue to play an instrumental role in promoting pathways to postsecondary degrees for Latinx/a/o students. This study showed Latinx/a/o leaders rely on multigenerational professional networks. Further research should consider the role of doctoral programs and leadership development institutes and programs in preparing equity-minded leaders to facilitate college access and move towards success for Latinx/a/o

students. These implications for research are presented as potential follow-up studies to continue sharing the stories and contributions of Latinx/a/o leaders in community colleges. Without a dedicated research agenda, the experiences and epistemological expertise of Latinx/a/o leaders will remain dismissed and invisible from the national conversation on community college leadership development.

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