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## AMAE Special Issue

### Latinx and the Community College: Promoting Pathways to Postsecondary Degrees

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## Editors' Message

We are pleased to publish the 2017 theme issue focused on community colleges and Latinx students. We personally thank the three co-guest editors, Drs. Edna Martinez, Nancy Acevedo-Gil, and Enrique G. Murillo, Jr., who bring a wealth of experience from the field of higher education. Their year-long effort and dedication brought together a collection of timely and relevant articles from an impressive set of authors from across the US. The articles in this issue examine the various ways that community colleges can empower and support Latinx students as well as the factors that influence student success. Scholars, policymakers, and community college educators will find important recommendations in this issue that can ultimately influence the academic trajectories of Latinx youth as they navigate postsecondary pathways.

Enjoy the special issue! And thank you for your readership.

*Juntos logramos más,*

Patricia Sanchez, *AMAE Journal* Co-Editor

Antonio J. Camacho, *AMAE Journal* Co-Editor

## **Latinx and the Community College: Promoting Pathways to Postsecondary Degrees**

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Latinx students continue to enroll in U.S. higher education in much greater numbers than in previous decades (Gramlich, 2017). Therefore, it is no wonder that “since 2006, we have seen a 78 percent increase in the number of institutions classified as Hispanic-Serving Institutions<sup>1</sup>, and a growing number of Emerging Hispanic-Serving Institutions,” the majority of which are two-year community colleges (*Excelencia & HACU*, 2017, para. 3). Latinx students represent 23% of community college students nationwide (AACC, 2017). Upon completing high school, 46% of Latinx students enroll in the community college sector (Krogstad & Lopez, 2015). Moreover, when compared to White students, Latinx students are more likely to choose a community college, even after controlling for academic achievement and socioeconomic status (Kurlaender, 2006; Tovar, 2015).

Even so, structural and institutional barriers continue to interrupt Latinx students’ postsecondary pathways, oftentimes forcing them to leave college without reaching their academic goals. When entering the community college system, approximately 51% of Latino/a/x students aspire to transfer to a four-year college, but less than 6% will earn a bachelor’s degree within six years of enrollment (Radford, Berkner, Wheelless, & Sheperd, 2010). Ultimately, 35% of Latino/a/x who earn a bachelor’s degree begin their education at the community college and are transfer students, which is the highest among other racial groups (Cataldi et al., 2011).

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<sup>1</sup> HSIs are defined in Title V of the Higher Education Opportunity Act (2008) as accredited, degree-granting, public or private nonprofit institutions of higher education with 25% or more total undergraduate Hispanic full-time equivalent (FTE) student enrollment. Emerging HSIs have a 15-24% full-time equivalent (FTE) undergraduate Hispanic student enrollment.

Although the community college has been established as an instrumental institution that can both support and hinder the experiences of Latinx students as they navigate postsecondary education (Moore & Shulock 2010; Núñez & Elizondo, 2013; Pérez Huber, Malagon, Ramirez, Camargo Gonzalez, Jimenez, & Velez, 2015), the community college continues to be an under-researched sector of postsecondary education. Accordingly, we sought to propose a special issue focused on Latinx<sup>2</sup> students and the community college with the aim to publish studies that promote pathways to postsecondary degrees.

When developing the call and special issue, we considered three guiding questions: What are the experiences of leaders, instructors, and students when promoting pathways to postsecondary degrees for Latinx students? How do scholars and practitioners challenge deficit structures and practices in the community college? What transformative changes (structural, attitudinal, processes) are needed to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for Latinx students at the community college?

Faced with multiple challenges, U.S. community colleges are complex organizations to lead (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014; Eddy, 2010; Nevarez & Wood, 2010). For instance, community college leaders must uphold multiple missions (Eddy 2012; Wood & Nevarez, 2014), which include developmental education, community education, transfer education, and vocational/career and technical education (CTE). To address the four functions, community college leaders and faculty must respond to the nation's developmental education crisis (Acevedo-Gil, Santos, & Solorzano, 2014; Bailey, 2009) and address low completion and transfer rates (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015). In addition, community college leaders must contend with dwindling, insufficient, and shifting revenue streams (Cohen et al., 2014; Goldrick-Rab, 2010; Nevarez & Wood, 2010) while (re)building relationships with board members (Smith, 2016) and operating within a culture of increased accountability (Eddy, 2010, 2012). Additionally, a number of community college leaders and faculty now face decisions centered on the added role of conferring baccalaureate degrees (Martinez, 2014; McKinney, Scicchitano, & Johns, 2013).

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<sup>2</sup> Although there are varying viewpoints regarding the use of the “x” signifier in “Latinx,” as guest editors we purposefully chose to employ the “x” signifier in an attempt to achieve inclusivity and challenge the existing gender binary. For a detailed view into the ongoing discussion regarding the use of the “x” signifier, see M. de Onis (2017).

Within this context, we frame the community college as a sector that can both facilitate college access for Latinx students and institutionalize obstacles to completion efforts. Nevertheless, the community college represents a sector that students, faculty, and leaders navigate and challenge institutional obstacles to bridge degree aspirations with completions. Latinx communities across the United States enact varied forms of social and political agency and claim authority to assert their voices through organizing and knowledge sharing. We see this collective sense of strength and resilience in the actions of Latinx who create new spaces from which to enact change. This issue provides a forum to scholarship that addresses the national imperative of the growing Latinx community college student population, as well as the possibilities present in college aspirations and persistence.

The issue begins with the institutional perspective in, “Supporting Latinx/a/o community college leaders: A geospatial approach” in which Ignacio Hernández focuses on institutional leaders who are members of one community college professional association. Using data from an original survey instrument and an exploratory spatial data analysis (ESDA), Hernández uses a geographic information systems (GIS) database and finds that Latinx community college leaders may be found in metropolitan areas with large Latinx/a/o populations. 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. In addition, Hernández posits the powerful notion that the competencies established by the American Association of Community Colleges alone are an ineffective framework to guide leaders towards broadening pathways to degrees for Latinx/a/o students.

The focus on institutional accountability continues in “Chicanas in IR: Data-driven advocacy for Latinx students from institutional research contexts in the community college,” by Elvira J. Abrica and Martha Rivas. The authors use *testimonio* methodology as institutional research (IR) professionals to examine how they experience, respond to, and challenge institutionalized racism and systemic obstacles as they advocate for Latinx students in the California Community College system. In particular, the article offers a critique of the pillar of neutrality associated with institutional research and calls for a critical examination of the ways in which IR may support the perpetuation and/or dismantling of educational inequities in community college.



The special issue continues with a focus on faculty members and their role in supporting Latinx student success in an article titled, “Connecting through engagement: Latinx student-faculty interaction in community college,” authored by Felisha A. Herrera, Judith W. Hernández Chapar, and Gabriela Kovats Sánchez. While previous research has focused on the engagement experiences of students enrolled at four-year institutions, it often excludes the experiences of Latinx students enrolled at two-year public institutions. In the article, the authors center faculty as institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar, 2011) and examine the formal and informal contacts between faculty and Latinx students. Using data from the 2004/09 Beginning Postsecondary Survey, the authors employ descriptive analyses and blocked hierarchical regression to understand the factors that impact the frequency of interaction with institutional agents for Latinx students.

The issue proceeds by examining the student-level experiences in an article titled “Latino men and their fathers: Exploring how community cultural wealth influences their community college success,” written by Victor B. Sáenz, Carmen de las Mercedes, Sarah L. Rodriguez, and Claudia García-Louis. In their article, the authors share findings from a qualitative study that examined the role of fathers in the educational success of Latino men attending community colleges. Using community cultural wealth as a framework, the experiences of 130 Latino men enrolled in Texas community colleges are highlighted. The following article, “Latina student mothers *trenzas de identidades* in the community college,” authored by Hortencia Jimenez and Nereida Oliva, provides insights into the experiences of Latina community college students who are mothers. The authors examine the narratives of four Latina student mothers enrolled in a community college. Using Chicana feminist theory as their theoretical framework, the authors apply *trenzas de identidades* (Godínez, 2006; Montoya, 1994) as a metaphorical and analytical tool to understand the experiences of Latina community college student mothers.

In efforts to dismantle pervasive educational inequities exacerbated by existing policies and practices related to developmental education, Erin Doran contributes an article titled “An empowerment framework for Latinx students in developmental education.” In the article, Doran provides an overview of the literature related to Latinx students in developmental writing and highlights understudied areas. Doran proposes a framework for Latinx students as a model, which combines a deeper understanding of language, power, and preparing Latinx

students for college-level writing. In the final research article, “Mexican and Mexican-American student reflections on transfer: Institutional agents and the continued role of the community college,” Edén Cortez and Erin L. Castro draw upon the experiences of six Mexican and Mexican American community college transfer students to examine students’ reflections regarding pre- and post-transfer support from both institutional agents and structured student programs.

The issue continues with conference proceedings, which entail the speech made by Eloy Ortiz Oakley, Chancellor of the California Community Colleges during the 2017 Latino Education & Advocacy Days (LEAD) Summit. As the first Latino to lead the largest higher education system in the United States, Chancellor Oakley is a passionate and unapologetic advocate for Latinx students. Since his appointment, Chancellor Oakley has been instrumental in reframing deficit thinking aimed at Latinx students and continues to work arduously to address equity gaps. While fully aware of the “depressing statistics” regarding Latino students in higher education, Chancellor Oakley emphasizes the role of California Community Colleges in improving educational outcomes of Latinx communities, many of which are Hispanic-Serving Institutions. Related to this point, Oakley underscores the need for Hispanic-Serving Institutions, often times more appropriately referred to as Hispanic-Enrolling Institutions, to become *Hispanic-Graduating* Institutions. In addition, Chancellor Oakley addresses questions related to the institutionalization of baccalaureate degrees at the community college as well as transformative policies to promote equity and justice within developmental education.

In alignment with Chancellor Oakley’s speech, Martha Rivas’s poem, entitled “A Real Tragedy,” provides insight into the challenges experienced by Latinx students in the community college and the institutional obstacles that leaders must address. Finally, Madeline Pérez De Jesús provides a book review for *Hanging out and hanging on: From the projects to the campus* (Núñez, 2014). Pérez De Jesús provides a critical review of *Hanging Out*, where Núñez (2014) discusses the use of institutional partnerships to address college access and affordability. In particular, the book examines the implications of a program that serves students who may not be excelling academically but have a commitment to their communities. In the program, students take courses at the community college and are housed near the campus, which minimizes the stigma associated with attending community college.

As editors, it is our hope that the collection of articles featured in this special issue continue to engage us to think critically about the role of community colleges in advancing Latinx students in higher education. We thank the *AMAE* Editorial Team, for their support of this work. In addition, we thank all the volunteer reviewers for their careful and critical reviews. Finally, we thank the contributing authors for engaging in this critical line of work while adopting various methodological approaches and asset-based frameworks. We urge scholars, practitioners, and policymakers alike to consider the recommendations offered in these works in order to advance policies and practices that help Latinx students not simply enter postsecondary education, but, in fact, achieve and surpass academic goals. Moreover, we encourage readers to consider the areas for future research highlighted by each author. At the same time, we want to stress the need to shift or reframe the discussion about increasing Latinx educational attainment from that of an economic imperative, to a social justice concern. Our students are more than just workers who will play a vital role in raising the country's economic prospects and global competitiveness. They are people with hopes and aspirations for themselves, their families, and their communities. These aspirations often begin at home and include earning a college degree. It is our intention that this special issue contribute to ensuring that deficit educational structures do not temper and/or crush these aspirations.

In sum, although we have made strides toward expanding access and opportunities for Latinx students in the community college, much work remains. In particular, this issue does not include research that addresses the experiences of Latinx student veterans, Latinx students with (dis)abilities, LGBTQ Latinx students, Latinx students who are undocumented, and other intersectional identities. We encourage scholars whose work centers on the aforementioned areas to consider *AMAE* as an outlet to disseminate their work. There is no denying that the current U.S. social, political, and economic context, full of extraordinary vitriol and divisiveness, threatens the progress we have made toward improving the representation of Latinx students in all sectors of postsecondary education. Now more than ever it is time for our scholarship, teaching, and service to speak truth to power and tear down the walls—both literally and figuratively.

*Guest Editors*

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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 postsecondary 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 association. 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.

## 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 association 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 association 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 administrators 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 community 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, Martínez, & Valle, 2016).

The literature on Latinx/a/o leaders in higher education, while sparse, 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, and 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 support 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 I provides a summary of the final response rate based on 161 submitted surveys from an eligible sample of 475.

Table I  
*LCCLS: Eligible Sample and Response Rate*

	<b>Cases</b>
<b>Sample</b>	482
Not Eligible	7
<b>Eligible Sample</b>	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
<b>Gender (n=161)</b>		
Female	89	55.3
Male	72	44.7
Prefer to self-describe	0	0
<b>Current Age (n = 163)</b>		
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
<b>Racial Identity (n=157)</b>		
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
<b>Job Title or Classification (n=160)</b>		
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
<b>Years in current position (n=160)</b>		
Mean	6.27 years	--
<b>Has been a community college instructor (n=161)</b>		
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
<b>Currently in a mentor/protégé relationship (n=161)</b>		
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
<b>Has Latina/o mentors in community colleges (n=161)</b>		
No	51	31.6
Yes	110	68.3
<b>Has Latina/o protégés in community colleges (n=161)</b>		
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)*

<u>State</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Percent</u>
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 multiple 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).

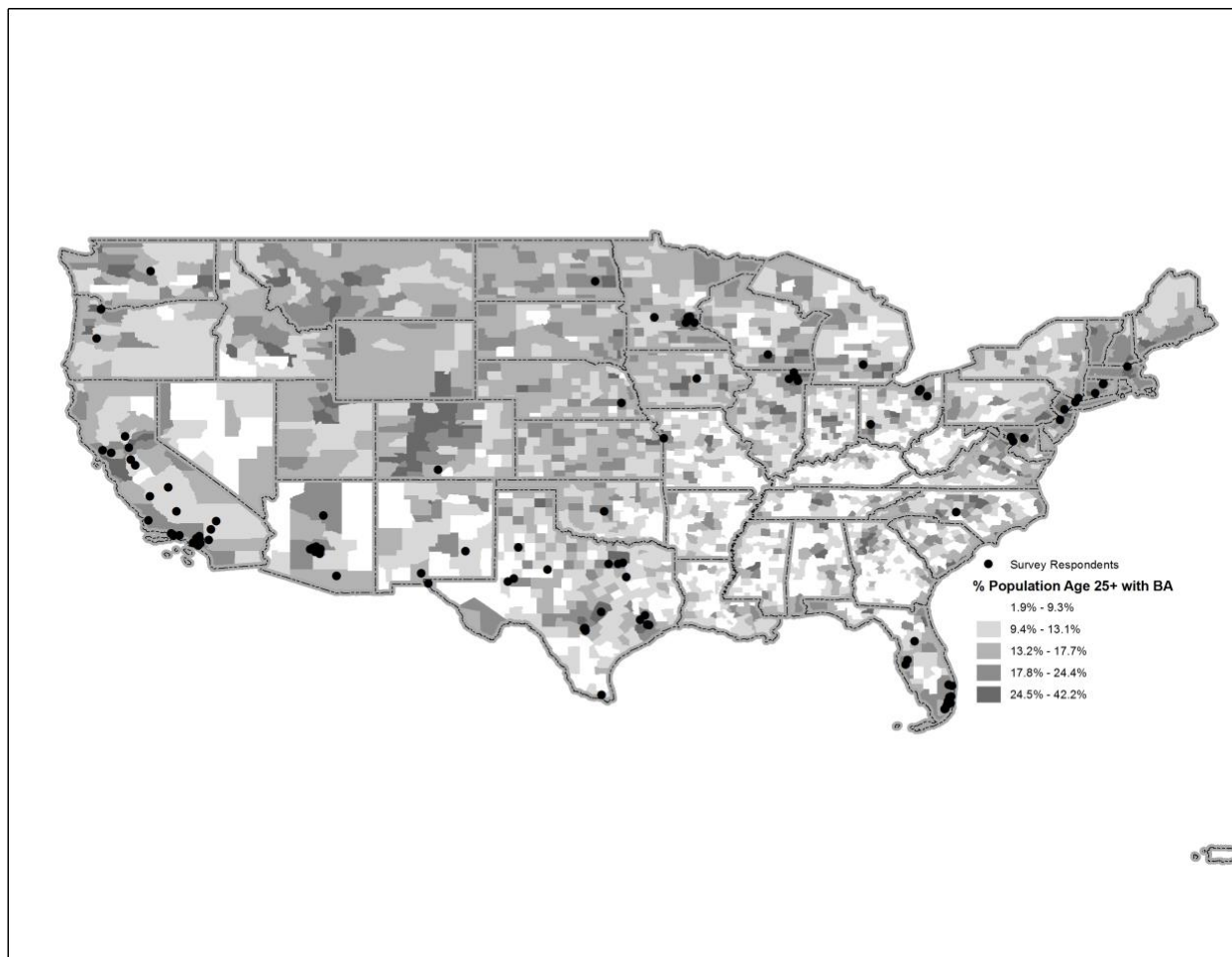


Figure 1. Leadership program participants in relation to US population with bachelor's degrees

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 postsecondary 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.

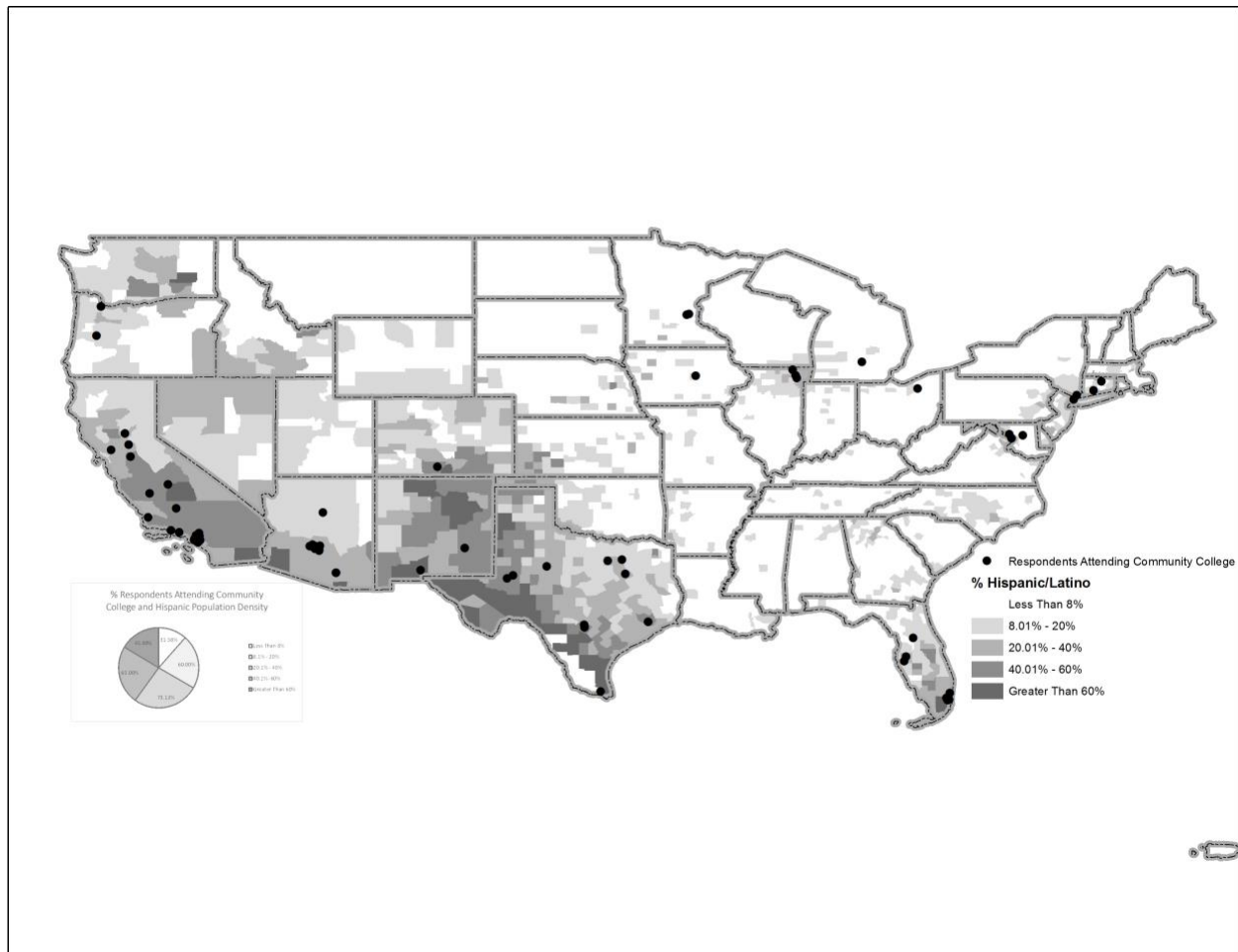


Figure 2. Community college attendance in relation to US Latinx/a/o population

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.

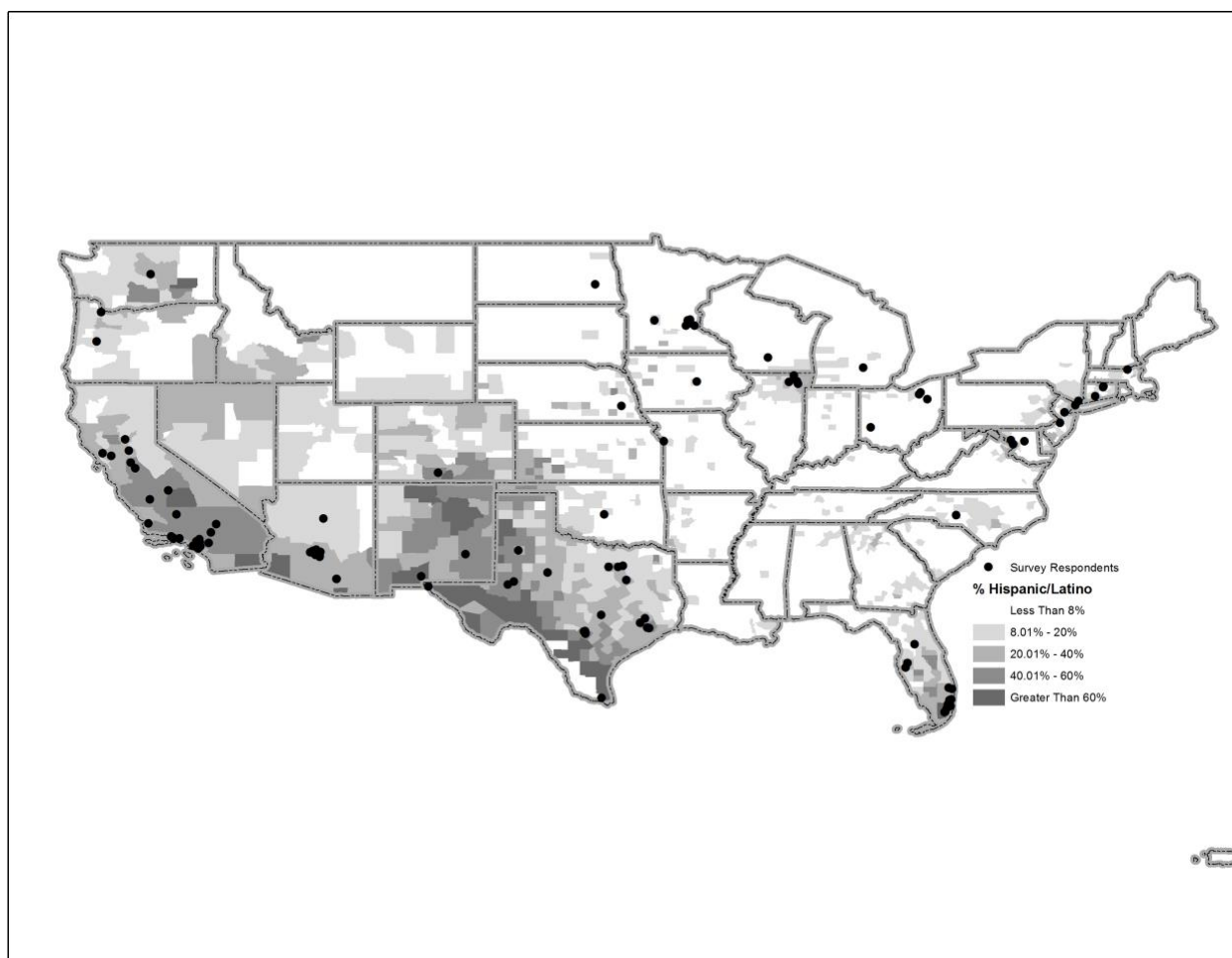


Figure 3. Latinx/a/o distribution of respondents in relation to US Latinx/a/o population

### 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 understanding 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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## **Chicanas in IR: Data-Driven Advocacy for Latinx Students from Institutional Research Contexts in the Community College**

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### **Abstract**

Various inequities and challenges facing Latinx students in community colleges continue to be documented. Yet, less documented are the challenges associated with *advocacy efforts* to support Latinx and other underrepresented Students of Color within the community college sector. There is not often pause to consider: *Who advocates for Latinx students? When and how does this advocacy take shape?* In this article, we offer Chicana *testimonios* as institutional research (IR) professionals to highlight ways we experience, respond to, and challenge institutionalized racism and systemic obstacles to advocate for Latinx students in the California community college system. We situate our *testimonios* within a critique of the pillar of neutrality associated with the institutional research profession and argue for a critical examination of the ways in which IR may play an active role in the perpetuation or the dismantling of educational inequities in California community colleges.

*Keywords:* race, persistence, Latinx students, institutional research, community colleges

## Introduction

Institutional Research (IR) offices, sometimes referred to as Offices of Institutional Effectiveness (IE), evaluation, assessment, enrollment research and/or planning, play an important role in shaping decision-making, policies, and practices within colleges and universities (Hossler, Kuh, & Olsen, 2001; Volkwein, 2008). Although the activities, structure, and organizational placement of IR offices vary widely across higher education institutions, their underlying purpose is to generate information that can guide institutional planning and practice (Saupe, 1990). In light of the significant role that IR can potentially play in driving institutional change (Bensimon, 2007; Dowd, 2005, 2007), it is important to explore connections between institutional research and efforts to promote post-secondary educational pathways for Latinx students.

Equity and advocacy for racial minority students are not routinely part of IR work (see Lindquist, 1999 for a description of routine IR activities). Indeed, accountability reporting frameworks do not expressly require IR offices to report, assess, reassess, or respond to ongoing student inequities (Abrica, 2017; Harris & Bensimon, 2007). This disconnect is problematic because, "...if the academic outcomes of minority students are not assessed regularly and treated as measurable evidence of institutional performance, we can expect inequalities in outcomes to remain structurally hidden and unattended to" (Harris & Bensimon, 2007, p. 78). This is especially true for Latinx and other Students of Color who increasingly represent the demographic majority on community college campuses (Murphy, 2013).

While there has been a proliferation of suggestions for how campus-level practitioners and faculty can better support Latinx students, this literature has not attended to the role that IR might play in driving institutional change (Dowd, 2005, 2007). Meanwhile, research studies of the IR profession have yet to engage explicitly with equity, much less critically engage a discussion of ways in which IR professionals can advocate for Latinx pathways in post-secondary institutions. A disconnect between the field of IR and equitable outcomes in post-secondary education reifies two *implicit* and *problematic* assumptions: 1) that IR is divorced from racial/ethnic disparities in student experiences and outcomes, and 2) that it is possible to address historic inequities without the critical examination of cultures, policies, and practices embedded within all structures of U.S. higher education.

An inquiry into the interconnectedness of IR and issues of educational inequity threatens the pillar of neutrality that is associated with the IR (Saupe, 1990; Terenzini, 1993, 2013; Volkwein, 2008). Saupe (1990), for example, wrote:

Institutional research, like other types of research, should be *objective*, systematic, and thorough. *The outcomes of the research should be as free as possible from the influence of personal philosophy, political considerations, and desired results.* The information provided by institutional research is combined with *academic and professional judgement* in planning and other decision-making processes. (p. 2, emphasis added)

Objectivity and the perception of political neutrality are described as the basis of the IR profession. However, it is our perspective that institutional research is an inherently political endeavor in which the research practices reflect and privilege particular epistemological and methodological traditions that do not necessarily incorporate nor consider the experiences of Communities of Color (Anzaldúa, 1987). Moreover, by not engaging, critically, with data and presenting results that are touted as “neutral,” IR professionals become complicit in normalizing discourse, policies, and practice that serve to perpetuate structural racism and educational inequity. Practitioners are limited in taking a more critical approach- informed by extant research on the pervasiveness of racism in higher education- to data collection, management, assessment, and data dissemination (Bauman, Bustillos, Besimon, Brown, & Bartree, 2005; Bensimon, 2007; Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Harper & Bensimon, 2003; Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009; Peña, Bensimon, & Colyar, 2006).

As Chicanas working in IR, we experienced *objectivity* as a denial of the gross inequities experienced by Communities of Color and *neutrality* of “number crunching” as counterproductive efforts to promote more equitable outcomes for Students of Color (Harper & Bensimon, 2003). We offer our *testimonios* as Chicana IR professionals in a single community college district to highlight the ways we experienced, responded to, and challenged systemic obstacles to advocate for Latinx in the California Community College context. Our *testimonios*—both in method and in content—challenge the presumption that IR is an *apolitical* endeavor (Ochoa, 2016; Pérez Huber, 2009).

## Literature Review

### Organizational Characteristics of Institutional Research

Research on the IR profession has been concerned with documenting the activities, structure, organizational placement, and purpose of IR across post-secondary institutions (Brumbaugh, 1960; Delaney, 1997; Muffo, 1999; Peterson & Corcoran, 1985; Saupe, 1990; Volkwein, 2008). Within this literature, there has been a consistent interest in the ways external accountability demands, which are ever-changing and intertwined with broader policy shifts, inform the organizational structure and activities of institutional researchers (Alexander, 2000; Bers, 2011; Head & Johnson, 2011; McLaughlin, Brozovsky, & McLaughlin, 1998; Smith Morest, 2009; Smith Morest & Jenkins, 2007). This interest has spurred both empirical research (e.g. Knight, Moore, & Coperthwaite, 1997) and reflective essays (e.g. Peterson, 1999; Terenzini, 1993, 2013) on the changing nature of IR within higher education. Notable is a study of a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) community college in Southern California by Murphy (2013), because it contributes to literature that otherwise would not include any mention of how institutions fulfill (or are unable to fulfill) their unique mission of promoting post-secondary pathways specifically for Latinx students.

An area of literature has focused on how IR can shape the organizational context, campus climate, or cultures of the institutions and students they serve. McLaughlin, Brozovsky, and McLaughlin (1998), for example, emphasized the role that IR can play in promoting specific institutional goals like student retention. More recently, Swing (2009) encouraged IR professionals to consider themselves change agents and argued that in many cases, IR professionals already have the training and ability to lead others on campus. An underlying concern was an underutilization of skills of IR professionals and a need to increase individual capacities to establish a common language of change, build awareness, and increase knowledge that can move individuals on campus toward action and change. Similarly, other scholars (Dowd, 2007; Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Dowd, Malcom, Nakamoto & Bensimon, 2012) have insisted that campus-level practitioners, rather than data alone, is needed to drive organization change and improve student outcomes.

## **Characteristics and Competencies of IR Professionals**

Yet another major area of interest within IR literature focuses on the skills, training, and competencies of IR professionals. A seminal scholar in this area is Terenzini (1993), who provided a comprehensive framework for the competencies of IR professionals, including technical and social skills needed for successful practices in the field. Terenzini (2013) focused on how the originally conceived competencies looked in light of broader changes in higher education (e.g. increased globalization, student diversity, and technological advancements). Revisions to the framework include considerations of increased competencies in what Terenzini (2013) calls “issues intelligences” (p. 23). This form of organizational intelligence includes “knowledge of the kinds of issues and decisions that middle- and upper-level administrators in functional units face” and “understanding how colleges and universities function” with regard to an “institution’s political dimensions and the formal and informal dynamics of power” (Terenzini, 2013, p. 141). Of note is the emphasis on IR professionals’ need to know how to play the game of navigating the politics of the campus environment. Politically-savvy IR professionals, according to this framework, will be most successful in securing access to resources and finding common ground with individuals representing multiple constituencies on campus. Terenzini (2013) states:

IR professionals need a keen understanding of the people in the college and university settings: what faculty, administrators, staff, students, and others value, what is important to them. It is the ability to anticipate how others will respond to a proposal, and idea or opportunity (or threat) and whether the reactions will be positive, neutral, or negative. IR is knowing what it will take to secure others’ support. (p. 143)

The identification of these skillsets is an important contribution to our understanding of the IR profession, however, they beg consideration of the following questions: (1) To what extent is the emphasis on political savviness, attentiveness, and responsiveness to constituencies on campus consistent with what is needed to promote educational equity? (2) What does “playing the game” mean for Practitioners of Color? (3) How do these skills and savviness ensure research practices will, in fact, present a platform to advocate for Latinx students?

Saupe (1999), Presley (1990), Hirsch (1975), Leimer and Terkla (2009), Delaney (1997), and others describe the socio-behavioral dimensions of the IR profession, all emphasizing political neutrality as a means of maintaining the perceived trustworthiness of the IR among constituencies (Leimer & Terkla, 2009). Literature on IR does not suggest a focus on issues of race and racism, or other forms of marginalization, within studies of institutional researchers. However, Harper and Bensimon (2003) offer a perspective opposite of what is observed in the literature: that an explicit recognition of race and racism (color-consciousness) is a vital quality for institutional researchers and leaders.

### **Equity and IR in California Community Colleges**

Researchers at the Center for Urban Education have developed an Equity Scorecard that incorporates equity into broader accountability reporting and measures of institutional efficiency. The Equity Scorecard represents an attempt to merge IR and equity, recognizing the need to do this work based on ongoing racial disparities experienced by Students of Color. While the scorecard is presented as a tool to disaggregate data and monitor progress on critical benchmarks to support students, especially highly disproportionately impacted students (majority first-generation, low-income, Students of Color), the tool itself does not facilitate critical dialogues among key practitioners. Critical dialogue would enable practitioners to address and work towards understanding: (a) equity, (b) disparities, (c) impact on students, and (d) perpetuation of racism via complacency and neutrality. Meaning, by not having IR practitioners that are versed to speak on various intersectional notions of institutionalized racism embedded in the lack of data interpretation and reporting, college practices are vulnerable to continue doing business as usual.

### ***Testimonio* as Primary Method**

A Chicana Feminist Critical Praxis framework unapologetically centers the lives of Chicana contributors with a commitment to produce scholarship accessible to multiple communities (not just academia) via *testimonio* (Rivas, 2012). This manuscript evokes the history of employing *testimonio* as both methodology and method. As methodology, we want to strengthen and contribute to the scholarship on the importance of employing culturally-responsive and appropriate methods to uncover and create new knowledge from voices often



silenced in academia (Flores Carmona, 2014). As a method, we engage in critical conversation and exchange, enabling us to highlight a narrative that is too often relegated as anecdotal. Thus, *testimonios* are a process where contributors are able to create knowledge and theory through a conversation of collective lived experiences that may facilitate change (Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012).

The Latina Feminist Group (2001) argued that *testimonios* are created when the personal and private become political—become an entity. During *testimonios*, the contributor shares her stories without holding or silencing her critique or analysis of any given experience (Rivas, 2012). Thus, *testimonios* are a tool where contributors can “theorize oppression, resistance, and subjectivity” (Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 19). *Testimonios* call for individuals to recall and share their many untold stories (Calderón, Bernal, Huber, Malagón & Vélez, 2012; Delgado Bernal, Burciaga & Flores Carmona, 2012; Rivas, 2012). Most importantly, *testimonios* serve as, “...a crucial means of bearing witness and inscribing into history those lived realities that would otherwise succumb to the alchemy of erasure” (Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 2). A Chicana Feminist Critical Praxis lens reminds us that Chicanas are creators and embody knowledge while their *testimonios* help us document these moments with future generations of scholars and community activists (Rivas, 2012).

We offer our own *testimonios* as Chicana institutional research (IR) professionals to highlight ways we experience, respond, and challenge institutionalized racism and systemic obstacles to advocate for Latinx in the California community college context. Previous scholars (e.g. Martinez, Marquez, Cantú & Rocha, 2016; Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Prieto & Villenas, 2012) have similarly relied on *testimonio* to offer narratives of advocacy and leadership in the realm of education to disrupt what Dolores Delgado Bernal and Villalpando (2002) and Pérez Huber (2009) refer to as an apartheid system of knowledge. While extant research on IR described core competencies and knowledge areas, we posit that our *testimonios* offer equally valuable knowledge in service of the IR profession (Castillo-Montoya & Torres-Guzmán, 2012; Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012). Other *testimonios* highlight experiences of Chicanas and Latinas very specific contexts within education (e.g. Cantú, 2012); however, we focus on the context of institutional research for which there has not yet been a recorded *testimonio* from the field.

## Dr. Elvira's Testimonio

SPSS®....

Syntax...

“Number crunching” ...

*Student Equity Plan...de Aztlan...*

These are the terms that come to mind when I think about the time I spent working in institutional research at a community college. These words circled around in my head; as if, personified, they were waiting for me to decide whether institutional research was the right fit for me. They swirled inside me, amidst the shame I felt for having not secured a tenure-track position at a research institution after completing my Ph.D. I found it difficult to decipher whether I actually wanted to be a part of academia or whether this instinct was purely a result of my doctoral socialization and normalized expectation that I go the faculty route. I was unsure as to whether I wanted to be a part of academia, knowing full well it had already taken a toll on my spirit. So there I sat, every day, from 8-5, with an uncertainty of where I belonged and where I was going.

Click, tab, click.

Mouse swirl.

Descriptive statistics.

Assessment, IR, Student Services, Faculty. So many sub-fields within education and I had to figure out where in this vast landscape of opportunity I could insert myself. Where could I make the biggest difference? How was I going to put this Ph.D. thing to use? They say you grow where you are planted, and I was digging a little spot for myself in IR in the community college sector.

### **The Door**

My office was at the edge of campus in the maintenance building. “There is just no more space anywhere on campus. This is only temporary.”

Everyone around me is maintenance staff. “There is an ant problem, and so-and-so is going to fix it.” Out of place, I closed the door to my office to do “think work.” I didn’t realize that classified staff, as I was, were not allowed to close their door. E-mails were sent. Senior

administrators got involved. I wanted to close my door to focus on my work. As a classified staff member I was not allowed to do so. The senior administrator working in the building says she must be able to watch me, must be able to see me. What could I possibly be doing in this office with a desk and a computer? Now administrators are involved in the debacle. Janitors are Black and Brown men. I chat with them and hear their stories from the weekend. We are so separated from campus. In the field. Next to a prison. Literally. I see clouds and dirt outside my window. I am not allowed to close my door. *What do they think I am doing in here?* My boss treads lightly, but asserts his authority to protect me. Classified staff are not allowed to close their doors.

Eventually, I broke down crying in my boss's office. I just don't know why I am in a field, far away. What am I here for? "Okay, we will get you moved to a building on campus." My new home was a cubicle near our Dean of Student Equity. HALLELUJAH! Free at last! "Hi I am looking for Dr. So-and-So. Can you tell me when he will be in? Why can't you just open his calendar and tell me what his schedule looks like?"

I am not the secretary to the Dean of Student Equity.

I am that Ph.D.—yet, labeled as everything but a doctor.

Ph.D.—the only Chicana with a Ph.D. on campus; yet, I am the only Latina on campus that is not a secretary.

### **Classified Staff**

It soon became apparent that being the only Chicana Ph.D. but also a classified staff member was going to be an interesting experience. I soon learned this campus was all about shared governance. At each meeting, there were representatives of faculty, administrators, and classified staff. I was a classified staff representative for the student success committee and student equity meetings. When I attended meetings, no one knew who I was. No one knew me. No one knew I had a Ph.D. I had this secret training in higher education, more specifically in institutional research and data analyses. I wanted to use it, trust me. I felt that I had the content knowledge- the research expertise and "book knowledge" to contribute to discussions but I too often sat silent in meetings because I was trying to get a feel for who these people were. My sense: there were a select few who really cared and others who were there to get out from behind their regular work. This was "shared governance," where there had to be equal

representation of all faculty and staff at all meetings. There was a meeting almost every day for some sub-sub-sub-subcommittee and another to that sub-committee. But really, my sense was that major decisions were made behind closed doors, between a select 2-3 people. Meetings and minutes were a way to formalize stuff that had already been done, planned, and it was a superficial act to gather everyone together as if it were a democratic process. I often questioned the capacities of individuals to contribute to these meetings.

### **Equity Falls on Deaf Ears**

We traveled to University of Southern California (USC) to participate in an equity summit. We heard faculty talk about equity. My boss tells me “this stuff doesn’t really apply to us.” Us? We have a conversation about equity. I get the impression that there are “equity folks” and then there is everyone else. A few people are committed to talking about equity. Others are silent, or perhaps made to feel silent. We brainstorm how we can promote equity on campus. “IR is just at this workshop because we provide the data,” I am told. All those charts and all those plans. I help write the student equity plan and honestly believe that change will happen. I run the numbers to calculate DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACT in accordance with the student equity framework identified in what I refer to as the Equity Plan (...de Aztlan!).

Click, tab, click.

Mouse swirl.

Descriptive statistics.

### **“I Need a Number Cruncher”**

I am in my boss’s office, who is the quintessential IR person. He is a walking example of the IR competencies Terenzini (2013) outlined:

He “protects” me from data requests and says if anyone asks for me to work on a project, they can go through him. He wants to protect my time and keep me focused on the limited number of projects at hand.

He is kind and respectful to me.

I look up his salary. Yeah, I think to myself, I would like to make that salary.

His responses to everyone are kind, courteous, and backed up by data. Professional and qualified.

He is endlessly patient when I need a quick refresher on SPSS commands I have forgotten. He walks me through my analysis and we make data jokes. I am being groomed for an IR career. He supports me as a new IR professional.

I take time off to attend national meetings and research conferences. Until one day, he denies this: “You can’t take any more time off. This is too many conferences. I see how you are. I see the way you think and the ideas you have. Advocacy for Students of Color. I just need you to focus,” he exclaims. “You should make a list of these ideas and we can have a daydream session in the summer of things we might like to explore in the dataset,” he states.

“I only need a number cruncher and I need you to focus,” he confessed!

### **What Does it all Mean?**

Essentially, the memories I share in this testimonio, be they disjointed and nonsensical, represent painful and confusing moments in my work as an IR professional. In so many ways, I did not belong in this position. I could not brace myself to be just a “number cruncher.” Worse, I asked repeatedly to attend different academic conferences and expressed interest in developing my own research projects to focus specifically on outcomes for Latinx students. I wanted to drive my own agenda and use the data I was working with to do something more critical and aligned to student needs. I just could not—and would not—be what I was told an institutional research professional is—a number cruncher. A number cruncher, in my mind, is a person who loves the statistics and the data, but is largely divorced from the realities of those who the data represent—Latinx students.

Yes, I was a horrible institutional research professional by established standards. And yet, in feeling like I failed, in being in a perpetual state of confusion, and in **ALWAYS BEING IN TROUBLE FOR SOME SMALL THING I DID OR SAID**, I learned a lot about the institutional climate. I learned a lot about how people see me. I learned what it was like to be out in the world as a formally Ph.D. educated Chicana. I learned that the culture, practices, beliefs of individuals are what make college campuses and that I, as an individual, was limited in how I could systematically change these. Yet, I tried to speak up in meetings. I tried to build community with other Individuals of Color on campus. I worked after my shifts were over to explore the data for my own research interests. I experimented with new ways of measuring student success. I reflected critically on the ways I was asked to calculate and report on various

indicators for different student populations. I questioned why we didn't share our research with wider audiences. I presented my research at academic conferences; I published my own research findings. And, finally, I was just there. I was just there for all eyes to see: A Woman of Color from a historically underserved background. A Chicana with a Ph.D. and classified staff member. I was just there. My presence on campus alone was sometimes all I could offer.

### **Dr. Martha's Testimonio<sup>1</sup>**

My personal introduction to institutional research was all about timing. I pursued a Ph.D. knowing it would offer opportunities that my parents, family, and community have fought for me to access. The Ph.D. was my ticket for upward mobility (*según*) and a microphone to exemplify and name the various and multiple forms of marginalization Students of Color continue to experience. Though the expectations to pursue tenure-track faculty positions continue to be the dominant narrative in doctoral training, the real politics of administration—or the attempt to create immediate systemic changes—are learned through lived experiences.

As a first-generation scholar and practitioner, the politics maneuvering IR spaces were quite momentous. My research and entire advocacy-research platform continues to assess and document inequities and support systems for Students of Color, particularly Latinx students, and their experience as they transfer from community college onto the four-year, and eventually gain entry into graduate school. I attempted to gain employment in the California Community College sector for 15-consecutive years. I was denied 99% of the time. Most often I received the, “You are too academic,” or the, “too research-based.” However, the California movement on Student Equity brought about the need to develop Institutional Effectiveness departments. Here, practitioners are to adequately disaggregate data to fully understand the processes and college efforts to *simultaneously* respond to student needs. Particularly for Students of Color, this meant an institutional response to understand and provide relevant services to yield positive student outcomes. In theory this sounds great. In theory. What I found was an institutional culture infused with acritical practices too often missing opportunities to address educational inequities—void of critical dialogue to fully understand “equity!” for that matter.

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<sup>1</sup> As noted in the literature, Offices of Institutional Research are also called Offices of Institutional Effectiveness. These terms are used interchangeably within this testimonio.

I was hired as Dean of Institutional Effectiveness. That spoke volumes, to me at least, of the commitment the college was making by hiring a critical race theorist to lead their research and assessment of effectiveness. During the 15-year wait to directly support the community college, I became a nationally—and internationally—recognized evaluator for the federal and nonprofit sectors. I continued to teach and lecture on educational inequities and experiences of Students of Color, but as a practitioner, I excelled in modifying infrastructural data repositories to access adequate data to respond to student needs. The College saw this, and along with degrees and credentials, hired me. However, soon (too soon!), it became apparent the culture within the sector was not ready for someone with my background; my Chicananess, doctoralness, brownness, nor my unapologetic focus on student experience!

Unlike many institutional research and institutional effectiveness practitioners, I hold a Ph.D. in social sciences and comparative education with a specialization in race and ethnic studies. Further, my doctoral dissertation focused on understanding how community colleges may (or may not) promote and support Chicanx/Latinx students. This is important to note because when we speak about how IR folks disaggregate data, I begin by asking, “How, where, and from whom are we collecting data?” to, “What and how are data triangulated to understand student experiences? How are we validating data to gain fidelity and reach generalizable statements to inform executive decision-making processes?” But often these questions are repeatedly ignored or marginalized within an agenda that does not allow for critical reflection and strategic assessment. This is infuriating to say the least. You see, I work with a sense of authentic urgency. We know the 1960 California Master Plan delineates a third sector in higher education as junior colleges—these are often perceived as the bottom of the educational pathways. Bottom of the pathway. Bottom of the pipeline, easily able to lose students altogether. This often evokes a psychological condition to “cool off” the aspirations our students hold (Brint & Karabel, 1989). Yet, sixty years after the fact, we now have a postsecondary educational system that holds the California Community College system as the largest sector in the nation, with 2.4 million students, of which one million are Latinx (California Community College Chancellor’s Office, 2016). The California community colleges are *the* pathway to ensure Students of Color transfer to obtain baccalaureate and graduate degrees. It is inevitable that I, especially as an IE practitioner, *gently* remind folks of these global implications and responsibilities. However, here is a systemic challenge: I am the only Mexicana-Chicana

with a Ph.D., under the age of 40, serving as an administrator at this college and within the entire community college district—this is a systemic problem! Trust that while I am vocal about what this responsibility entails, I also have to remind folks of who I am and the wealth of experiences that informs my empirical standpoint. But this is exhausting; too exhausting not to document the following:

**Scenario 1:** Shared Governance sub-sub-subcommittee meeting on Student Equity. Faculty, administrators, classified and support staff, and students present.

*Dra. M:* One third of our students are not successfully completing their courses with a “C” or better.

*Male Faculty:* Yeah, that’s because they don’t enroll full-time.

*Male Administrator:* That’s part of the reason. The other is that most of those kids don’t value education.

*Dra. M:* Those are interesting statements, opinions rather. The data I present are direct output data from overall course completion rates. Your statements, on the other hand, I’m wondering what data informs your conclusions? Did you interview students? Did you analyze full-time, part-time enrollment patterns? Both of your statements are not focused on the actual data presented. What I would ask from these data, for example, are what barriers may be preventing our students from completing the courses they enrolled in? Are we scheduling courses appropriately to support completion? Do these data help us understand the pedagogy in the classroom that may prevent students from engaging and completing? Probably not, but I am asking about institutional efforts, processes and barriers we may be able to modify to address students’ needs, versus blaming students and holding deficit opinions about our students.

*Both Men:* [ignore my comment and ask for my presentation to “just go on”]

**Scenario 2:** Southern California regional meeting with institutional research and institutional effectiveness practitioners. There are about 15 colleges represented. IR/IE administrators and support staff in attendance share frustration with annual Transfer Volume (number of students transferring onto four-year institutions), and executive leadership are also requesting data to be disaggregate by race/ethnicity and gender.



*Dra. M:* Help me understand why the frustration?

*Administrator 1:* Well, if we want to know how many students are transferring, let us present that number.

*Administrator 2:* I understand why we need to disaggregate data, but what are they [executives] going to do with it.

*Dra. M:* Well, what have they done before?

*Deans:* [blank stare]

*Dra. M:* Okay, well—the truth is that the “Transfer Volume” itself does not say anything other than the total amount of students who transfer for that specific year. This variable is also contingent on how effective the four-year institution supports transfer students to enroll into their college—is there room for that conversation? But let me not digress. In terms of transfer volume, if we conceptualize the need to measure transfer while simultaneously understand how colleges supported these outcomes, we need to calculate *transfer rates*. I would recommend we control analyses by considering student aspirations. If we follow students, by aspirations and pathways, we can measure completion rates. These may begin to help us understand whether the college did its job to support students to meet their desired goals.

*Administrator 1:* That’s assuming students know what they want to do. Most of these kids don’t know what they want to do when they come here.

*Administrator 2:* It’s not that easy to control. Students change their major all the time.

*Dra. M directed to Administrator 2:* Really? Not as I’m in agreement with your comments. What I am hearing you both state is that you are not understanding the variables that need to be controlled, nor measured. A student major is “program of study.” Aspirations are what they identify as a goal to accomplish (transfer, associates, certificate, etc.) during their educational experience at the community college. Students identify this on their application—we all know where to find this data. If we know what their aspirations are, for example transfer, then we see how the college responds and supports them until they transfer.

*Dra. M directed to Administrator 1:* I agree. Many students may not know exactly what they want to accomplish here, especially if they are first-generation college students. However, if we look at empirical data, we know over half of community college students

aspire to transfer. For example, at the college I support, 60% of entering students aspire to transfer, 25% want a CTE-related certificate, and 15% are undecided. Now, if the college is fully invested and does its job well to counsel and support students, a great majority of the 15% undecided would identify as wanting to transfer. In sum, almost 75% of students aspire to transfer. Centralizing this data, you would hope the majority of college practices would align accordingly and it would identify itself as a transfer college. But it does not. We should also see a comparable output figure of students meeting the transfer opportunity. But instead we simply have a transfer volume which does not specify how long it took the students to reach transfer. So when there are students who transfer in 2 years and others in 6-7 years, we have to ask ‘why?’ What is this college doing (or not) to increase transfer volume and measure a transfer rate appropriately?

*Administrator 1:* I get what you are saying, I do. But it’s not required for us to measure that. We are expected to report on transfer volume, so we do. That’s it. Maybe you can do all that transfer work as a “special project” of some sort, but I’m not here to change processes. I’m just here to report the data required by State and my institution. No deviation from there. I’m not responsible to change the system.

*Dra. M:* Well, maybe we ought to think we may be the researchers and practitioners that can lead our college communities to have critical conversations about systemic changes? If not us, who?

While there are countless scenarios to document how other IR practitioners attempted to silence me, or simply ignore me, I embrace these moments as clear indication ‘they’re not ready for systemic and cultural changes!’ Nonetheless, these scenarios exhibit various levels of institutional complacency. Further, the unfortunate reality are prevalent deficit ideologies that continue to plague the community college sector, and by default directly blame our students for the lack of progress. These deficit ideologies and lack of critical evaluative practices are rampant. Further, the role of IR practitioners is to critically analyze, and scrutinize, how the lack of positive outcomes or stagnant progress are heavily complacent due to the lack of innovative practices and acritical data analyses. Most importantly, the role of administrators, at all ranks, should centralize how data allow us to strengthen processes to support all students, but especially Students of Color. We have a long road to ensure our practices are critical, data-

driven and process-oriented to ensure our students access adequate support to meet their educational aspirations and degrees.

### Discussion

Our *testimonios* inadvertently bring to light a gross structural inequity: the underrepresentation of Practitioners of Color within the field of institutional research. Our experiences with being the “only” one of some aspect of our identity (i.e. only woman, only Chicana, only Chicana with Ph.D., etc.) in meetings with IR colleagues, highlights not only our underrepresentation in the IR field, but also a lack of data on the diversity of the IR profession. The most recent statistic available suggests that Latinx made up only about 4% of the IR profession (Lindquist, 1999), yet Latinx students make up the majority of so many community college campuses. It is vital that Practitioners of Color be represented in the field of IR and be part of the conversations around who gets counted and how, what gets measured and why, and what stories or narratives are told about Students of Color and other marginalized student populations. We intend to encourage future generations of Chicana researchers to consider institutional research as well as academic research professions.

In terms of competencies, the literature on IR is clear: political savvy and ability to remain neutral in the eyes of multiple constituencies is prized. However, our experiences suggest that there is no such thing as neutrality, and that practitioner work done under the guise of neutrality only serves to reinforce structural inequities. Our experiences have taught us to rely on our ethnic studies backgrounds, to draw on our knowledge of intersectionality, racism, and social inequity to enrich our quantitative work. Similar to the critiques made by Hernandez, in this special issue, the *Competencies for Community College Leaders* established by the American Association of Community Colleges’ (AACC) are far from making such connections. Institutional research, as a field, ought to assess critically researchers’ background, knowledge, training and expertise to support student outcomes in higher education.

### Conclusion

We offer our *testimonios* as Chicana IR practitioners to highlight the challenges embedded within advocacy efforts to support Latinx post-secondary pathways in community colleges. Each testimonio documents the specific ways in which our own ways of knowing and

desires to advocate on behalf of Latinx students threatened the political neutrality, complacency, and colorblindness that is associated with the field of institutional research. Ultimately, we draw on our experiences as Practitioners of Color to incite a more critical examination of the ways in which, as a field, institutional research can more effectively advance equity for Latinx students, particularly in community colleges. As Chávez, Guido-DiBrito, and Mallory (2003) point out, true transformation in higher education requires radical and uncomfortable reflection on the ways in which our experiences and backgrounds shape the work that we do. There is indeed room to assess the capacities of IR professionals as they advance *data-driven advocacy* for Latinx and other Students of Color.

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**Connecting through Engagement: Latinx Student-Faculty Interaction in  
Community College**

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**Abstract**

Student engagement with faculty has received increased attention from scholars and practitioners alike. However, much of the focus has been on the engagement experiences of students enrolled at four-year institutions, often excluding the experiences of Latinx<sup>1</sup> students enrolled at two-year public institutions. The present study centers faculty, who are situated within positions of power, as institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar, 2011) and examines their formal and informal contacts with Latinx students who began higher education at community colleges. This study utilizes data from the 2004–09 Beginning Postsecondary Survey and employs descriptive analyses and blocked hierarchical regression to gain greater knowledge of the factors that impact Latinx students' frequency of interaction with institutional agents. This study highlights the need to further disaggregate Latinx ethnic subgroups. Findings show that peer, academic, and social engagement are predictors of increased interaction with institutional agents. Of particular interest is the role of institutional contexts, as results reveal unrealized potential for Hispanic-Serving Institutions in promoting opportunities for interaction among Latinx and institutional agents. Implications for creating environments that foster student-faculty relationships are explored.

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<sup>1</sup> Latinx is used in place of Latino/a. Latinx serves as a gender-neutral term that is not limited by the gender binary.

## Introduction

Interaction between faculty and Latinx college students plays a significant role on the academic success of students (Tovar, 2014), including GPA (Baker, 2013), better defined academic goals (DeFreitas & Bravo, 2012), and increased retention into the second year of college (Upcraft, Gardner, & Overman, 2004). Additionally, engagement with faculty increases Latinx students' sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997), social satisfaction (M. E. Levin & J. R. Levin, 1991), and college adjustment and self-efficacy (Santos & Reigadas, 2002). In short, interaction with faculty leads to higher cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes, and increases the retention and graduation of Latinx students.

Unfortunately, Latinx students have the lowest frequency of interaction with faculty (Beattie & Thiele, 2016; Kim, 2010), and interaction with faculty is further reduced when the type of interaction is considered. For example, Anaya and Cole (2001) found that while more than 50% of Latinx students reported interacting with faculty regarding academic matters, less than 20% reported interpersonal (informal) contact with faculty. This point is further amplified by the work of Pérez and Sáenz (2017) who found that Latinx males enrolled in selective predominantly White institutions rarely interact with faculty inside or outside the classroom. Similarly, students enrolled in community colleges have less engagement with faculty (Price & Tovar, 2014).

Community colleges enroll larger proportions of students of color than public and private 4-year institutions (Provasnik & Planty, 2008) and Latinxs, in particular, are more likely to attend a community college than any other ethnic group (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, 2016). Forty-eight percent of all Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) are community colleges with a Latinx student population of 25% or greater (Excelencia in Education, 2014). Núñez, Hurtado, and Galdeano (2015) argue that HSIs are unique environments, which can be conducive for creating supportive campus climates for Latinx students. Furthermore, faculty, as institutional agents who hold positions of power within the organizational structure (Stanton-Salazar, 2011), can play a key role in fostering supportive environments. Given the importance of Latinx student engagement with faculty, and low engagement rates, especially at community colleges, the purpose of this study is to examine the factors that influence Latinx community college students' frequency of interaction with faculty both academically and informally. Scholars continue to highlight that Latinx students are not a

homogenous group and demonstrate that postsecondary experiences vary across Latinx ethnic subgroups (Arellano, 2011); therefore, we heed this call to disaggregate quantitative data with the study's first research question: To what extent does the frequency of interaction with institutional agents vary across racial and Latinx ethnic subgroups? The study's second research question examines the predictors of interaction: To what extent do demographic, precollege and undergraduate experiences, and key institutional environments (i.e., HSI institutions), influence the frequency of interaction with institutional agents for Latinx community college students?

### **Conceptualizing Faculty as Institutional Agents**

This study is guided by Stanton-Salazar's (2011) conceptualization of institutional agents. Institutions of higher education have historically been designed to support the success of White, upper middle class students (Gusa, 2010), often excluding the knowledge and experiences of Latinx students. Students of color, in addition to navigating postsecondary pathways, must negotiate an educational setting where their values, cultural backgrounds, and experiences are not the center of the institutional context (Gusa, 2010). Hence, Latinx students must utilize other lifelines to succeed in their educational journey. These lifelines, as Stanton-Salazar (2011) describes them, are institutional agents. Institutional agents, as representatives of the institution, occupy positions of power in which they can utilize their social capital, knowledge of the educational system, and access to resources to aid students in navigating the institution. Faculty members, "occupy relatively high positions in the multiple dimensional stratification system, and ... are well positioned to provide key forms of social and institutional support" (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, p. 15). In the context of community colleges, institutional agents are faculty with knowledge that provides "a whole spectrum of *social and institutional support* that contributes to [the students'] social development and academic performance" (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, p. 8). Additionally, institutional agents provide guidance, support, and advocacy on behalf of students, thus removing institutional barriers impeding the success of students (Bensimon & Dowd, 2009).

### **Interaction with Institutional Agents**

Formal and academic interactions outside of the classroom strengthen students' connections with faculty and informal or social contacts with faculty may foster deeper mentoring relationships (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). Students' informal interactions with faculty lead students to "feel valued and important" (Cox & Orehovec, 2007, p. 355). Mentoring relationships also facilitate students' personal and social adjustment to college by providing emotional support and access to resources (Santos & Reigadas, 2002). The more access to resources and information, the more likely students successfully navigate postsecondary education. Beyond gaining a sense of belonging in the educational system, students in mentoring relationships are more likely to have higher grade point averages and increased chances of persistence than peers who are not engaged in these types of relationships (Kincey, 2007). When students feel validated, they are more likely to persist in their educational studies (Barnett, 2011). Across the board, research demonstrates that deeper levels of engagement with faculty increases students' overall academic, career, and personal development (Kim, 2010; Tovar, 2014); thus, it is important to understand what factors promote or limit student-faculty interactions outside of classroom.

### **Interaction with Institutional Agents across Groups**

Previous literature has highlighted that not all types of students have the same levels of engagement with institutional agents. Research findings across race and gender are mixed. Kim and Lundberg (2016) found that that students of color enrolled at four-year institutions are less likely to interact with their faculty members in comparison to their White peers. Other studies focusing on the experiences of community college students have produced contradictory findings. For example, Alford (2012) found that Latinx students have higher rates of interaction with faculty and Kim (2010) produced similar findings related to African American students. The literature examining student interaction with faculty has also revealed differences across gender. Kim and Lundberg (2016) found that male students had greater levels of faculty interactions than female students, which in turn, resulted in larger gains in cognitive skills. Other research found that female students interact with faculty at higher frequencies in comparison to male students, yet the effects of such interaction are greater for male students (Sax, Bryant, & Harper, 2005).

Across socioeconomic lines, low-income students approach engagement cautiously, often working in isolation rather than consulting with faculty (Arzy, Davies, & Harbour, 2006). Similarly, first-generation college students tend to have less engagement with faculty (Lundberg, Schreiner, Hovaguimian, & Slavin Miller, 2007; Soria & Stebleton, 2012). Overall, there are large proportions of Latinx students who are low income and the first in their family to attend college (Hurtado, Santos, Sáenz, & Cabrera, 2008); yet, there are also differences across Latinx ethnic sub-groups. Chicanx college students, on average, have lower incomes and are more likely to be first-generation college students in comparison to Puerto Rican and other Latinx students (Arellano, 2011).

### **Factors Impacting Interaction with Institutional Agents**

For community college students, there are numerous factors outside the campus setting which can limit their interaction with institutional agents. For instance, the more students work off-campus, the less likely they are to be engaged with faculty (Pike, Kuh, & Massa-McKinley, 2008). Further, non-traditional students, defined as students older than 25 years of age with delayed or interrupted enrollment into the higher education pipeline, have different enrollment patterns than traditional students, and tend to interact with faculty primarily in the classroom (Wyatt, 2011). Additionally, students who enroll full-time tend to have higher engagement patterns than students who attend higher education institutions part-time (B. Jacoby, 2014). Finally, social integration—when students feel connected to the campus community, including other students—is a key component in supporting student retention and completion while promoting student engagement with institutional agents at a community college (Barnett, 2011; D’Amico, Dika, Elling, Algozzine, & Ginn, 2014).

### **Institutional Agents and the Community College Context**

It is important to understand the community college context as it presents unique challenges and opportunities. Over the last 20 years, faculty composition at the community college level has shifted from tenure track to predominantly non-tenure track and part-time faculty (Kezar, 2012). Non-tenure track and part-time faculty make up approximately 66% of all community college faculty (Green, 2007). While qualitative data shows that community college faculty are committed to their students and teaching (J. S. Levin, Cox, Cerven, & Haberler,

2010; Terosky & Gonzales, 2016), the institution itself lacks a culture of support that facilitates or encourages faculty-student interaction. One-year or semester-to-semester contracts, for example, force many non-tenure track faculty to constantly be on the job hunt limiting their time for student contact and teaching preparation (Green, 2007; Kezar, 2012). Research shows that multiple structural barriers cause part-time faculty to have fewer contact hours with students (Green, 2007; B. Jacoby, 2014; Jolley, Cross, & Bryant, 2014; Kezar, 2012). Over 50% of adjunct faculty, for instance, teach two or more sections each semester (Green, 2007) and teach at multiple community college campuses (Kezar, 2012). Additionally, non-tenure track faculty are asked to take on additional responsibilities without compensation (Kezar, 2012). Limited access to physical (i.e. office space) and cognitive/non-cognitive (i.e. feeling of connectedness to the institution) spaces and resources also impacts adjunct faculty's level of interaction with students (D. Jacoby, 2006; Kezar, 2012). Considering the complicated structural barriers within the two-year sector, there is a need for more research to better understand the opportunities for improving student-faculty engagement within community colleges.

### **Methodology**

This study utilizes data from the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS). BPS is a national probability sample with over 16,000 respondents, representative of about 4 million students who began postsecondary education in the 2003-2004 academic year. The BPS followed students for six years with students surveyed during their first year of enrollment in 2003-2004, their third year of enrollment, and finally, in 2009. The present study utilized data from the first and third years of the survey administration. The BPS collects data on student demographic characteristics, enrollment patterns, persistence and completion, as well as in-school experiences, such as students' engagement with faculty (Cominole, Wheelless, Dudley, Franklin, & Wine, 2007). The analytical sample is limited to degree seeking Latinx students who first enrolled at a two-year public college in 2003-2004, which includes approximately 710 students (rounded per NCES reporting guidelines). Of the Latinx community college students included in the sample, 44% identified as Mexican American or Chicanx, 35% as Puerto Rican, and 21% as Other Latinx, which includes Cuban, Mixed Latinx heritage and Other Latinx heritage students.

## Variables and Coding

Table I provides a complete description of variables and coding procedures utilized in this study.

Table I

### *Variables and Coding*

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#### *Dependent Variable*

Interaction with Institutional Agents

Range: min: 0, max: 5

Composite variable created from two variables: 1) Faculty informal meeting and 2) Talk outside of class with faculty (0: never; 2: often)

#### *Demographics*

Mexican American or Chicano

0: no, 1: yes (Cuban/Puerto Rican/Mixed Latinx/Other Latinx reference group)

Gender: Female

0: male, 1: female

#### *Precollege Factors*

Mother's highest education level

1: less than HS; 10: Doctorate/equivalent

Income

Percent range: min: 0, max: 1

#### *Undergraduate Experiences*

2004: Worked full-time (exclude work-study)

0: no, 1: yes

Delayed enrollment

0: no, 1: yes

Degree aspirations

1: no degree; 5: master's degree or higher

Enrolled full-time 2003-04

0: no, 1: yes

Declared a major 2003-04

0: no 1: yes

College GPA 2003-04

Range: min: 0, max: 400

Frequency: Participation in study groups

Range: min: 0, max: 3

Social integration index

Range: min: 0, max: 167

Composite variable derived from attended fine arts activities, participated in sports, participated in school clubs

#### *Institutional Context*

Hispanic Serving Institution 2003-04

0: no, 1: yes

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The dependent variable for this study is a composite variable of two factors: “talk with faculty outside of class” and “informal meeting with faculty.” These variables ask students to identify the frequency in which students talked to faculty about academic matters, outside class time (including email), and the frequency in which they had informal or social contacts with faculty members outside of the classroom and the office. For each variable, students were given the option to select the frequency of interaction (never= 0, sometimes= 1, often= 2). These measures were collected in both 2004 and 2006; therefore, a mean score was calculated from the values for each measure from both time points and then used to create a composite variable measuring frequency of interaction with institutional agents ( $M= 1.50$ ,  $SD= 1.06$ ).

The independent variables are organized in four categories—demographics, precollege factors, undergraduate experiences, and institutional context.

**Demographics.** The first block of independent variables focused on demographic characteristics. Only students who self-identified as Latinx (the term “Hispanic” was used in the survey) were included in the sample. Students were also asked to identify the type of Latinx origin. The survey included five options—1) Cuban descent, 2) Mexican or Chicano descent, 3) Puerto Rican, 4) Other Hispanic origin, 5) Mixed Hispanic origin (we use Latinx in place of “Hispanic” and Chicanx in place of “Chicano”). Also, included in the survey was a binary measure of gender, which asked students to self-identify as male or female. Fifty-nine percent of students identified as female.

**Precollege factors.** The category of precollege factors included: mother’s highest education as proxy for precollege socioeconomic status, which was measured on a 1 to 7 scale ranging from less than high school to doctoral degree or equivalent ( $M= 2.82$ ,  $SD= 2.13$ ). The income measure identified income in terms of a percentage of the 2003 U.S. Poverty Income Guidelines, with 49.5% of the sample falling at or below 185% of the national poverty guidelines.

**Undergraduate experiences.** The third block of independent variables focused on the undergraduate experiences of students, and included whether a student delayed enrollment (40.8%); worked full-time, excluding work-study (33.2%); declared a major during their first year of enrollment (63.3%); or enrolled full-time during 2003-2004 (50.5%). Degree aspirations were measured on a 1-5 scale ranging from no degree to master’s degree or above ( $M= 0.76$ ,  $SD= 0.79$ ) and first year college GPA ranged from 0 to 400 ( $M= 275.01$ ,  $SD= 83.87$ ). Measures of social integration and the frequency of participation in study groups were collected in 2004



and in 2006. A mean score was calculated from the values for each measure from both time points and then used to create variables measuring participation in study groups (range: 0 to 3) and composite variable of social integration (range: 0 to 167). Overall, students in the sample had a low frequency of participating in study groups ( $M = 0.76$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ) and low levels of social integration ( $M = 26.16$ ,  $SD = 32.25$ ). Social integration is a NCES derived variable from the following measures: attended fine arts activities, participated in sports, and participated in school clubs during the first year of enrollment.

**Institutional context.** The final block focused on an important institutional context for Latinx students in postsecondary education: enrollment in a higher education institution designated as a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI). Higher education institutions are federally designated as an HSI when they enroll a Latinx student population of 25% or greater of the total student body (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). In the sample, an HSI was the first institution of attendance for 43% of students.

## Data Analysis

The present study utilized descriptive statistics to understand the frequency of interaction with institutional agents across racial and Latinx ethnic subgroups and blocked hierarchical ordinary least squares (OLS) multiple regression analysis to gain greater knowledge of the factors influencing Latinx students' engagement with institutional agents. A key advantage in utilizing OLS regression analysis is the ability for the researcher to control for potential biases, thus clarifying the role of each of the independent variables on the dependent variables (Astin & Antonio, 2012). Blocked regression analysis was run in four blocks to assess the influence of student demographics, precollege factors, undergraduate experiences, and institutional contexts as previously described. This step allowed us to examine how each block of variables contributed uniquely to the variance in the outcome measure and identify the amount of explained variance in the outcome variables after controlling for each block. By controlling for independent variables in blocks, we identify and examine the influence of these key experiences and environments. For example, by modeling the variable of interest in the final block of the regression, the contribution of all other independent measures to the variance in the outcome measure was controlled. This allowed us to focus on unique elements in our model like the impact of enrolling in an HSI. To preserve the greatest number of respondents in

the sample, we employed the expectation-maximization (EM) algorithm, as a more accurate estimation method for replacing missing values (Krishnan & McLachlan, 1997), listwise deletion removed cases with missing data for the outcome variable, key demographic characteristics, dichotomous variables, and institutional variables.

### **Study Limitations**

Before we present our findings, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the study. First, due to the nature of quantitative data, we focused on the frequency and not the quality of interaction between institutional agents and students. While frequent interaction between institutional agents and students is an important component of successful student outcomes (M.E. Levin & J.R. Levin, 1991), students' perceived quality of interaction is far more meaningful in supporting student success (Cole, 2010; Lundberg et al., 2007). Another limitation of the study is the usage of the BPS. While the BPS provides variables to assess student engagement with institutional agents, the variables available may not be representative of the types of interactions students want, or have with faculty, especially at two-year public institutions. Further, survey respondents may interpret "interactions with faculty out of the classroom" differently depending on who is considered faculty within their college. Within colleges where counselors are also faculty, students may have considered their non-classroom interactions with primarily non-instructional staff as interactions with faculty.

Other research has highlighted the differential engagement patterns of non-traditional, first-generation, commuter students, noting that the aforementioned student population interacts seldom with faculty outside of class, and the majority of interaction happens within the classroom setting (Pike et al., 2008; Wyatt, 2011). Hence, further research should also consider interactions within the classroom as these may provide a more complete picture of engagement within the two-year sector. Lastly, limited sample sizes for Latinx students attending community colleges and two-year HSIs, did not allow for further disaggregation of Latinx ethnic subgroups or separate regression analyses comparing across students attending HSIs and non-HSIs; therefore, these may be important areas to explore in future research.

## Findings

### Descriptive Analyses

Table 2 provides the results of cross-tabulations, which were employed to gain a nuanced understanding of students' interactions with institutional agents across race/ethnicity and Latinx ethnic subgroups. Overall, larger proportions of students had some type of interaction (sometimes or often) with faculty academically outside of class in comparison to informal (non-academic) interactions. When compared to other students of color, Latinx students had the lowest rates of academic interaction outside of class with 65.5% meeting sometimes or often in comparison to 66.8% and 72.3% for Asian American and African American students respectively. Disaggregating across Latinx ethnic subgroups, Mexican American/Chicanx students had lower rates of academic interaction outside of class with 64.6% meeting sometimes or often in comparison to 66.2% and 71.6% for Puerto Rican and Other Latinx students respectively. Similarly, when examining informal meetings, Latinx students had the lowest rates of informal interaction with 26.9% meeting sometimes or often in comparison to 33.1% and 40.5% for Asian American and African American students respectively. There were only slight differences in informal interaction when disaggregating by Latinx subgroups, with 26.9%, 27.2%, and 27.4% for Mexican American/Chicanx, Puerto Rican, and Other Latinx students respectively.

Table 2

*Interaction with Institutional Agents by Race/Ethnicity & Latinx Ethnic Subgroups*

	Faculty academic meeting outside class % sometimes/often	Faculty informal meeting outside class % sometimes/often
Asian American	72.3	40.5
African American	66.8	33.1
Latinx	65.5	26.9
Puerto Rican	71.6	27.2
Other Latinx	66.2	27.4
Mexican American/Chicanx	64.6	26.9

**Regression Analyses**

Table 3 presents the unstandardized ( $b$ ) and standardized ( $\beta$ ) regression coefficients and r-square statistics for each regression model. The first regression model focused on Latinx demographic characteristics, including race/ethnicity and gender. Considering the descriptive findings indicating Mexican American/Chicanx students had the lowest rates of interaction with faculty in comparison to other Latinx ethnic subgroups, we included this variable in the regression, which allowed us to explore whether or not these differences would remain significant after controlling for other demographic characteristics and precollege and undergraduate experiences. Within this first model, identification as Mexican American/Chicanx was a statistically significant negative predictor of engagement with institutional agents. Mexican American/Chicanx students have a 0.15 lower frequency of interaction with institutional agents in comparison to Latinx students who do not identify as Mexican American/Chicanx, specifically Cuban, Puerto Rican, Mixed Latinx or Other Latinx students.

Model 2 added variables related to students' socioeconomic status, namely mother's education level and income. After controlling for students' socioeconomic status, students' identification as Mexican American/Chicanx is no longer significant. Instead, mother's education was a significant positive predictor with a 0.07 higher frequency of interaction with institutional agents for every additional level of education attained.

Model 3 introduces undergraduate experiences to the regression model. After controlling for demographics, precollege factors, and undergraduate experiences, there are four statistically significant predictors of engagement: Mother's education, enrolling full-time, participating in study groups, and social integration. For every step increase (i.e. from bachelor's degree to master's degree) in maternal education, a 0.04 higher frequency in interaction with institutional agents is expected. Enrolling full-time during the first year of enrollment is a positive predictor of engagement with institutional agents, as students who enroll full time during their first year of post-secondary education have a 0.17 higher frequency of engagement than students who enroll less than full-time. Students who participate more often in study groups have a 0.40-point increase in the frequency of interaction with institutional agents for every one-unit increase in participation. Social integration, a variable derived from students' attendance in fine arts activities, participate in sports, and social clubs, is also a strong positive predictor of engagement. Students who had higher frequencies of participating in these social activities have a 0.01 increase in interaction with institutional agents for every one-unit increase in social integration.

Table 3

Regression Analysis Predicting Frequency of Interaction with Institutional Agents among Latinx Community College Students (n=710, rounded per NCES reporting guidelines)

	Model 1 ( $r^2=.005$ )				Model 2 ( $r^2=.023$ )				Model 3 ( $r^2=.243$ )				Model 4 ( $r^2=.249$ )			
	b	S.E.	$\beta$	Sig.	b	S.E.	$\beta$	Sig.	b	S.E.	$\beta$	Sig.	b	S.E.	$\beta$	Sig.
(Constant)	1.64	0.14			1.43	0.16			0.44	0.30			0.48	0.30		
<i>Demographics</i>																
Mexican American or Chicano	-0.15	0.08	-0.07	***	-0.10	0.08	-0.05		-0.06	0.07	-0.03		-0.01	0.08	0.00	
Female	-0.04	0.08	-0.02		-0.02	0.08	-0.01		-0.02	0.07	-0.01		-0.02	0.07	-0.01	
<i>Precollege Factors</i>																
Mother's education					0.07	0.02	0.14	**	0.04	0.02	0.08	*	0.03	0.02	0.07	*
Income					-0.08	0.08	-0.04		-0.01	0.07	0.00		-0.02	0.07	-0.01	
<i>Undergraduate Experiences</i>																
2004: Full-time work									-0.08	0.08	-0.04		-0.09	0.08	-0.04	
Delayed enrollment									-0.05	0.08	-0.03		-0.05	0.08	-0.02	
Degree Aspirations									0.06	0.05	0.04		0.06	0.05	0.05	
Enrolled full-time 2003-04									0.17	0.08	0.08	*	0.16	0.08	0.08	*
Declared major 2003-04									0.12	0.07	0.06		0.13	0.07	0.06	
GPA 2003-04									0.00	0.00	0.00		0.00	0.00	0.00	

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Frequency: Study groups 2004/2006	0.40	0.05	0.30	***	0.41	0.05	0.31	***
Social Integration 2004/2006	0.01	0.00	0.25	***	0.01	0.00	0.26	***
<i>Institutional Context</i>								
Hispanic-Serving Institution 2003					-0.16	0.08	-0.08	*

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Note. \*  $p < 0.05$  \*\*  $p < 0.01$  \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

The fourth and final model accounts for Latinx students' enrollment in Hispanic-Serving Institutions. In the final model, all the predictors in Model 3 remained statistically significant with participation in study groups being the strongest predictor of engagement ( $\beta = 0.31$ ) followed by social integration ( $\beta = 0.26$ ). Additionally, enrollment in a HSI is a negative predictor of engagement with institutional agents; specifically, Latinx students who enroll in a HSI have a 0.16 lower frequency of engagement with institutional agents in comparison to their Latinx peers who are not enrolled at an HSI.

Table 3 also includes the r-square statistic for each regression model, which represents the percentage of variance in Latinx frequency of interaction with institutional agents accounted for by each block of variables. Model 3, focused on undergraduate experiences, ( $r^2 = 0.243$ ) appears to have the most impact on Latinx engagement with institutional agents and represents a 0.220 increase in the explained variance over Model 2. Furthermore, the final r-squared, which takes into consideration the influence of institutional context, accounts for 24.9% of the variance of Latinx frequency of interaction with institutional agents, an increase of 0.05% from Model 3.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

This study explored formal (academic) and informal (non-academic) interactions with faculty outside of the classroom, both of which are vital in fostering success among Latinx community college students. While research suggests that students' contact with faculty out of class is minimal (Abu, Adera, Kamsani, & Ametepee, 2012), our descriptive results show that students interact more with faculty about academic matters outside of the classroom and have very little informal interactions with faculty. Students seeking support on academic matters outside of the classroom is an indicator of students' engagement and sense of belonging (Barnett, 2011; Dayton, Gonzalez-Vasquez, Martinez, & Plum, 2004; Tovar, 2014). Yet, higher frequencies of student-faculty interaction about personal and family issues is linked to persistence in community college students (Bharath, 2009); therefore, informal or social contacts are important to foster mentoring relationships between faculty and students (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). Informal engagement with faculty influences students' academic success, social satisfaction (M. E. Levin & J.R. Levin, 1991), and self-efficacy (Santos & Reigadas, 2002). Mentoring relationships facilitate students' personal and social adjustment to college by



providing emotional support and access to resources and information (Santos & Reigadas, 2002). In general, students' engagement with faculty outside of the classroom is crucial in increasing overall academic, career, and personal development (Kim, 2010; Tovar, 2014).

Prior research has noted differences in the amount interaction with faculty for Latinx students versus White students (Anaya & Cole, 2001), but has not been able to tease out the experiences of particular Latinx ethnic groups. The majority of empirical quantitative research in higher education treats Latinx students as one homogenous group (Arellano, 2011). This study, however, capitalizes on its unique capacity to explore interactions with institutional agents across Latinx subgroups. Our findings reveal that Latinx students have the lowest rates of engagement with institutional agents in comparison with all other racial groups. Further, when disaggregating across ethnic subgroups we observed lower levels of formal and informal interaction among Mexican American/Chicanx students in comparison to their Puerto Rican and other Latinx peers. The study was limited by the data available through BPS, yet advanced from recent literature by disaggregating across three Latinx subgroups; however, due to a lack of specification of ethnicity at the time of data collection and low response rates among specific groups, additional disaggregation by country of origin was limited. Future research should heed the call to further disaggregate Latinx subgroups to fully understand the nuances of a diverse Latinx population.

The initial regression model indicated ethnic subgroup differences, with lower interaction rates for Mexican American/Chicanx students in comparison to their Cuban, Puerto Rican, Mixed Latinx, and Other Latinx peers. However, these differences across subgroups were no longer significant after controlling for income and mother's education. This loss of significance may be explained by the literature demonstrating that Chicanx students have on average lower income and higher proportions of first-generation college students in comparison to Puerto Rican and other Latinx students (Arellano, 2011). Clearly parental education is an important factor, as it remained a significant predictor of engagement even after accounting for college experiences and institutional context. This finding supports prior literature that found status as a first-generation college student to be a negative predictor of engagement with faculty within the classroom (Soria & Stebleton, 2012).

Several undergraduate experiences were central factors impacting Latinx students' engagement with institutional agents. Participation in study groups was the strongest significant

predictor of greater interaction with institutional agents, suggesting that students who are more involved with their peers are more academically engaged. This finding is consistent with research indicating students who frequently discussed coursework with other students had a higher sense of belonging at the institution, including interactions with faculty (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Similarly, study groups create a sense of comfort and belonging for community college students (Deil-Amen, 2011). This is an important factor for students of color, in particular, as participation in study groups positively influences academic performance and social engagement on campus (Kincey, 2007).

Social integration, a composite variable that includes participation in clubs, sports and fine art activities, is also a significant positive predictor of student engagement with institutional agents. This composite variable is operationalized in the survey as social integration, yet it primarily measures the frequency of behaviors and does not fully capture the complicated reality of this type of engagement for historically marginalized students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997) and community college and commuter students (Deil-Amen, 2011). We conceptualize these activities as social dimensions of two-year experience that may promote engagement in information networks that informally facilitate the transfer of institutional knowledge or procedures (Karp, Hughes, & O’Gara, 2010). With fewer opportunities to build these out of classroom relationships within the two-year context, it makes sense that students who are more involved overall and in social and academic activities that engage them in these informal information networks are more likely to interact with institutional agents more frequently.

Acknowledging the unique nature of community colleges is key to understanding the conditions that promote or hinder Latinx student engagement with institutional agents. Many students within two-year contexts are low-income, non-traditional, first-generation college students who may be working full-time or have other family or personal commitments—all populations that have shown lower rates of engagement (Lundberg et al., 2007; Wyatt, 2011). In our analysis, full-time enrollment was a significant positive predictor of interaction with faculty, substantiating prior research suggesting that students who enroll full-time tend to have higher engagement patterns than students who attend part-time (B. Jacoby, 2014). Many students enroll part-time due to familial responsibilities, full-time employment, or other responsibilities. The two-year environment is one where diverse student populations spend minimal time on campus, only attending classes and consequently have less opportunities to

interact with faculty (Tovar, 2014). Thus, faculty play an important role as the primary point of contact with students and impact students' outcomes through meaningful relationships (Nakajima, Dembo, & Mossler, 2012) particularly for community college students (Kim, 2010; Tovar, 2014) and Latinx students (Barnett, 2011). Within this context, it is important to ensure that contact with faculty is meaningful, frequent, and focused on ways in which faculty can address systematic challenges for students.

Unfortunately, the community college environment is often not conducive for promoting advising and mentoring of students as an important component of faculty members' professional responsibilities (O'Meara & Braskamp, 2005) nor does it employ sustainable employment practices that promote student-faculty engagement (J. S. Levin & Hernandez, 2014). Part time faculty are a growing presence in higher education, accounting for almost half of faculty in higher education overall and more than two thirds at community colleges (J. S. Levin & Hernandez, 2014), providing nearly half of all instruction at community colleges (D. Jacoby, 2006). High proportions of part-time faculty are associated with lower levels of student engagement (Porter, 2006), as part-time faculty report interacting with students at lower frequencies than tenured and tenure-track faculty (Nakajima et al., 2012; Umbach, 2007).

The overreliance on part-time faculty, particularly at community colleges, adds another challenge to fostering student engagement between faculty and students. Part-time faculty may lack appropriate support and resources to advocate on behalf of students. Many part-time faculty teach at multiple community college campuses making it difficult to stay connected to a particular campus. Part-time faculty may not have access to office space which limits the opportunities to meet with students (Kezar, 2012). Further, lack of adequate compensation diminishes part-time faculty's motivation to engage with students (Eagan & Jaeger, 2009; Ehrenberg & Zhang, 2005). It is important for college leaders to recognize negative impacts of overreliance on part-time faculty (Ehrenberg & Zhang, 2005). To this end, community college leaders must work towards decreasing reliance on part-time faculty while fostering a campus environment which views faculty, regardless of their status, as "essential contributors to student outcomes" instead of "individuals that are unwilling to cooperate" (Levin et al., 2010, p. 54). Faculty, including part-time faculty, are professionals generally interested in supporting the critical and creative thinking of their students (Terosky & Gonzales, 2016); therefore, it is

critical to create opportunities to compensate faculty (financially and cognitively) who engage with students beyond the classroom setting.

It is imperative that community colleges identify strategies to encourage interaction for Latinx students. Arguably, HSIs are the most well positioned to foster Latinx engagement as they have greater representation of Latinx faculty and administration (Núñez et al., 2015). Access to role models and faculty of the same ethnicity can greatly impact Latinx students' motivation to succeed in college (Dayton et al., 2004). HSIs hold potential for creating supportive campus climates and increasing academic self-concept for Latinxs (Núñez et al., 2015). Unfortunately, our findings reveal that HSIs fall short of this potential as Latinx students who enroll in HSIs had lower rates of interaction with institutional agents in comparison to their peers at non-HSIs. Scholars have criticized low student outcomes of Latinx students at HSIs by using the term “Hispanic-enrolling” instead of “Hispanic-serving” suggesting access alone does not fulfill a larger mission and commitment to Latinx students (Gasman, 2008). Garcia (2017) argues that “Hispanic-serving” goes beyond the metrics of Latinx persistence and attainment, but includes providing community engagement opportunities, positive campus climate, and support programs.

Clearly an organizational shift is needed within the two-year sector to fully realize the potential of student-faculty relationships in promoting Latinx postsecondary success. The onus of accountability must move from the student to the institution, which includes supporting faculty to engage with students. Faculty members, as institutional agents, are situated organizationally in a position of power to connect historically underserved students with resources and remove institutional barriers (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). In doing so, faculty can impact not only the success of Latinx students, but also the culture of the institution. The institutional environments of community colleges and HSIs add complex nuances to be considered as we reimagine the role of faculty in these unique contexts.

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**Latino Men and their Fathers: Exploring How Community Cultural Wealth  
Influences their Community College Success**

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**Abstract**

Academic scholarship has demonstrated the importance of father engagement in fostering early educational success of their children, but little exploration in this area has focused on the role that fathers play in the college success of their Latino male sons. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the role of fathers in the educational success of Latino men attending community colleges. Using community cultural wealth as a lens for this study, the experiences of 130 Latino men at community colleges in Texas were highlighted. Results demonstrated how fathers provided support, *consejos* (advice), and encouragement to their sons. Nonetheless, fathers also expected their sons to work and contribute to the family finances. These complications influenced the way in which Latino men viewed the college-going process and interacted with their fathers.

*Keywords:* Latino men, fathers, educational success, community cultural wealth, persistence, community college

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## Introduction

The role of family has been positively linked to increased levels of academic achievement, school attendance, positive perceptions of school, college aspirations, and overall sense of well-being (Holcomb-McCoy, 2010). Studies on college persistence indicate positive family involvement can increase the likelihood of enrollment and persistence for Latina/o students (Auerbach, 2004; Bourdieu, 1986; Gándara, 1995; Tierney, 2002; Yosso, 2005). Research on Latina/o parental involvement shows “parental support and encouragement is one of the most important—if not *the most* important—indicator of students’ educational aspirations” (Fann, Olivares-Ureuta, De La Pena, & Pulido, 2011, p. 75). For Latina/os, family is instrumental in instilling values such as resilience, persistence, and hard work—values that are deeply rooted in cultural identity and passed on from generation to generation (Kiyama, 2010). In fact, for many Latina/o students, *familismo*, or a sense of family unity and connectedness, is a central component of their lives, deeply influencing their decision-making process (Ovink, 2017; Ovink, Rios-Aguilar, & Deil-Amen, 2012).

Much of the extant research devoted to Latina/o families centers on the role of mothers as chief arbiter of all educational endeavors within the family while the role of fathers, particularly at the higher education level, is rarely addressed (Moreno & Lopez, 1999; Sáenz, García-Louis, Mercédez, & Rodríguez, forthcoming; Terriquez, 2013). Understanding how Latino fathers engage in their children’s education is important given their unique influence in the home. Studies indicate fathers—of any race—who are actively involved in their children’s education tend to positively influence their academic achievement, school attendance, grades, and foster a college-going habitus (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Jeynes, 2007; Terriquez, 2013). Although scholarship focused on the specific role Latino fathers play in the educational pathways of their children is scant, Quiñones and Marquez Kiyama (2014) underscore how at the K-12 level, Latino fathers cultivate educational success as a family endeavor, critique the dominant parent-school-district dynamics, and acknowledge their critical role as fathers resisting racism and invisibility in schools. Research is still needed to understand how these elements might continue on to influence a Latino man’s college-going process.

Community colleges continue to serve as the most important entry point for Latina/o students pursuing higher education (Fry, 2011). Latina/os have made significant strides in enrollment and graduation rates, yet Latino men continue to be underrepresented within higher

education, making up just 6% of the total undergraduate population (*Excelencia in Education*, 2015). Although scholarship concerning Latino men in community colleges is growing in terms of addressing masculinities, peers, faculty, and other issues (see Rodriguez, Massey, & Sáenz, 2016; Sáenz, Bukoski, Lu, & Rodriguez, 2013; Sáenz, Mayo, Miller, & Rodriguez, 2015), fewer studies have focused on the role fathers play in the community college educational experiences of their sons. Given the transformative nature of the community college experience and meaning making that takes place during this transition, it is imperative that practitioners and scholars understand how Latino men use cultural community wealth from their fathers to navigate their community college experiences.

Using Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth framework, this study explored the influence that fathers have on the educational experiences of Latino men attending community college. Two research questions framing this study were:

- 1) How do community college Latino men perceive the influence of their fathers in their educational pursuits?
- 2) What forms of community cultural wealth passed down from their fathers do Latino males use to navigate their community college experience?

## Background

Early research on Latina/o families was largely characterized by a deficit perspective, accusing Latina/o parents of being uninvolved and unengaged (Ada, 1997; Valdes, 1996; Valencia & Black, 2002). Recent studies have refuted these claims, showing Latina/o families are involved in both academic (e.g. preparation, accountability) and nonacademic ways (e.g. *consejos*/advice, *educación*/manners/values) (Quiñones & Marquez Kiyama, 2014; Yosso, 2005; Zarate, 2007). Teaching children to have *respeto*, (respect for their parents and for others regardless of age or gender), is one of the most salient cultural values (Calzada, Fernandez, & Cortes, 2010). Demonstrating *respeto* in this case, may show the role of the father as someone who makes sacrifices, works hard, and provides an example for his son (Valdes, 1996). Latino fathers value their role as teachers or mentors and thus teach their children *respeto*; most feel they are egalitarian with high aspirations for their children (Cabrera & Bradley, 2012). Through *consejos*, or advice, from their fathers, young men are often taught about the role of men and the importance of hard work (Valdes, 1996).

Latina/o family members believe parental involvement and moral guidance shape educational experiences and behavioral expectations of their children (Zarate, 2007). Parents, in particular, play a critical role in creating a college-going culture by shaping attitudes towards school and decisions about college attendance early on in the lives of Latino males (Sánchez et al, 2010; Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Hoover-Dempsey & Sander, 1995). Delgado-Gaitan (1994) claims “involving Latino parents is an ongoing process by continuously assessing and revising the parent involvement program” (p. xii). Ultimately, this leads to engaging the entire family in the educational endeavors of the children. Latina/o parents are no longer asking themselves “whether [their children] *should* go to college...[but rather] *which* college they will attend” (Tierney, 1999, p. 83).

Families may socialize their children in gendered ways connecting *familismo* and traditional, patriarchal values (Ovink, 2017). An understanding of what it means to be a man, including proper behavior for men, may be reinforced by their families (Ovink, 2017). Historically, Latino fathers have been viewed as exhibiting *machismo* and inciting fear into their children (Mirandé, 1997). Recent studies demonstrate how Latino fathers rely greatly on *familismo* which is characterized by family unity and reciprocity manifesting itself in purposefully spending quality time with their children (Terriquez, 2013; Cabrera, Cook, McFadden, & Bradley, 2012).

Most of the aforementioned studies center around the K-12 educational experiences of Latino fathers but few highlight how they remain engaged in their children’s post-secondary educational endeavors. Within the community college context, the relationships between Latino men and their parents is emerging (see Sáenz, Bukoski, Lu, & Rodriguez, 2013; Sáenz, García-Louis, Mercédez, & Rodriguez, in press; Vasquez Urias, 2014), but none provide an in-depth examination of how Latino men see the role of their fathers in their higher education pathway. Furthermore, numerous past studies have employed deficit framing, rather than anti-deficit or value-added framing to address the educational experiences of Latino males. This study seeks to address the gap in the literature by utilizing an anti-deficit approach in order to understand the influence of fathers on their community college Latino male sons’ educational experiences through the voice of Latino males enrolled in Texan community colleges.

## Theoretical Framework

This study utilized Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth framework to explore how Latino men in community colleges see the role of their fathers in their higher education journey. Contrasting Bourdieu's' (1986) traditional theory of social capital, which has often been cited for its deficit thinking (Valdez & Lugg, 2010), Yosso's (2005) theoretical framework applies Latina/o critical race (LatCrit) theory to establish the concept of community cultural wealth where students of color have various funds of knowledge and are creators of knowledge (Valdez & Lugg, 2010). Community cultural wealth consists of six distinct forms of capital: *familial, linguistic, aspirational, social, navigational, and resistant capital*. These varied forms of capital build upon each other and are interconnected. For the purposes of this study, familial, aspirational, and resistant forms of capital were explored in depth given their noted importance.

Familial capital is strongly linked to *familismo*, which is characterized by family unity and sense of connectedness to the family unit (Ovink, 2017; Yosso, 2005). Latino parents have a strong sense of responsibility to give advice or *consejos* to their children along with the need to be actively "involved in their children's lives and provid[e] moral guidance" to their children (Zarate, 2007, p. 9). Aspirational capital is the ability to hold onto hope in the face of adversity (Yosso, 2005). These aspirations are often "developed within the social or familial context" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). As a result of their experiences, Latina/o parents play a significant role in passing on aspirational capital to their children. Resistant capital relates to the way in which Latino men may leverage their higher education experiences to produce more equitable outcomes for their communities. This form of capital, which often derives from parents and other community members, inspires students to engage in social justice. The dynamic interplay and reliance on the noted forms of capital lead to an increased sense of autonomy on campus.

## Methods

This qualitative study conducted 23 focus groups with 130 Latino men at seven Texas community colleges to understand how fathers influenced the educational experiences of Latino men as expressed by community college Latino male students. Utilizing phenomenology, this study centered on the personal and subjective experiences of the students in the study and how community college Latino male students personally understood and made sense of their experiences with their fathers. A phenomenological approach was selected in order to address

the nature of father-son relationships for Latino men in community colleges and distill individual student experiences to essential concepts or ideas. This approach allowed the researchers to understand the essence of these experiences and consider how participants made sense of these experiences (Creswell, 2013). Although traditionally associated with interviewing, scholars have recently argued for the use of the focus group method within interpretive phenomenological analysis (Palmer, Larkin, de Visser, & Fadden, 2010; Rodriguez et al., 2017; Sáenz et al., 2013; Sáenz et al., 2015).

All participants met the following criteria: (a) identified as Latino men and (b) were enrolled either part- or full-time at one of the community college research sites. In terms of demographics, students mostly came from homes where fathers had educational backgrounds of grammar school or less (34%) or had completed some or all of high school (36%) and mothers who had educational backgrounds of grammar school or less (39%) or had completed some or all of high school (39%). For the majority of participants, English was their first language and more than half of participants came from homes with total incomes less than \$40,000 per year (65%). The majority of participants had grade point averages above 3.0 (72%). More than half of participants were working part- or full-time while going to school (59%) (see Table I for more information).

Table I

*Participant Background Information*

<b>Background</b>	<b>Participant Information</b>
Father Education Level	Graduate Degree – 5% Some Graduate School – 1% College Degree – 9% Some College – 15% High School Diploma – 19% Some High School – 17% Grammar School or Less – 34%

Mother Education Level	Graduate Degree – 6% Some Graduate School – 0% College Degree – 16% Some College – 17% High School Diploma – 31% Some High School – 8% Grammar School or Less – 39%
English as First Language	Yes – 61% No – 39%
Family Income Level	Up to \$40,000K – 65% \$40,001-\$99,999 – 30% \$100,000 and Above – 3%
Grade Point Average	Below 2.5 – 14% 2.51-2.99 – 13% 3.00-3.5 – 34% 3.51-4.0 – 38%
Work Status	Full-time – 13% Part-time – 46% Unemployed – 40%

The study utilized existing professional relationships with research site administrators to recruit participants via institutional listservs. Led by research team members, focus groups utilized a protocol to center the conversation around how Latino males perceived the role of their fathers in their higher education pathway. Each group included 4-8 participants, lasted around one hour, and was digitally recorded and later transcribed by the research team. The researchers then identified significant statements which highlighted individual experiences of the phenomenon. Once the significant statements were identified, the researchers created a list of these experiences, taking care to assign equal worth to all statements. From there, significant statements were then grouped into larger “meaning units” or themes (Creswell, 2013, p. 193). The meaning units centered around Latino male’s perceptions of their father’s involvement in

their higher education pathway. This process allowed the researchers to identify the meaningful experiences of the research participants and discover emerging themes within the data set.

### **Trustworthiness and Research Positionalities**

To ensure trustworthiness of the study, team members reviewed transcripts, exchanged ideas on coding and analysis, and engaged in memoing activities. Reading through the collected information allowed the researchers not only to review the collected data but also allowed the researchers to begin understanding participant experiences in more detail and begin drawing connections between the data. Each researcher wrote analytical memos throughout their research and analysis activities. Memoing allowed the researchers to capture initial perspectives on the data as well as pose possible patterns or additional questions (Saldaña, 2009).

Furthermore, each of the four research team members utilized memos to explore their positionalities as related to the study. The research team consisted of the principal investigator (PI) who identifies as a Latino man and three research team members who each identify as Latina women. Team members come from a variety of personal and professional backgrounds, including experiences in K-12, community college, and university settings. Each of the research team members also explored their varying experiences with their own fathers; these experiences varied from experiences with double-parent households and single-mother households to experiences with absent fathers. Although each member of the research team brings a slightly different perspective to the study, the team worked together to engage in multiple conversations around analyses and possible interpretations to ensure that findings were trustworthy.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

Similar to all research studies, this study has limitations. Despite their role in the educational process, other family members were not included in this study. Focusing on how Latino males view the role of their fathers in no way suggests that other family members do not play a significant role in the decision-making process or persistence towards a college degree. The scant literature on the involvement of Latino father's in their children's higher education journey is still a growing area in postsecondary educational research. Delimitations were



chosen to facilitate an in-depth understanding of how Latino males at community colleges speak about their fathers and the influence they have on their postsecondary educational goals.

This study was both delimited and limited by its focus primarily on fathers within the traditional heterosexual family structure. When asked about their fathers, the men within this study did not indicate that they had experiences beyond this traditional structure. And, while the research team encouraged an open discussion, some students may not have felt comfortable sharing these experiences. Future research should address these limitations in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between Latino men and their fathers.

### **Findings**

The role of familial, aspirational, and resistant capital was evident as Latino men shared stories of how their fathers influenced their college choices, provided support and motivation as they navigated the community college environment. Strong familial ties and *consejos* led the Latino males in this study to enroll in college and ignited their passion to persist. Fathers were identified as role models and enthusiastic motivators who encouraged Latino males to consider future career possibilities. Fathers encouraged students' college-going aspirations and inspired them to persist towards degree completion mostly through conversations at home with their sons. In some cases, the role of fathers was complex, causing some students to reconsider their educational goals in light of economic and family pressures to work and be a provider. These complexities were often the result of differing perspectives from fathers and sons about the role of men, working, and the educational process.

### **Fathers' Struggles as Familial and Aspirational Capital**

Latino males expressed benefiting from their fathers' encouragement and learned from their use of familial and aspirational capital to remain focused towards degree completion. Latino fathers were also identified as being instrumental in teaching their sons drive and motivation, ultimately increasing their intrinsic drive towards academic success. Although some participants expressed encountering significant economic barriers, they described the desire to achieve because of (and in spite of) socio-economic barriers, a value learned through observing their fathers.

As a student shared, the desire to live a better life without being forced to endure the same hardships as their father, serves as an illustration of how aspirational capital was passed on from father to son.

So I went to work with him and I realized I don't know how my dad does it. 8-9 hours a day, it's hot inside; I was getting a little depressed thinking, 'Wow this is what my dad goes through and he wants me to do something better.' So that's one factor; they want me to have a better life than they did because they struggle a lot. I saw what education could do.

This quote demonstrated how the father's love for his family—also a form of *machismo*—pushed him to withstand difficult working conditions for the benefit of his entire family. This father was serendipitously motivating his son to seek a better future through a college education. Latino males understand the importance of a college education. They draw motivation from struggles, difficult working conditions, and economic barriers they witnessed their fathers undergo.

Students also recalled conversations where their fathers promoted higher education as a way to secure a better future and livelihood.

My father, he didn't graduate high school and he's working construction. And, we're... struggling financially. And he's always told me to graduate, and go to college and be somebody so you can have better than what he did.

Encouraging words such as these prompted students to pursue a college education to avoid similar hardships. This quote also highlighted the importance of *consejos* in a father-son relationship. Although the father may not understand how to navigate the college system, he recognized the pathway to a better life was through formal education. Another student witnessed the conditions under which his father worked and he gained a critical understanding of the value of an education.

...I slowly started realizing he didn't go to go college...I saw that he was still suffering, and I know me, seeing that he suffered, and I know I didn't want to be like that. I didn't want to be in the same position that he is, earning only a few

bucks to get him by every month, and then some...I honestly did not want to see myself suffering...

Aspirational capital is evident though maybe not easily implied. Fathers intentionally exposed their sons to their complicated working conditions as a way to teach them that life could be easier through an education. Often, Latino fathers in the study lacked formal education but recognized the value of a college degree. As witnesses to their fathers' financial struggles, these students reported aspiring to achieve more. Students grew up seeing the physical labor and financial strain that their fathers experienced while trying to make ends meet and working in labor-intensive jobs. Students attributed noted hardships to a lack of formal education. By witnessing their fathers' struggles, these students formed their familial and aspirational capital and found the motivation to continue their education.

### **Fathers Use *Consejos* to Inspire Resistant Capital in their Sons**

Latino males expressed feeling motivated by the stories of their fathers. Their stories were filled with barriers but they always managed to persist. Encapsulated in these stories were forms of resistant capital passed on from father to son. Not only were students motivated by the financial struggles they witnessed their fathers endure, fathers also overtly encouraged their sons to gain an education as a form of resistance. Latino males noted their fathers did not want them to endure what they had, so they provided their sons with *consejos* to ignite their desire for a better future.

My dad does construction, too. He does sheet rock and has to go to work in the cold weather or hot weather...He always had a saying, "You see that I'm struggling and I don't have a degree or anything; well you have to do better than me. Be more... upper... like, higher than the American people. Have the money to spend and buy your stuff, not like me that I have to go to work and I barely do it with the bills. Be higher than what I did, do something for your life and do more than what I did." He always told me that and I always had it in mind, that's why I came to college.

Through sharing his life experiences and *consejos* with his son, this father provided a unique form of resistant capital when he states, “do more than I did.” Though not specifically stating how to do it, the father motivated his son to do better economically rather than “have to go to work and...barely do it with the bills.” This student’s father encouraged his son to resist being forced into a lower waged job, like other Latino men might, in favor of becoming equal with “American people.” The sentiment of equality carries much significance given most participants were U.S. born but still felt like outsiders.

Similarly, another student related the *consejos* his father gave him regarding the relationship between education, work, and future careers.

Even when I was younger and used to go to work with my dad, when I could, I remember him telling me, “Well, what do you want? This is what you’re going to face every day. Do you want to be like me working for the man, or do you want to be in the office?”

By asking thought-provoking questions, this father motivated his son by showing him the type of life he could lead after earning a college degree. The father uses himself as an example in his advice displaying resistant capital, telling his son that he could lead a life “working for the man” or a better life “in the office.” The quote demonstrates this father’s perspective that most outdoor work is labor intensive and indoor jobs are less physically demanding. The father illustrates the job options he perceives as available, and asks the critical question, “what do you want?” The son takes these lessons from his father and is motivated to do better for himself. In both of these instances Latino males utilized the *consejos* and life stories of their father’s as resistant capital to propel them towards degree completion. Through candid conversations of their own personal struggles (and their own resistant capital), fathers transmit both aspirational and resistant capital to their sons. Most importantly, it highlights the selfless investment of their father’s to a successful future for their children—yet another form of *machismo* not regularly recognized.

Latino men also discussed how their fathers encouraged them to delay full-time employment and to focus on their education.

My dad always said, it doesn’t matter if, as much as a job sounds tempting right out of high school, he said, of course it’s good to have a part-time if you want to

have money to buy stuff that you want, but school is more important in the long run.

Fathers encouraged their sons to postpone immediate gratification and to focus on the long-term rewards by earning a college degree. Fathers contributed to the college-going process because they emphasized the importance of a college degree in their sons' future career plans. Regardless of their personal educational experiences, fathers promoted college enrollment and encouraged Latino men to earn their college degrees. Once again fathers are passing on aspirational and navigational capital to their sons. Understanding the importance of patience, planning, and the value of education allows Latino fathers to gain an appropriate understanding of how important a college degree is for a successful future.

### **Complications with Familial Capital of Fathers**

Although fathers expressed a need for their sons to attend college and built aspirational and resistant capital within their sons, fathers sometimes set up conflicting expectations concerning educational decisions, professional work, and financial responsibility. While Latino men felt that their fathers valued education, they also expressed that their fathers held a more traditional perspective of Latino male work responsibilities (Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Latino men described conflicting messages from their fathers regarding educational decisions and the expectation to work. One student noted:

My father he works every day and everyday he sees me going to college he wants me to finish college but at the same time he wants me to work. He wants me to do both. And sometimes I have discussions with him because of that.

Fathers wanted their sons to enroll and graduate from college, but they also wanted them to contribute financially. This shows a unique interdependence between Latino fathers and their sons; the fathers need the sons to help contribute to the family finances and the sons need their fathers to serve as strong role models and counselors. Because fathers often lacked an understanding of the time and effort needed to be successful in college, many fathers expected their sons to balance their academic responsibilities and their familial obligations to work and contribute to the household.

Latino men felt as though their fathers shamed them for enrolling in community college while not having a full-time job. Rather than think about the future gains that his son would experience by obtaining an education, fathers were concerned with present costs and their sons' lack of work experience. One student related:

My father on the other hand, when I first started, as soon as I started college, he automatically thought about, "That's going to cost money and you're not going to work full-time anymore..." He was pretty negative about it; he always kept telling me, "By the time I was six, I was already working 10 hours a day and you just finished high school and you still haven't gotten a full-time job."

This man's relationship with his father was strained as a result of his enrollment in community college. His father's extensive experience in the workforce contrasted to his decision to forgo his previous full-time employment in order to focus on his educational journey.

Fathers encouraged their sons to begin work, using their own experiences as the benchmark for their sons' lives. Latino men described how their fathers insisted that they work, not only to earn money or gain experience, but also because, as a man, working was expected. One student remarked, "My father, 'Oh, I don't know m'ijo. I work, and that's what I do, and that's what you need to do, too. You need money. You have to work.'" Another student remarked that his father has "always been a worker and that's why he wanted me to just go work, work, and work; just make money." For these Latino men, their fathers drew a clear connection between established norms and the need of men to work in order to gain financial security. Because these fathers had worked immediately, without a college experience, they believed their sons should, too. For these reasons, the familial, aspirational, and resistant capital that fathers nurture through their presence in their sons' lives becomes complicated when confronted with the actual process of earning a degree.

### **Summary of Findings**

As findings demonstrated, Latino men were influenced by their fathers' struggles and utilized those challenges as familial and aspirational capital for success. Furthermore, fathers instilled a sense of resistance within their sons through the use of *consejos*, sharing their desire to see their sons succeed despite their economical or educational backgrounds. In contrast,

Latino men also experienced complications with the familial capital of their fathers as a result of encouragement to attend college but to also work. The tension of the conflicting expectations of attending college and also contributing to the family finances often impacts Latino males' persistence in school (Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Familial, aspirational, and resistant capital was evident through varied forms of motivation for achievement. Fathers also showed support for their sons through their providing them with advice and encouraging resistance. As fathers showed high educational expectations for their sons, Latino men then aspired to achieve. Despite the conflicts between financial and work expectations that some students experienced, Latino men still felt their fathers supported their educational endeavors and motivated them towards success.

### **Discussion & Implications**

Study findings bring to light the role community cultural wealth has as Latino men shared how their father's role of providing familial, aspirational and navigational capital along the educational pipeline helped them succeed (Yosso, 2005). This study demonstrated how fathers served as strong sources of support throughout the college or university experiences of their sons. These experiences connect *familismo* to familial capital by reinforcing how fathers serve as sources of strength and support for their sons throughout their lives. In fact, the *consejos* (advice) from fathers play a key role in setting expectations and establishing aspirational capital for Latino males. Thus, the significance of applying certain aspects from the framework of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) in a plan of action for Latino student success is shown. This study also affirms that Latino male students in postsecondary education are more likely to persist in their postsecondary pursuits "because" of their family and neighborhood support than "despite" them (Tierney, 1999, p. 86).

This study also revealed the more complicated nature of father-son relationships and the building of community cultural wealth. The demographics of the participants within this study may inform the way in which fathers and sons view educational opportunities and transmit forms of capital. For instance, many of the participants had fathers (and mothers) who possessed lower educational levels, came from low income households, and worked either part- or full-time while completing classes. Because most of their fathers did not attend college and held blue collar jobs, they may not understand how to best support their sons educational endeavors. Nonetheless, participants acknowledged the various forms of support given to them

by their fathers. The various forms of cultural capital these fathers utilized may require their sons to translate it as relevant to the college context as aspirational capital (maintaining dreams of success) or resistant capital (opposing inequities seen). Working part- or full-time while attending college may be an attempt by these men not only to balance finances or seek opportunities but as a way to draw on forms of capital from their fathers regarding finances. This challenges the assumptions that some might have about the social inequities faced by Latinos in community colleges and demonstrate that Latino men and their fathers are uniquely positioned for success. It is through this motivation and their success that students validate the sacrifices that their fathers made.

Although participants felt as though their fathers provided aspirational and resistant capital for them during their college journeys, these Latino men also articulated how their fathers pressured them to remain tied to traditional views of Latino men as hard-working providers. These pressures may be more pronounced within the community college setting as Latino men are often in close proximity to their families while attending college and may often work in order to make college attendance affordable. In addition, community college students are often more likely to come from lower socio-economic, immigrant, or first-generation backgrounds. In these instances, concepts of hard work and providing may need to be reframed in order to show how Latino men might take their fathers' concepts and translate them to their new educational contexts. Through the incorporation of findings from this study and extant literature highlighting the value Latina/os place on family, culture, and community, this study advances an asset based understanding of how Latino father's support their son's educational journeys through forms not traditionally acknowledged.

The majority of Latino men in this study were high-achieving and early in their community college and higher education journeys. This may indicate that although the role of fathers and various forms of capital may be complicated, Latino men are finding a way to balance and channel that cultural community college wealth early in their academic careers. Although this study does not directly address how this might change over time, or during the transfer process, one might see that Latino men continue to refine the way in which they enact these various forms of capital. In addition, one might also see that Latino fathers, who, over time may be engaged with the college-going processes of their sons or other children, may find new and creative ways of conveying cultural community wealth to their children.



## **Implications for Policy and Practice**

In terms of policy and practice, our findings suggest several implications for the nature of Latino and Latino male-specific programming and student development at community colleges. Community colleges should recognize the importance of recognizing the role of family as an asset for Latino male enrollment and persistence in college. In particular, the integral role of Latino fathers in the overall academic success of Latino males cannot be denied. Our findings revealed that fathers play an important and perhaps decisive role in their Latino male student's college going decisions and expectations for success. Fathers, in particular, provide a network of support and encouragement that provides a strong foundation for Latino males in their pursuit of postsecondary degrees.

Community colleges should also explore how they approach Latino male student development, especially in the early years of college, and implement various forms activities to build different types of capital and promote cultural community wealth. For all students, but especially Latino males, having students identify and acknowledge various sources of capital could allow students to understand the sources of capital that they possess and how to maximize those sources. Institutions might integrate these exercises in first-year experience or introductory courses in order to maximize the understanding first-time in college students have about their cultural community wealth. These exercises could be introduced in the form of writing assignments, group activities, or discussion points, depending on class size, type, and instructor expertise.

Onus is on the community college to ensure that Latino men are successful. Our study demonstrates that fathers are active in their sons' education and provide cultural community wealth in their own ways. While parental engagement is often seen in at the university level, community colleges often fail to fully engage parents in the college-going process. As such, institutions can engage fathers in dialogue and also provide family members with information on how to continue to talk to their student as challenging situations arise during their college years, such as academic progress, social and economic dilemmas, and health and wellness issues. Keeping the role of the Latino family, particularly the role of Latino father, in mind can positively impact success. Community cultural wealth offers a way to explain key cultural values that can help institutions understand what the Latino community values, and thus provide

programming that is properly suited. Encouraging a college-going culture and involving Latino families in the education of their children may eliminate some of the barriers Latino males face while in the college pipeline.

Community colleges should consider implementing meaningful experiences for Latino men and their fathers like those done for young college bound Latinas and their mothers. Programs like *Con Mi Madre* in Central Texas, which serves college-bound Latinas and their mothers in multiple activities around becoming college-ready, could serve as a model for community colleges interested in serving Latino men. Before Latino males even get to college, institutions should seek to engage Latino fathers in the college-going culture through college-readiness discussions, college visits, etc. Programs such as Fathers Active in Communities and Education (F.A.C.E) in South Texas seek to build communities of fathers and create systemic change at the campus, district, and interdistrict levels. As a result of its GEAR UP STAR Partnership, this program has offered college tours aimed at fathers and their sons and a model for father and son leadership teams at the secondary level. Programs such as this one, could allow fathers of Latino males to actively participate in the college-going culture and educational decision-making process, rather than passively participating in activities in which they have little to no input. Implementing programs which actively involve fathers could also mitigate the level of fear Latino male fathers may have about the unfamiliar spaces and new experiences that their sons will encounter while in college. Group activities and/or discussions related to what college is like and what they need to do to prepare not only allow students to create that shared safe space for discussion, but also have the benefit of connecting Latino men to other students and fathers who may have similar experiences and backgrounds. These activities might enhance cultural community wealth and enable Latino male students and their peers to better understand how their experiences can benefit their future.

Institutions may operationalize these ideas during outreach activities with the Latina/o community as well as during pre-college activities with parents and prospective students. Outreach events that particularly focus on the Latina/o community can provide opportunities for targeted events or messaging to fathers and their sons, while pre-college activities may be an opportunity for colleges and universities to address underlying fears and misconceptions that fathers have about their sons and the college experience. Our study reveals an opportunity for colleges to enhance the messaging geared toward Latina/o families, and, more specifically to

fathers, who need to understand the type of work that their sons are doing in college and what returns these young men can expect for their efforts. Fathers, especially those of first-generation college students, may be unfamiliar with college workload expectations, so providing context about their son's experience or future experiences may prove helpful. Making the connection to a return on their investment of a college degree may also be helpful to first-generation Latino men engaging with their fathers about college enrollment or financial responsibility. Administrators should seek to generate greater levels of participation for fathers of Latino men by making these spaces of interaction more inviting to men and at flexible times to accommodate working schedules. By having fathers present on the outset, Latino males can share learning about the educational experience with their fathers and build an understanding of the expectations of college.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Future research should seek to include the perspectives of the fathers of college-going Latino males in order to gain a much richer understanding of the capital these fathers bring to their sons. Understanding the educational experiences of Latino males from multiple perspectives would add a unique perspective to the work that has been completed thus forth. In addition, future research studies should investigate how the institutional context affects the environment in which these father-son interactions take place. For example, researchers may want to explore how father-son interactions differ for Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs), and Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) or how rural, urban, and suburban contexts may influence these experiences. Finally, future studies may also want to address these father-son relationships under a variety of different lenses, especially those around critical race theory (CRT) and Latino critical studies (LatCrit). Understanding these relationships in multiple ways may further enhance the way that we encourage Latino male student development and involve fathers in the process of higher education.

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## **Latina Student Mothers' *Trenzadas de Identidades* in the Community College**

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### **Abstract**

Latinx are one of the fastest growing demographic groups in the country and their growth is visible in higher education. Using focus groups with student mothers, we examine the narratives of four Latina student mothers pursuing higher education at the community college. Using Chicana Feminist Theory as our theoretical framework, we apply *trenzadas de identidades* (Godínez, 2006; Montoya, 1994) as a metaphorical and analytical tool to understand the experiences of Latina community college student mothers. The student mothers' *trenzadas de identidades* demonstrate the ways their mother, student, and professional identities intersect and influence how they experience and navigate the educational pipeline. We call upon higher education faculty and administrators to reject deficit ideologies of Latina student mothers, and we offer recommendations for creating a receptive environment for them.

*Keywords:* Chicana/Latina, student, mother, parent, motherhood, community college, education, pipeline, metaphor, *trenzadas de identidades*, braids

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## Introduction

*I just want to come to my class. I don't have time for anything even if I wanted to I really don't have time.—Anayeli*

Student mothers, like Anayeli, juggle parenting, family obligations, jobs, and school commitments, leaving little time or energy to participate in anything else. In college campuses, the parenting status of student parents is not recognized as an important part of their identities and experiences (National Center for Student Parent Programs, 2017). As a result, student parents, particularly Latina<sup>1</sup> student mothers, have received scant attention in the academic literature on the community college student experience (Oliva & Jiménez, 2017). Here, we analyze what these educational experiences look like for Chicana/Latina student mothers and what this means for the Chicanx/Latinx educational pipeline. Montoya (1994) and Godínez (2006) offer the framework of *trenzas de identidades* (multiple strands of identity) to better understand their experiences as a student, mother, and professional. To be specific, the student mothers' *trenzas de identidades* “illustrates the emotional and spatial rhythms, difficulties, and opportunities of shifting work, domestic, and familial spaces” (Matta, 2013, p.137) within and along the educational pipeline. All student mothers face challenges similar to those of other non-traditional college students; however, their challenges magnify with motherhood because they deal with society's cultural ideals, expectations, and definitions of a mother's role in higher education. As will be seen in the findings, Latina student mothers have additional territories to navigate.

Despite the increasing number of student parents at the community college, U.S. social policies provide little support to student mothers (Green, 2013). Additionally, campus climates tend to be negative toward student mothers; notably the belief that students who have kids do not belong on campus and cannot devote enough time to their student responsibilities (Duquaine-Watson, 2017). Hence, it is important to narrow our focus on Latina student mothers, a hidden population within the non-traditional student population.

This article is organized into five parts; first, we provide background on Latinas mothers in higher education and the growing number of student parents in community colleges. Second,

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<sup>1</sup>We use Chicana to refer to women of Mexican descent and Latina to refer to women of Latin American ancestry.



we introduce *trenzadas de identidades* as a metaphorical and analytical tool for understanding the experiences of Latina student mothers at the community college. We then discuss the research site and methods. Subsequently, we introduce analysis of each strand: motherhood, student, and professional. We conclude with recommendations.

### **Latina Student Mothers in Higher Education**

The number of Latinas in higher education has increased substantially over the past decades (Sapp, Marquez Kiyama, & Dache-Gerbino, 2016). However, their rate of degree attainment compared to non-Latina peers is relatively low (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). Chicana/Latina students in higher education face unique challenges and barriers in postsecondary education, including access to college admissions information (Kimura-Walsh, Yamamura, Griffin, & Allen, 2008), financial aid (Perna, 2006), citizenship status (Gonzalez, 2016), and campus climate (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Allen, 1998; Solórzano, Allen, & Carroll, 2002; Villalpando, 2003).

Explanations for college access and educational opportunities for Latinas have relied historically on gendered explanations emphasizing *marianismo*—Latinas' self-sacrificing role, underscoring women's roles inside the home (Sy & Brittan, 2008). This deficit explanation sees Latinas as incapable of succeeding as students while taking care of family. However, what is seen as a weakness is actually a strength. As Delgado Bernal (2006) found when examining the role of family in the educational experiences of Chicana college students, Chicana students draw on their "bilingualism, biculturalism, commitment to communities, and spirituality" to overcome challenges and barriers to academic achievement (p. 118). They also rely on counselors, teachers, and friends to address barriers while in college (Sapp et al., 2016).

Chicana/Latinas face stereotypes that reduce their multi-dimensional and complex identities to oversimplified binaries as "college-bound/drop-out, good/bad; sexually promiscuous/academically talented" (Sapp et al., 2016, p. 42). Student mothers must negotiate the presumed conflicts between the binaries of mother/student, good mother/good student, as well as the socially constructed narrative of the "good" versus "bad" mother (Duquaine-Watson, 2017; Lynch, 2008). Literature on student mothers focus primarily on the graduate level (Castañeda & Isgro, 2013; González, 2007; Lynch, 2008; Springer, Parker, & Leviten-Reid 2009), with little attention to community college student mothers, rendering them "unexplored

and, as such, an unacknowledged population” (Oliva & Jimenez, 2017, p. 239). Jillian Duquaine-Watson’s (2007) study on single student mothers at a community college revealed the “chilly climate” they must navigate while pursuing their education (p. 229). That climate stigmatizes them because of “their marital status and their status as parents” (Duquaine-Watson, 2017, p. 145). Deficit ideologies range from blaming student mothers for poor judgment for pursuing an education while deciding to have children, to cultural stereotypes and beliefs that single student mothers are bad mothers (Cunningham, 2013; Duquaine-Watson, 2017). These deficit ideologies view student mothers with mutually exclusive identities, incapable of parenting well while pursuing an education.

These ideologies are further complicated by the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, and immigration status. Women of color historically have been sexually stereotyped. For Latina women that means sexually provocative and hypersexual. Since the early days of Hollywood, Latinas have been presented as hypersexual, sexually promiscuous, prostitutes, and spitfires (Ramírez-Berg, 2002). Current political discourse frames Latina immigrant mothers as hyper-reproductive, hyper-fertile, and producing *anchor babies*.<sup>2</sup> They are vilified as “bad mothers” and “bad immigrants” (Escobar, 2016; Meacham, 2016, para 12). Chicana feminist scholars have challenged these deficit ideologies and binaries (Anzaldúa, 1987; Castillo, 1994; Escobar, 2016; Segura, 1994; Smith-Silva, 2011, Téllez, 2013) by humanizing, honoring, respecting, and recognizing Chicana/Latina mothers as distinct, multidimensional, and complex. Their writings underscore intersections between Chicana/Latina cultural identity and motherhood and social forces such as migration, violence, poverty, sexism, education, homelessness, mass incarceration and deportation, to name a few.

The enrollment of student mothers of color has significantly increased in the past several decades (Christopher, 2005; Duquaine-Watson, 2007; Katz, 2013; Snyder & Dillow, 2010). Student parents make up 26% of U.S. undergraduate students (4.8 million) of dependent children in 2011 (Christopher, 2005; Duquaine-Watson, 2007; Katz, 2013; Snyder & Dillow, 2010); the majority, about 71%, are women. About 2 million students, or 43% of the total student parent population, are single mothers (Gault, Reichlin, Reynolds, & Froehner, 2014a). About 45% of student parents are enrolled in public two-year institutions, while 16% attend

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<sup>2</sup> Anchor babies is a racist, racialized, and gendered term that centers around Latina immigrant women’s reproductive bodies. It implies that undocumented Latino parents, particularly, mothers immigrate to the U.S with the goal of establishing citizenship for their children.

public four-year schools (Gault, Reichlin, Reynolds, & Froehner, 2014b). The majority of student parents who are matriculated at community colleges are mothers of color: black mothers comprise 53.7%, Latina mothers 40%, and American Indian mothers 40.1%. They are also low-income, work full-time, need childcare, and graduate with high debt (Reichlin, 2015). A 2013 report published by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) found that the lack of on-campus child care prevents many community college student mothers from reaching their educational goals. Only 26% of two-year student parents attain a degree or certificate in six years (Reichlin, 2015). Student parents at the community college have been most dramatically affected by the decline of childcare from 53 percent in 2003-2004, to 46 percent in 2013, with less than half of all two-year campuses offering campus child care services (Gault, Reichlin, Reynolds, & Froehner, 2014b). Finding affordable and reliable child care is important for student parents and with the rising costs and limited childcare options, it's difficult for them to complete their college education.

### **Theorizing Trenzadas/Braids in Chicana/Latina Educational Scholarship**

Our individual and collective experiences as former first generation graduate student mothers of color offer a unique understanding—a cultural intuition—that is sensitive to the experiences of community college student mothers (Delgado Bernal, 2002). As Chicana/Latina mother scholars, we use frameworks and tools that honor and validate the complex lived experiences of student mothers. We draw on Chicana feminist theory utilizing *trenzadas de identidades/braids* as a metaphorical and analytical tool in understanding Latina student mothers (Delgado Bernal, 2008; Espino, Muñoz, & Marquez Kiyama, 2010; Godinez, 2006; González, 1998; Montoya, 1994; Montoya, Cruz, & Grant, 2009; Quiñones, 2016).

Margaret Montoya (1994), a feminist legal scholar, first utilized *trenzadas* as a conceptual metaphor in her bilingual (auto)biography about a mother-daughter braiding story. For Montoya (2009), *trenzadas* is about intertwining stories, topics, and experiences that are fluid and require constant “unbraiding and recombining and rebraiding. In the process you comb things out” (Montoya et al., 2009, p.188). González (1998) furthers *trenzadas* as an analytical tool in her qualitative study exploring the development of womanhood and the multiple identities of *Mexicanas* in California (p. 5). Delgado Bernal (2008) utilizes the framework of *trenzadas* to theorize her personal, professional, and communal identities as a Latina in the academy,

challenging academia's continuous attempt to separate these identities. She argues that "we are often stronger and more complete" (p. 135) when we weave together these identities, but they can also "overlap, merge, collide, and sustain each other" (p. 147).

Espino et al. (2010) also theorize how multiple strands of their identities have shaped their doctoral education. They use *testimonio* to analyze how their *trenzas de identidades multiples* of motherhood, social class, and public intellectual have shaped their transitions from graduate school to faculty positions at different institutions. Quiñones (2016) uses a methodological application of *trenzas* around the notion of being a well-educated person to understand the experiences of six Latina teachers in New York and found that her Puerto Rican teachers took a bilingual-bicultural stance employing a broader view of what it means to be a well-educated person.

*Trenzas de identidades* allows us to explore the experiences of Latina student mothers at the community college as they weave the three main strands of their braided identity: mother, student, and professional (Dolores Bernal, 2008; Godínez, 2006). These three strands intersect and influence how they navigate the educational pipeline to find their way to success. What makes *trenzas* particularly relevant to Chicana/Latinas is the way relationships among them are shaped by the actual physical process of braiding each other's hair. Professor of Law, Zuni Cruz comments that, from an indigenous perspective, braids allow her to connect to her ancestors, both male and female relatives who wore braids. For her, braids are "a link to [her] grandfather" (Montoya et al., 2009, p. 179). We recognize that our goal of centering *trenzas de identidad* explicitly as a Chicana framework is not new; however, it is one that is rarely used to understand the experiences of Latina community college student mothers.

We utilize one *trenza* with three strands: student, mother, and professional identities. The order of the strands does not matter; however, what we have found in our research is that the strand of motherhood is more salient. It is nearly impossible nor do we want to separate each strand of their *trenza* because the strands are interconnected. As Caballero, Pérez-Torres, Martínez-Vu, Téllez, and Vega (2017) noted "our identities are not only intersectional but also interwoven because we cannot easily compartmentalize the work we do within our communities, families, and academic spaces" (p. 64). For organizational purposes here, however, we place the strand of motherhood first, followed by student and then professional strands. In

examining each, we do not separate these identities, but rather seek to tease out how each strand separately and together shapes the educational pipeline for these mothers.

### **Description of Research**

As faculty we have regularly signed and checked student progress reports for CalWORKS. We have also interacted with student parents who talk to us about their struggles and challenges. As a result, we are convinced we must make student parents visible to community college decision makers. Once approval for this research was obtained from the Director of Institutional Research in the Office of Institutional Planning, Research and Effectiveness, at Pacific Coast Community College, we conducted focus groups in the spring and summer of 2016 to gain a better understanding of the student parent population.<sup>3</sup> Specifically, we collected information on student parent experiences, their challenges, types of support system, thoughts about parenting, education, long term career aspirations, as well as mental health and self-care. We recruited participants through flyers, word of mouth, and with the help of the Pacific Coast Community College CalWORKs counselor. Thirteen student mothers—representing a diverse group based on marital status, social class, age, career aspirations, and ethnic and racial background—participated in four focus groups. Our respondents found the focus group discussions useful because they were able to share their stories in a supportive environment, and many wanted to continue the process. For example, one participant said “as busy as we are, this was a mini support group. Is there a support group for mothers?” Participation in the focus groups made them feel their experiences are valuable.

We utilized a semi-structured open-ended interview guide, which allowed participants to speak freely about experiences that were meaningful and private to them (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Our research question was: How do Latina student mothers interweave multiple identities as they navigate the educational pipeline? Interview questions emphasized how students understood education and motherhood (e.g., Have your educational and career goals been shaped by motherhood), their goals and aspirations (e.g., What are your educational and career goals?) if they knew campus resources for student parents (e.g., Are you aware of programs in campus that help student parents? Low income students?). Developing trust with

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<sup>3</sup> Pacific Coast Community College is a public two-year community college designated as a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) with an enrollment of at least 25% Latinx students (*Excelencia in Education*, 2017).

the participants was important, particularly with the student parents who did not know the researchers. To do so, we shared our experiences as former student parents navigating the educational pipeline while parenting, we also allowed the participants the opportunity to ask us questions and reach out to us beyond the focus group if they needed any social support.

Focus interviews were recorded and transcribed by both researchers. Focus groups allow the opportunity to collectively engage other student mothers in ways that otherwise would not happen (Wilkinson, 1998). We followed the tradition of qualitative research of coding, which involves “bringing together and analyzing all the data on major themes, ideas, concepts, interpretations, and propositions” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 151). The codes that were more recurring across interviews became the core codes. After identifying core codes we underwent a careful line-by-line reading with the aim of identifying additional instances and variations of the core codes. The core codes that we focus on in this manuscript are mother, student, and professional identities in the community college pipeline and serve as the basis of our analysis.

Out of the 13 students who participated in the focus group, we chose to focus on four self-identified Latina student mothers: Anayeli, Adriana, Krystal, and Rosa to demonstrate how their various and complex identities affected how they navigated higher education and their professional goals. We focus on these four participants because it became evident in the focus group transcripts the common intersectional and interwomen identities of mother, student, and professional. The narratives also show how the student mothers worked out some of the tensions in their *trenza* such as choosing a career that provides them the flexibility to “be there” for their children. What we present here comes from a place of care and respect for respondents who entrusted us with their lived experiences. Pseudonyms are used for the participants who requested their anonymity.

### **Findings: Intertwining Chicana/Latina Student Mothers’ *Trenzas de Identidades***

The following narratives outline the student mothers’ *trenzas de identidades*. The student mothers’ *trenzas de identidades* capture how their motherhood, student, and professional identities influence how they navigate and experience the community college. We understand each identity to be a part of or a strand of the students mothers’ *trenzas de identidades*. Each

strand builds on one another and carries very intimate, painful, and life-changing experiences and stories.

### **Motherhood Strand**

In this section we introduce the motherhood strand of the student mothers' *trenza de identidades*. The motherhood strand revealed: 1) how the respondents defined and understood motherhood, 2) the intersectionality of motherhood based on race and class, and 3) how motherhood affected and influenced the student mothers' educational journey and professional goals.

For Anayeli, a mother of four, becoming pregnant at 17 with her first child was a life-changing experience even though she had already graduated from high school. She came from what she referred to as a "traditional" family, and the expectations of that traditional Latinx family created a taxing situation at home. As she explained,

We came from Mexico, they are really you know traditional. So, my dad especially, he was like, "You are pregnant. Hay pero who is the guy? Why didn't he come ask me for permission?" No, I was more like open. No, asking my dad for permission? I'm not his...I'm not really his, you know.

The quote above illustrates the ways patriarchal ideologies influenced how Anayeli's parents received her pregnancy announcement. Anayeli's brown pregnant body was perceived and treated like property, in particular by her father. Asking for "permission" is a common practice in Mexican and Mexican American families that implies possession or control over the female body by the father or male figures in the family (Gonzales, Sable, Campbell, & Dannerbeck, 2010). Patriarchy is not exclusive to the Latinx community; women of different class and racial background and sexual orientations experience patriarchy in different ways (Walby, 1990). Patriarchy within the Latino community does not occur in isolation; it occurs alongside and at the intersection of race, class, and other forms of oppression. Ana Castillo (1994) critiques the subordination of women's sexuality within patriarchy. She writes, "*la hembra* first submits to parents, next to extended family; if she belongs to the church, she then defers to that institution" (p. 183).

Becoming pregnant at a young age also contributed to Anayeli's experience of

motherhood. McDermott and Graham (2005) assert that “early motherhood has become synonymous with a number of social ‘problems,’” particularly for women who become mothers before age 20 (p. 59). Anayeli’s young pregnant body was further scrutinized after her then partner decided to end their romantic relationship. Anayeli recalled her father’s reaction, “*Te dije*, I told you that was going to happen. He wasn't serious with you, if he was serious he would have come and ask for permission.” In the quote, Anayeli demonstrates her father’s perceived authority over her body. For Anayeli’s father, asking for “permission” was a verbal agreement between him and Anayeli’s former partner. Anayeli’s father’s desire to have been asked for permission may have come from a place of care for his daughter; however, the expression of care in this manner reflected a patriarchal transaction of authority over Anayeli’s body. Adriana, a 20-year old mother of an infant, also experienced being stigmatized for becoming a teenage mom. Adriana was 19 when she got pregnant and even though her boyfriend supported her, family members insisted she would never amount to anything. At one point, Adriana thought of having an abortion, but her partner and parents dissuaded her. She remarked that her “baby is the best thing” as her eyes filled with tears and began to cry. She said her father's side of the family believes that “if you are pregnant, it’s over.” As the first in her immediate family to become pregnant, Adriana said “I felt discriminated.” She became the subject of gossip and criticism of the family. As she said “it's so bad to get pregnant and it's like a sin. Because I was not with the guy. Now, I’m married.” The criticisms continued even after Adriana got married because her husband is a few years older than her and has a child from a previous relationship.

The beliefs held about Anayeli and Adriana’s young pregnant brown bodies reflect the way virginity or marriage elevate a woman’s status (Anzaldúa, 1987; Castillo, 1994), but it falls if she is sexually active outside of marriage. A pregnancy is undeniable public proof of extramarital sexual activity. Furthermore, under traditional and religious views, both Anayeli and Adriana’s pregnancies, unlike other pregnancies in the community, could not be celebrated (Téllez, 2013). Thus it is “simultaneously juxtaposed with equal denigration of the Mother status” (Castillo, 1994, p. 183).

In the same vein, Rosa, single mother of one, also explained how becoming a mother affected her life. As she stated, “after I got pregnant, everything fell apart, I lost my job. There was a lot of turmoil.” Losing her primary source of income while being pregnant brought on unforeseen stressors, such as losing her home. Additionally, her partner at that time had drug



problems, and Rosa eventually left him. The “turmoil” Rosa began to experience immediately began to shape and challenge her beliefs about mothering. She said, “how you said, everything on TV, oh you have your family, is nice, you have your house, on the outside everything looks good but in the inside everything is falling apart.” Popular culture images portraying “the perfect family and home” only made her feel worse about her situation. Additionally, at this time in her life, Rosa was desperately committed to finding employment to provide for her soon-to-be born child. College attendance seemed impossible under the circumstances: “I got laid off, so I was like, ‘Maybe I should go back to school,’” she said, “but school was still not a priority...like I needed to be more a mom than the student.”

Like Anayeli, Rosa understandably prioritized employment and being a “mom” over attending college. In addition, Rosa felt that attending school in addition to working would prevent her from “being there” for her daughter. She was aware of how she felt when her own mother returned to school and often didn’t have time to spend with her as she would have liked. Thus, Rosa did not initially perceive college as an option. Yet, with time, Rosa realized “that being a student is actually gonna...help me be a better mom.”

Latina student mothers experience motherhood within interlocking systems of oppression such as race, class, and gender (Hill Collins, 2000). Such interlocking structures intersect and manifest themselves in the student mothers’ lives and affect how they navigate higher education and other institutions. The motherhood narratives help locate the student mothers within the current sociopolitical context, and as a result, within the educational pipeline. The motherhood strand serves as the entry point for exploring further Chicana/Latina *trenza de identidades*. The following two strands—student and professional—both build on and weave themselves into the motherhood strand.

### **Student Strand**

In this section we introduce the student *trenza* strand to show (1) that the educational experiences of student mothers in the community college are nonlinear, (2) how teenage mothers deal with the stigma of stereotypes, an underappreciated and unacknowledged journey; and (3) how student mothers deal with the consequences of higher education fraud.

*Trenzadas de identidades* depicts the Latina student mothers’ nonlinear educational pathways as a multidirectional fluid process that includes stopping out of the educational system

for extended periods of time and returning later in life. For Anayeli, Krystal, and Rosa, a better future for their children was central to the choice to further their education, but it took time for them to realize this, due to financial instability. Motherhood delayed Anayeli and Rosa's enrollment in postsecondary education because they needed to figure out their lives as new mothers. As young and single mothers they dealt with the everyday circumstances of life—worrying about money, food, and shelter for their kids, and dealing with the pressures from over their single mother status. Motherhood is an underappreciated and unacknowledged journey because motherhood is assumed to come naturally.

As discussed earlier, Anayeli faced a series of challenges that delayed her matriculation at Pacific Coast Community College. In the Fall of 2009, she enrolled at Pacific Coast Community College and stayed for two semesters. She stopped because her partner at the time did not support her. She tried to maintain a relationship with her daughter's biological dad, but his lack of support caused her to fail and/or drop her courses. By the time she returned to school, she had four children, her 8-year-old daughter from her first relationship, an 11-year-old step daughter from her current husband, and their 4-year old twins. Her transition "back to school" involved fear and self-doubt. Anayeli's racial identity as a Chicana/Latina further complicated her educational experience because of her racialized brown body (Cruz, 2001). Being a young Chicana/Latina mother of four children automatically placed her in the stereotype of young Chicana/Latina moms stopping out of school—which she did, temporarily. Anayeli described it this way:

Like everyone expected me to not do anything because I was a teenage mother. I was like not going to do anything with my life. At the beginning I actually did believe it. I actually did believe that I couldn't really do it.

Anayeli experienced stereotype threat, feeling that perhaps she would confirm the stereotype of the Latina teenage mother (Steele & Aronson, 1995). The intersection of motherhood, race, and age significantly affected her confidence in her status as a student mother.

In contrast to Anayeli, Rosa was a second generation college student who grew up exposed to the college setting via her immigrant mother; however, this exposure still did not help her understand the intricacies of the educational system. Rosa lacked a strong knowledge base; in particular, she did not understand federal financial aid. This ultimately led her to

become a victim of fraud by the for-profit institution, Heald College. She tried enrolling first at Pacific Coast Community College in 2010 when she was pregnant, but she did not get the help she needed. All Rosa wanted to know when she tried to enroll in Pacific Coast Community College was “what is FAFSA”? She sought help from the financial aid office, but in effect they blocked her from receiving that information from a disinterested source. Rosa described her experience:

What is FAFSA, what is this? They said, “come tomorrow at 8 o'clock in the morning. They're going to be open from 8.” So I went and the line was out the door and I'm pregnant. I'm like, what do I do? I have to pee every 5 minutes. You get out of line, they don't want to hold your spot so you get back in line. Finally, I got in the room. It's hot. I'm bothered. I haven't ate, I'm cranky, and I just walk up. We had to sign in so I back up to the desk where the lady had the sheet and I'm like, “I've been here since 8 o'clock in the morning and I just want to know what's FAFSA, can I do it on my own?” She's like, “well, you're just gonna have to wait, they're gonna help you.”

The embodiment of Rosa's pregnant body further complicates her experience trying to get information about financial aid while constantly needing to use the restroom, and no other student would save her spot in the line. Rosa was near her “breaking point” and “stormed out of there” a few hours later, without any help or direction. Instead, Rosa was enticed to enroll at Heald College in Oakland, California, after “seeing all these commercials, get in, get out, get ahead, you know.” In her mind, Rosa had it all figured out. By the time her daughter turned two she would have a career. She stated: “(my daughter) won't even know that I was broke you know, she won't even know I went to school.”

Rosa was not considering enrolling at Heald. She went to Heald only to get information about financial aid. But in less than two hours Rosa left Heald college with her financial aid application completed and a schedule of her classes. Rosa earned an A.A. in Applied Science from Heald college after three years. However, when she left Heald her debt was over \$30,000 and she had no job. Her first student loan statement was more than her car payment, \$300. Rosa struggled financially despite her degree—or perhaps, because of it. She moved four times in one year and eventually moved in to live with her parents. But, she held on to a dream

because, as she said, “I always knew school is going to get me through this, like, if I just hold on to school, and I was holding on to the wrong school but I held on, you know.”

Little did Rosa know that she was one of thousands of student victims deceived by misinformation and misrepresentation by Heald College. In 2015, Corinthian Colleges, Heald’s parent company, closed all of its 28 ground campuses misrepresenting job placement data. Using those inflated placement rates, they encouraged students to take out expensive private loans (Whittaker, 2015). Hundreds of students were deceived by Heald college, but Rosa received no compensation for the fraud. On the contrary, the insurable debt she acquired left her with no job security or financial freedom. Since she earned an A.A. degree she was disqualified from receiving California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKS), a type of temporary cash aid when she enrolled at Pacific Coast Community College. This made it even more difficult for her to continue her education while parenting. Nonetheless, Rosa developed strategies to make things work. Among other sacrifices, Rosa compromised her privacy and parental autonomy by moving in with her parents to save money, enabling her to graduate with an Associate in Arts Degree for Transfer (AA-T).

Through the lens *trenzas de identidades* offers, we can identify the various ways motherhood has influenced Anayeli and Rosa’s educational experiences. Navigating the educational pipeline for Latina community college students, particularly student mothers, multidirectional rather than linear. Both Anayeli and Rosa began their postsecondary education at Pacific Coast Community College but left and returned once they were mothers. Although returning to college was not easy, they continued to push through the self-doubt and financial challenges. The narratives in this section further our understanding of the “leaks” in the Chicano educational pipeline, in particular for those who begin their postsecondary education at a community college. The student *trenza* also demonstrates how the mother identity influences their educational experience. Several scholars note that identity development has a significant influence on the overall college experience. However, mother identity for Latina community college students has not been included in the discourse (Caballero et al., 2017). This is problematic because unless the mother identity in addition and in relation to their other identities is explored, best practices will not fully reflect and include Latina community college student mothers.

## **The Professional Strand**

The professional strand highlights how student mothers negotiate the conflicts between career choices and parenting responsibilities, selecting education that will lead to careers that align with their priorities and responsibilities as mothers. Some had to negotiate “big” dreams with more realistic professional careers. For example, the career paths Krystal, Anayeli, and Rosa chose will allow them to achieve their personal academic goals, provide for their family while still allowing them to raise their children in ways that meet their motherhood standards.

Krystal, a thirty-year old single mother of two children ages six and eight enrolled in the nursing program at Pacific Coast Community College in the fall of 2014. Originally, Krystal wanted to be a physical therapist, but after considering what that would require of her she realized it would not be possible to combine that with her responsibilities as a mother. Pacific Coast Community College did not offer physical therapy programs.

I have to work [and] ... the closest [program] is San Francisco and it's super competitive, it's like 35 spots, it's \$50-\$60,000 a year and it's continuous, and it's clinical hours are 40 hours a week, so I would go to work. I wouldn't be able to go to school and take care of children at the same time.

The cost, commute, expected clinical hours, work, and necessary child care meant she couldn't pursue her first career choice. She chose Pacific Coast Community College nursing program instead because it would allow her to weave her student and mother strand.

Anayeli also had to compromise her professional goals along the way. Initially, Anayeli dreamed of “owning a business” but she believed being a mother cost her that dream, “Before I wanted to be like something big, a business woman or something and now I just kinda like...I want to be a math teacher; math is my major and I want that.”

When I became a mother I was like, like you lose a dream, it's like your kids only, that was like for me, my kids and then my boyfriend was going to the [police] academy, so, it's kinda like his turn kinda thing, so, I was put in the back burner kinda thing until right now that I started. I actually you know, taking classes.

Mothering pushed Anayeli to negotiate her “dreams” with more “practical” goals and aspirations. When she returned to Pacific Coast Community College in the Fall of 2014 she discovered that she was “really good” at math and enjoyed taking math courses. She recognized the perks of teaching—getting the summers off and being able to spend more time with her children. Anayeli feels she had to compromise her professional aspirations, choosing to become a math teacher because the job aligns with the demands of motherhood.

In 2014, after focusing on her responsibilities as a mother, Rosa gave Pacific Coast Community College another try. She enrolled full time and has been matriculated every semester since. She will graduate with an Associate in Arts in Sociology for Transfer (A.A.T.) and will attend UC Berkeley in the fall 2017. Rosa’s academic goal is to earn a Master’s degree in Counseling so she can be a guidance counselor for high school and college students. That career choice also fits well with the demands of motherhood.

The professional strand builds on the aforementioned two strands, the mother and student *trenza*. The career paths Krystal, Anayeli, and Rosa have chosen will allow them to achieve their personal academic goals, provide for their family, and have the necessary flexibility to raise their children.

### Conclusion

Latina community college students mothers are often invisible on college campuses and in the education literature. In order to improve their chances for success, we must understand the lived experiences of Latina community college student mothers, and perhaps student parents overall. We must acknowledge and validate their experiences and identities using frameworks providing a “holistic, culturally rich, and family inclusive model” (Sapp et al., 2016, p. 53) such as *trenzas de identidades*, so we can better serve them as administrators and faculty.

The student mothers’ *trenzas* reveal the centrality of their motherhood and its influence on their educational and professional experiences and goals. Additionally, the student mothers’ *trenzas de identidades* challenge the deficit ideologies (Valencia, 2012) about Latina mothers and Latinx community college students. They affirm motherhood as a positive force and source of strength and wisdom that contribute to their educational pursuits. As other scholars have noted and as these narratives exemplify, Latina community college student mothers are neither “lazy” nor “uneducated” (Cunningham, 2013), but rather “creators and holders of knowledge”

(Delgado Bernal, 2002). Student mothers face circumstances similar to those of all non-traditional students, but because they are parents, their challenges magnify exponentially, particularly on hostile, unwelcoming college campuses. Their experiences and identities play a critical role in who they are as mothers today, where they are located academically, and whom they hope to become professionally and personally. The stories shared in this article are a testament not only to their persistence, but also their resiliency and *ganas* to obtain a post-secondary education in order to be role models for their children.

We urge others to recognize that the educational pipeline for Latina student mothers, often begins at the community college. This is critical because the literature on the Latinx pipeline does not address the detours community college student mothers must make after they enter and return later. We know that out of 100 students, 17 go to the community college and only one transfers to a four-year university (Pérez Huber et al., 2015; Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). We question who those 17 students are and to what extent they include student mothers. We also wonder who is the one student who transfers to a four-year university.

The affirmation of Latina community college student mother *trenzadas de identidades* warrants culturally responsive policies and practices in higher education. Administrators, practitioners, and educators need to create appropriate services and resources to support student parents. We provide a list of recommendations in creating college campuses that are welcoming to student parents:

- Extend childcare during evening classes
- Offer child-friendly spaces throughout campus that include changing tables in campus restrooms and lactation rooms for nursing mothers.
- Provide a library study room for student parents equipped with computers.
- Collaborate across campus programs and community organizations to support student parents and their children by providing student parents with mentoring, scholarships, and parent education workshops.

In addition, administrators can provide professional development opportunities for faculty and staff to attend conferences and workshops on student parents, such as the annual Student Parent Support Symposium organized by Endicott College. Community colleges can create a Student Parent Center offering services that target student parents. Community college administrators can collect data on their student parent population so they may better

understand this group and respond with programs and services to meet their needs. The National Center for Student Parent Programs (2017) launched the family friendly campus toolkit to enable colleges and universities to begin collecting relevant data. By creating a campus culture that is receptive and welcoming, we can increase student parent retention rates. We call upon administrators, faculty, and staff in other community colleges to join in these efforts.



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## **An Empowerment Framework for Latinx Students in Developmental Education**

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### **Abstract**

While developmental education in community colleges has the potential to prepare students for college-level work, its effectiveness and need is often questioned. Further, while Latinx students are overrepresented in developmental courses, there is a dearth of literature on their experiences in such courses and how to effectively serve their needs in developmental contexts. This article provides an overview of the literature related to Latinx students in developmental writing to point out areas that have been understudied and then introduces an Empowerment Framework for Latinx students, a model which combines a deeper understanding of language, power, and preparing Latinx students for college-level writing.

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## Introduction

In an era of increased accountability, developmental education remains one of the biggest challenges in community colleges today. When academically underprepared students arrive on two-year and four-year campuses, they may be assigned to a variety of classes and services to help them reach college readiness levels in math, reading, and English as quickly as possible (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010). The last ten years research has explored an array of interventions including high school programs that help students avoid developmental education later in college and campus-based support programs available to students once they arrive on college campuses (Howell, Kurlaender, & Grodsky, 2009; Kerrigan & Slater, 2010; Rutschow & Schneider, 2011). While the enrollment trends in developmental education have declined somewhat, it is estimated that approximately 40% of all students enrolled in the two-year college sector enroll in some sort of developmental education (Chen & Simone, 2016).

One glaring gap in the literature is work on Latinx students in developmental education. Latinx students are overrepresented on community college campuses nationally (Santiago, Calderón Galdeano, & Taylor, 2015), and it is estimated that approximately 75% of Latinx students in two-year colleges and 53% of Latinx students in four-year colleges enroll in some type of developmental education intervention (Chen & Simone, 2016). An analysis of Latinx students in the California Community College system offers some startling conclusions about these students in developmental education: out of 100 students who place into any level of developmental English, a little more than a third are likely to pass into a college-level, credit-bearing English course (Solórzano, Acevedo-Gil, & Santos, 2013). Even more troubling, the higher the number of developmental courses a student is required to take, the less likely they are to pass into credit-bearing courses (Solórzano et al., 2013).

Given these statistics, the extant body of literature does not provide enough information to know how developmental education positively or negatively impacts Latinx students (Crisp, Taggart, & Nora, 2015). The large enrollment of Latinx students in these courses reveals a research imperative to learn more about what factors promote or inhibit student success and prepare students for college-level coursework. The field of researchers, practitioners, and administrators should focus on the Latinx population in particular and take into account issues salient to these students. As Stein (2005) argues, “We can no longer work off the false paradigm of believing that by researching what works for the White student and for

the African American student will by some sort of default work for Latino students just because they are ‘minorities’” (p. 84).

The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of the literature on Latinx students in developmental education, particularly in the context of reading and writing courses. As will be discussed, there is a growing body of research paid to students in developmental math, but there is a noticeably smaller amount of attention given to reading and writing. After identifying research that helps frame what we know about developmental reading and writing, I will provide recommendations for considerations researchers and practitioners should make in engaging students in these subjects.

### **The Conundrum of Developmental Education**

Due to their open access missions, community colleges serve many students who are labeled “at risk” and those who face various academic and/or social challenges that may threaten their persistence in college (Porchea, Allen, Robbins, & Phelps, 2010). Developmental education interventions, including a broad range of formal classes and services that aim to build the college readiness skills of students, can vary widely in terms of placement policies (Bettinger & Long, 2009) and the number of courses a college may require a student to take before they may enroll in college-level courses like Freshman Composition (Bailey et al. 2010).

Though not specific to only Latinx students, a number of pre-college factors may contribute to a students’ placement in developmental education. In a study focused on placement and success in college mathematics courses across racial/ethnic groups, parents’ educational attainment levels, household income, and living in predominantly White and more affluent neighborhoods were statistically significant for non-remedial students in a nationally representative sample (Hagedorn, Siadat, Fogel, Nora, & Pascarella, 1999). High school factors also influence students’ need for developmental education. For instance, a lack of academically rigorous mathematics courses in high school has been identified as a risk factor for placement in developmental education in college (Crisp & Nora, 2010; Swail, Cabrera, Lee & Williams, 2005). Latinx students disproportionately attend underresourced high schools that do not offer a rigorous college preparatory curriculum (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). The role of high school curriculum in preparing students for college may be even more complicated, however. One troubling finding from a more recent study in Texas is that 80% of students in a sample of over

1,300 students completed the recommended or distinguished tracks for high school graduation, indicating that students may be graduating from high school seemingly ready for college and still place into developmental education, suggesting a disturbing disconnect between high school and college curricula and expectations (Pretlow & Wathington, 2013).

A national focus on boosting the representation of Latinx students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields have placed a focus on developmental mathematics as a critical entry point in students' early college careers. More students across racial/ethnic groups place into developmental mathematics than any other area, and Bahr (2010) illustrates the disparities for Latinx and African American students in math, a key gatekeeper course for students that dictates their access to many college-level courses. For example, while Latinx students show greater levels of persistence in mathematics, their likelihood of successfully passing a developmental math course was lower than their White counterparts. These disparities are attributed to small differences in math achievement that may appear as early as kindergarten and continue to widen as students reach college (Bahr, 2010).

Given the national imperative to increase Latinx representation in STEM majors and jobs (Flores, 2011), the importance of developmental mathematics is vital. However, the focus on one developmental field away from others, specifically reading and writing, only tells one part of the story. Effective reading and writing skills are critical for preparation into the workforce. Stories in popular media often lament the literacy skills of college graduates especially in writing (e.g., Strauss, 2016). The study of writing possesses unique challenges to better understanding the conditions under which Latinx students may thrive.

### **Challenges of Conducting Research in Writing Settings**

Much of the research surrounding developmental education is anecdotal, largely the result of developmental educators publishing reflections of their experiences without a rigorous research design (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Over the last decade, there has been an increase on rigorously studying these students and specific interventions, both qualitatively and quantitatively, for example in the last two decades through initiatives such as Achieving the Dream (Bailey, 2009). In understanding success in college writing, an interesting point to note is that scholars cannot fully agree on what constitutes "college-level" writing. The four basic expectations for writing include, "coherence, clarity, consistence, and (not least) correctness"



(Yancey, 2004, p. 306). This seemingly basic definition of what constitutes “good” writing is highly subjective, and differences between individual teachers’ perceptions of essay quality has been documented in the literature (Bloom, 2006; Sullivan & Tinberg, 2006; Thompson & Gallagher, 2010). One study illustrates the differences between one high school and one college instructor in assessing student papers: There was great variation in the approach to grading both teachers took even though they were both assessing the quality of the writing (Thompson & Gallagher, 2010). The high school teacher operates in a reality of standardized tests and rubrics, so she was more likely to grade according to her experiences with those. On the other hand, the college professor’s perspective and grading was arguably more subjective and personal. This lack of alignment between high school and writing expectations could potentially fuel students’ needs for developmental writing in college.

There is also work in the field of English Studies that suggests that the nature of college writing has changed in the last thirty years (Harris, 2012; Lunsford & Lunsford, 2008). Building on an earlier study on student error (Connors & Lunsford, 1988), a more recent study examined student papers from a national sample and compared them to the samples from previous studies (Lunsford & Lunsford, 2008). They find that students produce longer assignments for their classes and that assignments are far more likely to be persuasive or expository in nature than personal. Convoluting this even further, higher education is starting to grapple with what is meant by “literacy” (Paulson & Armstrong, 2010). Scholars who study college writers are paying increased attention to technology and other types of literacy that shape communication in today’s world (Relles & Tierney, 2013). Therefore, the aforementioned Four C’s (Yancey, 2004) may be a generic start to understanding the form of college-level writing, the nature of the subject has changed and likely will continue to change in light of changes in the ways writing is taught at the college level. In addition to contending with the challenges of what college-level writing is, researchers concerned with Latinx students must also take into account issues salient to this student population.

### **Latinx Students’ Transition to College**

Racism and inequality are imbued in the Latinx educational experience (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Kurlaender, 2006; Taggart & Crisp, 2011). Latinx students encounter a number of acculturative stresses when they enter a college campus that has traditionally been a

predominantly White structure (Nora, 2003; Rendón, 1994). When campus agents, especially faculty, provide content that honors students' cultural backgrounds and encourage them, these agents provide students with validating experiences that have been linked to increased persistence of Latinx students (Rendón, 1994). Without this validation, Latinx students struggle to find curricula, faculty members, mentors, and services that reflect their respective needs among other challenges (Nora, 2003). While research has looked at campus-level factors that promote or predict the success of Latinx community college students (Cuellar & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2016; Hagedorn, Chi, Cepeda, & McLain, 2007), there is a dearth of research that considers the developmental education context.

### **The Stigma of Remediation**

So far, this essay has purposefully avoided use of the word “remediation” in discussing developmental education though the terms are sometimes used interchangeably (e.g., Bailey et al., 2010). The word “remediation” is ubiquitous in the field, yet scholars have long criticized the use of the term. Rose (1985), for example, argued that the term pathologizes students. Bahr (2008) refers to remediation as “by definition, a ‘remedy’ intended to restore opportunity to those who otherwise may be relegated to meager wages, poor working conditions, and other consequences of socioeconomic marginalization” (p. 422). Bahr’s (2008) description of developmental education states the proposed goal of the field, yet a large body of literature calls into question its purpose and efficacy. It is estimated that developmental classes account for ten percent of all credits earned at community colleges annually (Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez, 2015), yet one study finds that less than a quarter of students who enroll in developmental education at community colleges receive a degree or certificate within eight years (Bailey, 2009). Grubb and Gabriner (2013), who conducted some of the most in-depth classroom-based research on developmental education, argue that rote teaching and learning is teacher-centered, decontextualized, and lacks meaningful engagement with students. This is troubling considering the system denies students access to mainstream college classes and then fails to prepare them for college-level courses.

Some critics accuse developmental courses of having an adverse effect on student progress and on stigmatizing students who may not be institutionally recognized as college ready (Shor, 2000). Shor (1997) compares the field of developmental education as a type of

institutional apartheid, creating obstacles that cost student precious time and money without providing progress toward a degree program. Even when campuses attempt stigma-free remediation, they may provide students with a false sense of confidence or a lack of understanding on the purpose of remedial courses and these courses' importance for making progress toward degree completion (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2002).

The threat of stigma and of hindrance to degree progress is not imaginary. The developmental education experience can have a tremendous impact on Latinx students—for better or worse. Participants in a qualitative study on developmental education experiences described placement in these classes a negative experience, particularly in holding them back from their degree programs (Acevedo-Gil, Santos, Alonso, & Solórzano, 2015). Students reported that faculty could demonstrate a lack of respect of their students and could make them feel dumb through their teaching approaches, perhaps through the same type of indifferent or uninteresting teaching described as remedial pedagogy (Grubb & Gabriner, 2013).

However, the work by Acevedo-Gil and colleagues (2015) suggests that developmental education can provide moments of empowerment for students, helping them to believe in themselves. This study adds to the thin literature on Latinx students in developmental education by showing that there are ways to lift up students and contribute to their future success. The challenge, then, is in helping faculty to identify moments of empowerment and to positively respond to situations where students lose their confidence or motivation. The next section offers a discussion of issues salient to Latinx students in developmental education, especially in writing contexts, which are understudied in the current body of literature that may help faculty teach with the possibility of transforming students' experiences.

### **Latinx Students, Language, and Writing**

Perhaps the most salient and least understood issue regarding Latinx students in developmental writing courses and the community colleges at large is real understanding of their proficiency of English and how their language background may affect their experiences in college. For example, many Latinx students who speak Spanish at home are mislabeled as English as Second Language (ESL) students despite the fact that they received the majority of their education in the United States (Harklau, Siegel, & Losey, 1999). Institutional practices, especially placement policies for developmental education, may not take into account that while

students may speak Spanish, their fluency is verbal only (Newman, 2007). The work of Valdés (2001) and Ferris (2007) explain the complexity of language fluency and acquisition, suggesting that students may be labeled as Spanish dominant and place them in ESL courses when they should be in developmental reading and writing courses. This extra layer of required coursework only delays students' progress in college further and puts possibly unnecessary barriers in their way.

The biggest challenge higher education needs to address with linguistic minority students is twofold. First, institutions need to find ways to identify linguistic minority students and to distinguish them from similar but separate groups of students. For instance, Ferris (2007) pointed out that a developmental writing instructor may encounter both English as a Second Language (ESL) learners and international students. The former group may be Generation 1.5 or recent immigrant students who have received some exposure to the American educational system; the latter may be brand new to the United States. While perhaps superficially similar, Ferris (2007) argues that these two groups and their differing levels of exposure to the American classroom also impacted their needs from their respective instructors.

Bunch and Panayotova (2008) explicate these issues and show how the language proficiency and academic skills testing that students undergo just before starting college can create barriers to Latinx students who are also English Language Learners. Language background no doubt influences some Latinx students' need for and placement into developmental English, and English Language Learners are more likely to be placed into developmental activities (Ignash, 1997). Further, some institutions require English Language Learners to complete multiple levels of developmental courses, including ESL-specific courses to more mainstream developmental courses, before they can move into college-level work (Razfar & Simon, 2011). Ignash (1997) draws a connection between ESL courses and developmental courses, pointing out that debates emerged among scholars as to whether the goals of advanced ESL courses could be or were the same as general developmental writing. In some cases, the separation of ESL and developmental writing results in students having to complete two sequences of non-credit bearing courses before they can enroll in college-level courses (Razfar & Simon, 2011). Finding ways to better understand the common purpose of ESL courses and developmental reading and writing courses and how they can be combined into one course can potentially save students precious time and money while enabling them to move

forward with their degrees more efficiently. Rather than focusing on functional English (e.g., English for the workplace, conversational English), ESL courses might also incorporate elements of academic discourse.

### **Academic Discourse**

Developmental writing courses presumably orient students to academic writing, or the type of writing they will be expected to do once in college-level courses. This type of writing engages students in academic discourse. Hyland (2009) defines academic discourse simply as “the ways of thinking and using language which exist in the academy” (p. 1). Academic discourse takes on various forms such as lectures, papers, dissertations, and conference presentations (Hyland, 2009). It also serves a variety of purposes including constructing and transmitting knowledge. Drawing on Gee’s (2008) work on Discourse, Hyland (2009) also contends that academic discourse shapes behaviors within the academy including training new academics (thereby reproducing academic discourse) and collaboration with others. In short, academic discourse is a way of communicating, but also a way of behaving with peers within the community. To that end, students undergo an acculturation process as they become members of their academic communities (Hyland, 2009).

Prominent composition scholar Elbow (1991) concedes that academic discourse is a necessary part of teaching students how to write in college, but he argues that students will write in various ways and across various genres for the rest of their lives in settings that do not follow the conventions of the academy. Therefore, the focus of college writing should not be exclusively focused on writing for a professor or speaking to a specific discipline. Instead, it enables students to join conversations through their literacy skills in a variety of contexts. This moderate view speaks in agreement to the types of literacy practices that are necessary for college students and their college knowledge (Conley, 2005).

Additionally, there are scholars who see academic discourse as a non-negotiable part of full participation in the academy. In his now seminal work on academic writing, Bartholomae (2011) evaluated student writing and how students acquired the voice of their disciplines. Bartholomae treated this discourse acquisition as an imperative for students who want to be part of the academy, saying in no uncertain terms, “They must learn to speak our language. Or they must dare to speak it, or to carry off the bluff, since speaking and writing will most

certainly be required long before the skill is ‘learned’” (p. 5). He continued by describing the performative aspects of writing for the academy, stating that students have to “appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse” (p. 9).

### **Cultural Dissonance in the Academic Discourse**

Villanueva (2011) suggests that the teaching of college writing does not incorporate the full extent of Latinx students’ capabilities if they are confined to “traditional” genres and a single language with which to express themselves. Ybarra (2001) accuses basic writing courses of having a cultural dissonance between the expectations of academic writing and the backgrounds of Latinx students. This dissonance is largely the result of instructors’ lack of understanding of students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds which pervades classroom interactions and writing assignments. Even mention of dominant or mainstream culture (e.g., sports, entertainment) can be misguided because this assumes that all students have the same point of reference (Pappamihel & Moreno, 2011). Students placed in these classes become suspicious of the course and of the education system in general (Ybarra, 2001). What is also highly contentious is the way students engage with language and writing in these courses when there is a cultural incongruity.

### **Students’ Right to Their Own Language and Latinx Students**

Perhaps the most controversial debate in developmental and college-level composition courses that has tremendous implications for students of color is the debate over Standard English. Certain myths about college-level writing and academic discourse have conflated correctness and the use of Standard English with quality (Bloom, 2006). Bloom (2006) admits that the adherence to Standard English is problematic, but that it is so codified in our educational practices from kindergarten that it is unlikely to be resisted. Concepts of “Standard” English and Discourses have real implications for college students, particularly those who are historically underserved such as Latinx students, in college English. English and writing instructors are likely among the first people students encounter when they enter college, especially if the students place into developmental writing courses. Lippi-Green (1997) argues in her in-depth examination of the Standard English debate that the concept of “standard” English is essentially a socially constructed myth. When proponents of this concept refer to a certain

type of Standard English, they are referring to the language of the highly educated (Lippi-Green, 1997). Ultimately, this debate is imbued with power, particularly with the intersections of class, race, and access to quality education.

Within the field of composition studies, this discussion of Standard English and its place in postsecondary college writing settings began decades ago. Responding to the growing presence of more students of color entering college in the 1960s and 1970s, the postsecondary branch of the National Council of Teachers of English issued a policy known as “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” (hereafter, SRTOL) in 1974 (Smitherman, 2003). The policy flatly rejected any hierarchy of languages and the notion that one dialect of English exerted any domination or correctness over others (Conference on College Composition and Communication [CCCC], 1974). Instead, it upheld language diversity in the United States as a cultural symbol of the country and advocated training and experiences for English teachers who work with students of different linguistic heritages (CCCC, 1972). A later expansion of SRTOL acknowledged that discrimination on the basis of dialect or accent was a reality, but proceeded with the hope that attitudes regarding language and minority dialects would change in favor of pluralistic language.

What is interesting about the scholarly conversations about SRTOL is the willingness to talk about linguistic diversity as a monolithic entity without differentiating specific racial/ethnic groups (e.g., “World Englishes” as described by Cliett, 2003) or to focus specifically on African American Vernacular English (Kinloch, 2005; Smitherman, 1999). Scholars have noted that students of color, like Latinx students, often come from literacy backgrounds that differ from “mainstream” schools and lead to a clash in cultures (White & Lowenthal, 2011), and these differences have been specifically noted in reference to Latinx students’ linguistic backgrounds (Baca, 2008; Ybarra, 2001). Given the growth of the Latinx population over the last thirty years (Stepler & Brown, 2016) and the growing prominence of this demographic on college campuses across the country, it is time to consider these students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds and how these can be built upon in ways that promote their retention and success in college rather than push them out of postsecondary education altogether.

### **An Empowerment Framework for Developmental Writing**

Given the complexity of Latinx students' needs in developmental writing, there are various ways institutions and programs can build culturally responsive developmental curricula. Building on the work on Ladson-Billings (1995), Pappamihiel and Moreno (2011) make the case of cultural responsive instruction in colleges and universities with the purpose of boosting educational attainment for Latino students specifically. Culturally responsive instruction has four attributes that grow out of critical race theory (CRT): it is validating, multidimensional, comprehensive, and empowering (Pappamihiel & Moreno, 2011). This type of pedagogy provides students with validating experiences (explained by Rendón, 1994), moves away from the "remedial pedagogy" solely focused on skills that is described by Grubb and Gabriner (2013), and empowers students by giving them dignity and respect in the classroom (Pappamihiel & Moreno, 2011).

A similar model for teaching that was developed specifically for the developmental classroom is the multicultural developmental education curricula model (Bruch, Jehangir, Jacobs, & Ghare, 2004). Within this model, cultural diversity is celebrated, power and oppression within society are discussed meaningfully rather than ignored, and education is presented to students as a means of upward social mobility and empowerment. These models call for a central focus on power, oppression, and difference, subjects that are not often combined with Yancey's (2004) aforementioned four C's.

Building on the multicultural developmental education model (Bruch et al., 2004), I call for an Empowerment Framework for Latinx students in developmental education that takes into consideration critical issues related to language and writing. In combining the teaching of skills, educational power structures, and more welcoming perspectives toward students' use of Spanish, the developmental education may be positively transformative for students who might otherwise feel stigmatized or held back by placement policies. However, this change can only occur if there is a meaningful, intentional effort to empower students while they are enrolled in developmental courses in ways that provide knowledge about the power systems they will engage with, how to move in between social worlds, *as well as* building more practical writing skills such as clarity and cohesion. This can be achieved with explicit discussion of the power structure of academia as well as helping students develop themselves as college students without abandoning their other personal identities.



### **Illuminate the Power Structure in the College**

The developmental writing classroom is located at the crossroads of multiple power structures. It is a gatekeeper course to Freshman Composition, which in turn has been called a gatekeeper course (Zeidenberg, Jenkins, & Scott, 2012). Students, especially Latinx and other minoritized students, are asked to become part of an academic discourse community that is not only foreign to them but may be hard to make sense of (Ybarra, 2001). White and Lowenthal (2011) are explicit that academic discourse requires engagement with visible and invisible codes of power and the ability to navigate through or grapple with them. What is more, navigating the power structure of institutions through the use of academic discourse is something that is seldom taught explicitly (White & Lowenthal, 2011).

Rather than masking the purpose of developmental education out of fear of disheartening students, faculty members, and other campus agents who work with developmental students (e.g., advisors, support services staff) have the opportunity to enfranchise students with knowledge about the power structure in higher education and how to navigate it. There is a body of literature related to the negative effects of Latinx students' challenges in navigating their college campus (Campa, 2010; Núñez, 2011a), and such explicit intentionality in unmasking the tacit codes of power (White & Lowenthal, 2011) could help students build what Campa (2010) called "critical resilience" (p. 431).

This type of teaching requires open conversations with Latinx students about an educational system that was not built for them. However, students may be able to make sense of what is going on around them once they know the overt and covert parts of the power structure and can think about how to navigate this structure. In her reflective essay, Bernstein (2004) recalls working with Latinx students in the Houston, Texas area and how reading Jonathan Kozol's seminal work *Savage Inequalities* resonated with students who were given the opportunity to reflect upon the educational inequalities they experienced in K-12 schools. Through reading and writing on the topic, the students acquired a way to draw on their experiences in an academic setting and to combine their experiences with academic sources in their final papers. This type of exercise with the combination of critical sources and students' actual lives provides a way to teach students about power and how to break the cycle of inequality and oppression imbued in educational systems.

### **Build Identities as College Students without Abandoning Other Identities**

Teaching Latinx students in developmental education how to navigate power structures is not a proposal to teach them how to assimilate into White, dominant spaces. One criticism of academic discourse in K-12 and postsecondary settings is that it diminishes the power of students' literacy backgrounds, especially their home language practices (Delpit, 1995, 1997; White & Lowenthal, 2011). Rose (1985) argues against deficit-driven concepts of developmental writers' backgrounds that portray them as little more than illiterate. In his critique of academics' notions of underprepared students, Rose (1985) states:

The problem is that the knowledge these students possess is often incomplete and fragmented and is not organized in ways that they can readily use in academic writing situations. But to say this is not to say that their minds are cultural blank slates. (p. 353)

Put another way, students arrive with a social and culturally rich history and knowledge base that is undervalued in academic settings, but they have a wealth of knowledge and experience that can be drawn from. Rather than teaching students to assimilate, the emphasis should be teaching them to learn to move in between spaces with knowledge and confidence, or how to effectively codeswitch.

Codeswitching is “innovative, inevitably changeable, exploratory, and flexible...It is also a socially binding act, a kind of linguistic glue, and at the same time a method of breaking barriers reducing distance, opening lines of communication” (Kells, 2004, p. 36). Guerra (2004) echoes a similar type of engagement which he terms “transcultural repositioning,” or “shape shifting in cultural, linguistic, and intellectual terms” (p. 15). What is useful about Guerra's (2004) definition in particular is that codeswitching here is not just about the use of conversational language; it is also about participating and engaging with others in a variety of spaces. Rather than simply codeswitching between English and Spanish, faculty can teach students how to codeswitch between various discourses (e.g., in their homes, in the classroom, in the workplace) by teaching students how to move between discourses and contexts. Put another way, a faculty member can build on *all* of a students' literacies (reading, speaking, listening, and writing) and discourses across contexts rather than focusing on and privileging academic discourse. The basis of this holistic approach is to help students gain confidence as

capable, confident college students who can coexist as Latinx in a predominantly White space and overcome the challenges of balancing the multiple demands of home and school.

This type of teaching must also be reinforced with the course materials students ultimately read and write on. One of the best programs to model a developmental writing program with a Latinx Studies curriculum is the Puente Program in California community colleges. The program was specifically developed in the 1980s to address the observed lack of success of Latinx students in developmental writing in particular (McGrath & Galaviz, 1996). For over three decades, the program has incorporated a curriculum with Latinx writers and an intentionality for “validating” (Rendón, 1994) and affirming students’ rich cultural backgrounds. The research on Ethnic Studies programs has also demonstrated the powerful responses students have when exposed to content that affirms their cultural background (e.g., Núñez, 2011b; Sleeter, 2011).

One final issue that has not yet been fully developed in the literature in building a culturally responsive curriculum for Latinx developmental writers is the place of Spanish in the classroom and in student writing. In the K-12 sector, the growth of the Latinx student population has spurred a growth in dual language programs that provide classroom instruction in English and Spanish (Alanís & Rodriguez, 2008). However, Latinx students in college receive no such instruction in college. Villanueva (2011) argues that teaching academic discourse does not adequately serve the needs of students of color who are learning how to express themselves and their experiences. Villanueva (2011) blends different genres, including narrative and poetry, in his own academic writing and argues that *memoria* invites students to take part in their own writing. The argument here is that academic discourse, in short, stamps out the ethos of students’ writing, and Villanueva (2011) advocates bringing it back to students through the use of their own histories. Exploring the relationship between discourses and in helping students understand their dynamics and how to blend them may lead to transformative teaching practices for faculty and writing skills for students. This blending demonstrates that there is beauty and power in a writer’s expression across languages, and by untethering expectations away from the Four C’s (Yancey, 2004), the door is open for enabling students to shape shift in the academy. This type of teaching also builds students’ linguistic capital, or their ability to communicate in more than one method or style (Yosso, 2005).

## Recommendations and Conclusions

Since the subject of Latinx developmental writers is underdeveloped, more classroom-based research should be done to capture successful practices in helping students move from developmental education to college-level courses. Many of the practices suggested in this piece, such as the multicultural developmental education model (Bruch et al., 2004), have been described in journal articles as theoretical suggestions, yet empirical pieces describing the execution of these models and exploring their effectiveness is non-existent. It is time to put research into practice.

As a matter of institutional and classroom practice, more action needs to be taken to fully understand the relationship between English as a Second Language (ESL) and developmental writing (and reading) in order to serve the part of the Latinx population who could benefit from these services. Previous research suggests that English Language Learners may have additional obstacles put in front of them as they enter community colleges (Bunch & Panayotova, 2008; Razfar & Simon, 2011), and institutional placement policies should carefully consider how students are assigned to ESL courses and/or developmental writing courses. As more Latinx students enter postsecondary education, it is also advantageous for faculty in writing and reading to obtain professional development related to supporting students' literacy development in both English and Spanish. Two-year and four-year institutions do more to hire faculty of color, especially faculty who are fluent in Spanish, who can serve as visible examples of former college students who successfully navigated through the academic world. Having faculty who are fluent in Spanish also enables the respective faculty members to teach the blending of languages in writing, when such blending is appropriately used, and to affirm the power of being bilingual.

As more Latinx students enter postsecondary institutions, it is crucial that we as a field (researchers, administrators, and campus agents) promote their holistic success, especially in critical points like developmental education, which can promote or hinder progress. Through employing culturally responsive practices that invite students to engage in academic discourse as full participants without asking them to sacrifice their identities, we have the chance to positively shape the experiences of a large sector of the Latinx student population.

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**Mexican and Mexican American Student Reflections on Transfer: Institutional Agents and the Continued Role of the Community College**

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**Abstract**

This qualitative analysis draws upon the experiences of six Mexican and Mexican American community college transfer students during the 2012-2013 academic year. Relying on literature regarding institutional agents, we examine students' reflections regarding pre- and post-transfer support from both institutional agents and structured student programs. We provide descriptive information about participation in key student support programs such as CAMP and TRiO SSS, which provided many students with introductions to institutional agents. A combination of programmatic support and guidance from individuals who acted as institutional agents assisted students in this study throughout the transfer process. Overall, individuals employed by the community college played key roles in the lives of Mexican and Mexican American community college transfer students pre- and post-transfer.

**Keywords:** community college transfer, Mexican and Mexican American transfer students, student support programs, institutional agents

## Introduction

Issues on persistence, retention, and completion rates for Latinx<sup>1</sup> transfer students in higher education continue to garner the attention of researchers, practitioners, and university leaders. This student population faces tremendous challenges in the pursuit of a bachelor's degree. Research indicates Latinx students earn fewer baccalaureate degrees than their white peers despite desires to persist (Melguizo, 2009), and vertical transfer (e.g. transfer from a community college to a four-year university) rates continue to lag behind white students (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014). In what Nuñez and Elizondo (2013) refer to as the *Latino/a Transfer Gap*, Latinx community college transfer students remain underrepresented at four-year universities despite their expressed intentions to transfer and complete degrees. The vast majority of Latinx community college students enter with intentions to transfer (Martinez & Fernández, 2004); yet, only about 35% complete a degree or certificate and/or transfer to a four-year university (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014). Critical research shows that Latinx transfer students can face disproportionate bias in the vertical transfer process, preventing full participation in college life and ultimately, completion. Such challenges include—but are not limited to—incidents of racism and systemic racism (Castro & Cortez, 2017; Franklin, Smith, & Hung, 2014; Reynolds, Sneva, & Beehler, 2010), language discrimination and perceptions of limited English language proficiency (Alexander, Garcia, Gonzalez, Grimes, & O' Brien, 2007), and potential anxiety and fear related to documentation status (Huber & Malagon, 2007; Stebleton & Aleixo, 2015).

Yet, despite systemic and institutional challenges, Latinx community college transfer students can and do persist. Like all postsecondary students, Latinx community college transfer students benefit from support, caring, and validation from institutional agents who can further support their educational experiences (Dowd, Pak, & Bensimon, 2013; Rendón, 2002). Dowd et

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<sup>1</sup> Our use of Latinx is an attempt at inclusivity and recognition of the non-binary, trans\*, and fluid nature of gender—as well as the continuous development of language and linguistic choices. We wish to note that the use of x is not a settled debate and draws ongoing discussion in the field of critical ethnic studies, gender studies, and contemporary publics, among other outlets. Our own understandings regarding the use of x continue to evolve. Yet, we feel it important to use the x in this moment to keep attention toward gender, gendering, and more expansive and accurate notions of genders and gender identities. As we stated in previous work, this term refers to “female, male, transgender, gender queer, and gender nonconforming individuals who racially, ethnically, and/or culturally identify as descendants of Latin Americas—including South and Central America as well as colonized and borderized territories of North America” (Castro & Cortez, 2017, p. 1). Unless we are directly citing a primary source, we use Latinx throughout. For more on this evolving discussion and the politics (and tensions) regarding linguistic choices, see: de Onís, C. M. (2017). What's in an 'x': An exchange about the politics of 'Latinx.' *Chiricú Journal: Latino/a Literatures, Arts, and Cultures*, 1(2), 78-91.

al.'s (2013) research documents how transfer agents or transfer champions, individuals who assist Latinx students with understanding and navigating academic and bureaucratic processes related to successful transfer, play a key role in guidance, mentorship, and advocacy. Often times, Latinx community college students come into contact with transfer agents through their participation in structured student support programs at either or both the sending or receiving institution. Participation in select student support programs, such as programming with organized interactions among faculty, academic advisers, and peers, is correlated with increased student success and intentions to persist among Latinx students (Tovar, 2015). Structured support programs can provide direct and consistent access to academic advisors and counselors who are heavily and personally invested in the success of their students. These programs can provide both formal and informal supports, including mentoring, access to resources, and various programming efforts to students who come from low-income backgrounds, are first-generation, are migrant, and/or have disabilities (Mahoney, 1998; Museus, 2010). Indeed, student support programs continue to be a crucial component of postsecondary success among Latinx community college transfer students (Jain, Lucero, Bernal, Herrera, & Solorzano, 2017).

The present study contributes to these scholarly conversations in two important ways. First, drawing from previous qualitative research (Cortez, 2013), this analysis focuses on the experiences of Mexican and Mexican American community college transfer students who successfully transferred to a four-year university. Secondly, this study specifically examines students' perceptions and understanding of student support programs accessed through the transfer process. Thus, this study addresses the following research question:

- In what ways do Mexican and Mexican American community college transfer students reflect upon their experiences with pre- and post-transfer support?

In sharing their experiences, students elevated both programmatic and individual support in their transfer processes, of which we expand upon and analyze in this study.

### **Literature Review**

Successfully navigating four-year institutions can be challenging for many community college transfer students. Community college transfer students may require additional and different kinds of support given their experiences (Townsend & Wilson, 2006)—this is

particularly true for community college transfer students of Color attending Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) (Bensimon & Dowd 2009; Dowd et al., 2013; Museus & Neville, 2012). Museus (2010) and Museus and Neville (2012) point out the importance of institutional agents in providing access to dominant forms of social capital for students of Color to ensure their success at PWIs. For example, among the findings in Museus's (2010) study, he identified the importance of institutional agents in providing students of Color with access to forms of dominant social capital needed to achieve their academic goals, similar to Dowd et al.'s (2013) discussion of transfer agents and transfer champions. In this sense, dominant social capital encompasses the types of benefits accrued by individuals who participate in networks or groups and utilize acquired benefits as sources to gain other benefits (Bourdieu, 1985). In the case of transfer students, they can experience limited or no access to dominant capital which include access to accurate and timely information, connections with knowledgeable and helpful individuals on campus, understanding the availability of and how to utilize campus resources—including scholarship and funding opportunities, among related institutional connections that are crucial to successfully navigate their institution. Support provided by social agents is not a one-time encounter, as Museus (2010) points out, but an on-going relationship or a number of relationships throughout students' educational trajectories at the university. In sum, institutional agents are more than solely academic advisors or counselors in that they work to understand and empathize with students' life situations and show this through demonstrating care and trust. Committed to student success, institutional agents are part of a larger network at the university, and beyond, and they use this network to address students' needs and connect them with others within their networks.

Research on institutional agents serves to elevate the role that institutions play in facilitating and/or limiting student success, and particularly minoritized student success. Turning toward institutional agents also helps to understand how actors within the university interact with and influence students' engagements with and perceptions of higher education. For community college transfer students, making connections with institutional agents can prove challenging during the transfer process (Bensimon, & Dowd, 2009; Fry, 2002). Structured student support programs, including federal, state, and locally funded projects, can facilitate connections among incoming students and individuals at the college and university committed to their success. For Latinx community college transfer students, having access to transfer

agents early in the transfer process is essential for decisions regarding how and where to transfer, as well as having the necessary information and materials to do so (Bensimon & Dowd, 2009; Dowd et al., 2013). Latinx students often have limited access to necessary information regarding transfer, which contributes to lower transfer and completion rates in general, as well as persistent underrepresentation at selective receiving institutions (Bensimon & Dowd, 2009).

The post-transfer experiences of Latinx transfer students at the receiving institution are also mitigated by access to supportive, caring, and well informed institutional agents (Dowd et al., 2013). In research conducted by Dowd, Pak, and Bensimon's (2013), many of their community college transfer participants had consistent support from institutional agents, including program directors, university administrators, faculty, among others, who had high levels of authority at both the sending and receiving institutions. In their study, institutional agents provided students with mentorship that reassured their academic goals at both institutions, and more so at sending institutions—community colleges. Their participants did not have positive guidance early in their educational trajectories and all shared how crucial their connection to institutional agents was for them to realize their potential and become successful transfer students.

The above research demonstrates that for Latinx community college transfer students, connection with institutional agents can positively aid in realizing educational goals regarding transfer and completion. Yet, we continue to know little regarding how Latinx community college transfer students connect with and perceive institutional agents, as well as where institutional agents are located within the institution. Knowing such information can assist in correcting contemporary disparities in vertical transfer—that is, the Latino Transfer Gap—as it can provide insight into if and how Latinx students connect with institutional actors at the sending and/or receiving institutions.

### **Theoretical Framing: Institutional Agents, Social Capital, and Validation**

In this study we draw on the concept of institutional agents as conceptual framing for the present analysis (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). The concept of institutional agents was developed in a secondary education context with high school Mexican youth, and we connect the importance of institutional agents in the validation of transfer students as conceptualized by Rendón (1994). In addition, social capital is linked to the conceptualization of institutional

agents in that students benefit from connecting with and accessing institutional agents' social capital that supports their education endeavours. In this sense, we provide a critique of the deficit thinking that renders minoritized students as having no or low social capital by acknowledging Yosso's (2005) conceptualization of Community Cultural Wealth.

Stanton-Salazar's (2011) study focused on minoritized youth who he argued have "low-capital", meaning, a limited access to and knowledge about crucial resources (p. 1067). Stanton-Salazar (2011) stated that resources and key forms of social support are embedded in students' immediate network and can be accessible through nonfamily adult agents with authority, which he refers to as institutional agents. Like all students, minoritized students are part of a series of socialized processes and, as such, they engage with multiple individuals, groups, networks, and authority figures. Taken together, students are part of a "complex social world" and learning to navigate these networks are crucial for students' effective participation in society and societal institutions like higher education (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, p. 1067). Because of entrenched structural inequities, students of Color and other minoritized students throughout all levels of education are often excluded from learning about and engaging with dominant forms of social capital in meaningful and fulfilling ways. From this perspective, Stanton-Salazar (2011) argues that minoritized youth consequently have limited social capital that can provide them with the necessary tools, support, language, and understanding of enactment of specific social identities that can prove beneficial in educational spaces.

Yosso's (2005) conceptualization of community cultural wealth is important to recognize here, given an emphasis on capital as it relates to institutional agents. According to Yosso (2005), minoritized students hold different type of social capital or cultural wealth that helps them navigate dominant environments. Often their cultural wealth goes unnoticed by school representatives who value dominant conceptualization of social capital (i.e., socioeconomic status and parents' education background) over other forms of capital (Yosso, 2005). In this sense, community cultural wealth derives from the rich experiences students have in their community. Thus, Yosso's (2005) notion of community cultural wealth critiques dominant understandings of cultural capital by illustrating the types of wealth held by minoritized and marginalized students and communities of Color. The problem is that such wealth often goes unrecognized and/or devalued within PWIs, potentially leading to the development of compensatory programs rooted in deficit perspectives of students of Color



(Castro, 2014). Contrary to employing educational deficit thinking (Valencia, 2010), Yosso (2005) argues that Latinx students can enact six forms of capital, including aspirational, familial, linguistic, social, navigational, and resistance. An emphasis on institutional agents as an analytic framework aligns with Yosso's (2005) research in that institutional agents can and should recognize the multiple forms of wealth held on behalf of students and communities of Color (Dowd et al., 2013).

Stanton-Salazar (2011) notes that institutional agents are non-kin individuals who can play empowering roles in the educational experiences of minoritized students. Institutional agents use their high-status positions (i.e., administration, faculty, staff, counselors, etc.) in ways to strategically support students to enable them to effectively navigate their immediate environment. Rendón's (1994, 2006) concept of validation theory is useful in understanding the influence that individuals can have on the educational experiences of Latinx students. Rendón (1994) notes that "validation is an enabling, confirming and supportive process initiated by in- and out-of-class agents that fosters academic and interpersonal development" for students and mainly Latinx transfer students (p. 44). Rendón (2006) contends that while some students can navigate college campuses and form connections on their own, validation theory asks that college faculty, administrators, and staff take the initiative in reaching out to students to assist them in learning "more about college, believe in themselves as learners, and have a positive college experience" (p. 5). When individuals took the initiative to reach out to students and validate them academically and/or interpersonally, Rendón (1994) found that students began to believe that they could be successful. Indeed, support from institutional agents can help to empower students so that they can understand and learn to counter oppressive systems (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). In this sense, institutional agents can play key roles in the socialization and empowerment of minoritized students in higher education.

### **Methodology**

The data used in this analysis are drawn from a larger qualitative study conducted in 2013 that examined the transfer related experiences of Mexican and Mexican American community college transfer students in the Pacific Northwest during the 2012-2013 academic year (Cortez, 2013). The primary study used LatCrit (Alemán, 2009) to analyze students' understanding of their pre- and post-transfer experiences, and interview protocol was designed

to elicit both students' experiences with accessing support programs pre- and post-transfer and their racialized experiences as a community college transfer student of Color. This current study draws from data collected from two main interview constructs: a) student access to support programs during the transfer process; and b) formal and informal support received from institutional agents at both the sending and/or receiving institution.

## Participants

A total of six Mexican or Mexican American students, three who identified as women and three who identified as men, participated in this study between 2012 and 2013 (See Table I; pseudonyms used). All participants transferred from the same two-year institution to the same four-year university and identified as either Mexican or Mexican American. Five of the students were the first in their families to attend college and earn a high school diploma, with the remaining student earning a General Educational Development diploma. Academic major at the receiving institution is included in Table I for further context.

Table I

*Participant Demographic Information*

Name	Age	Sex	Race/Ethnicity	College Generation Status	Secondary Credential	Major
Laura	21	Female	Mexican American	1 <sup>st</sup> generation	High School Diploma	Animal Science
Blanca	22	Female	Mexican	1 <sup>st</sup> generation	High School Diploma	General Science
Jorge	21	Male	Mexican	1 <sup>st</sup> generation	High School Diploma	Computer Science
Alex	35	Male	Mexican American	1 <sup>st</sup> generation	GED	Ethnic Studies
Ruby	21	Female	Mexican	1 <sup>st</sup> generation	High School Diploma	Geography
Saul	29	Male	Mexican American	Father college graduate	High School Diploma	Ethnic Studies

Potential participants were recruited via email solicitation. Emails were sent to Latinx student organizations, advisors from academic colleges on campus, and student support programs aimed at serving first-generation and low-income students at the receiving institution. Snowball sampling (Merriam, 2009) was used to recruit additional eligible students. Eligibility was based on two inclusion criteria; first, students needed to self-identify as Mexican and/or Mexican American and, second, potential participants must have attended at least one academic year at the community college prior to transfer *and* completed at least one academic year at the receiving institution.

### **Limitations**

Due to the previous study design, there are two important limitations to address in this analysis. First, only one author conducted interviews; thus, data interpretation may have been enhanced with the presence of both authors during interviews and peer-debriefing sessions. Second, the original study was designed to elicit the experiences that students had with both institutional agents and structured student support programs. However, the protocol was not designed to probe further into the meaning-making students had with individuals and programs. Our current analysis could have been enhanced by asking additional questions regarding students' perceptions of support programs and institutional agents. Future research may want to examine the perceived long impact of these programs and institutional agents on behalf of participants.

### **Analysis: Student Support Throughout Transfer and Transition Processes**

The lived experiences of students in this study were heavily influenced by the institutional and informal support they received throughout the transfer processes. The following section is divided into two parts: student participation in support programs and the role of institutional agents in students' educational trajectories. Discussion and implications follow, with concluding recommendations for policy, research, and practice.

## Participation in Support Programs Pre- and Post-Transfer

Five of the six students in this study participated in institutionally supported programs that assisted undergraduate students with academic and social integration of college life. Two of three programs, the College Assistant Migrant Program (CAMP) and TRiO Student Support Services (SSS), were utilized by students at the community college. Students utilized the third program, the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), at the university. The only student not to use any formal academic support program was Saul and this was likely due to a combination of factors, including his age, his formerly incarcerated status, and his personal relationship with a graduate student who assisted him in navigating the admissions and transfer process at the receiving institution.

The institutional support that students obtained dramatically differed between sending and receiving institutions, as illustrated in Table 2. Laura, Blanca, Jorge, and Ruby all participated in CAMP at the community college. CAMP is a federally funded program that aims to support migrant or seasonal farmworkers and their children during their first year of higher education. CAMP participants must meet migrant or seasonal farmworker criteria and apply to the program. Support offered through CAMP includes academic counseling, tutoring, financial stipends, and health services, among other related services (U.S. Department of Education, 2017a). Because CAMP is a federally funded government program, only U.S. citizens are able to participate in the program.

Table 2

*Participants' Access to Support Programs Pre- and Post-Transfer*

Name	Community College		University		
	CAMP	TRiO	CAMP	TRiO SSS	EOP
Laura	X	X			X
Blanca	X				X
Jorge	X				
Alex		X			X
Ruby	X				X
Saul					

Two students, Laura and Alex, utilized TRiO SSS while enrolled at the community college. Like CAMP, TRiO SSS is a federally funded program designed to academically support first-generation students, low-income students, and students with disabilities while enrolled in

postsecondary education. TRiO SSS participants must meet the aforementioned criteria, apply, and participate in a screening process. TRiO SSS is focused on academically supporting students through degree completion (U.S. Department of Education, 2017b). Like CAMP, only U.S. citizens are eligible to participate in the program.

EOP programs vary in shape and size across the country and depending on the institution, non-U.S. citizens may be eligible. In general, EOP seeks to support low-income, first-generation, and students of Color at four-year institutions. Services vary depending on institutional commitment, but in general, EOP aims to provide students with academic and financial advice, study skills, and scholarships to ensure their success in college (Berkley, n.d.).

Once enrolled at the receiving institution, students in our study did not continue to participate in TRiO SSS or CAMP. Because CAMP is a first-year program, the students in this sample exhausted their eligibility at the community college prior to transfer and so their lack of formal involvement with CAMP at the university made sense. However, all of the students in this sample were eligible for services through TRiO SSS at the receiving institution but did not apply nor participate. Our research did not examine the reasons why students chose not to apply for TRiO SSS at the receiving institution, but we speculate that limits on program capacity, such as the number of students allowed to enroll and the number of support staff available, influence transfer students' ability to participate in these programs. Institutional programming, staff, and culture among receiving institutions vary, as do services between different institutional types, which can also influence students' ability and desire to participate in support programming.

Three of the five students who received formal services at the community college during their first-year post-transfer enrolled in EOP at the university: Blanca, Alex, and Ruby. Laura also participated in EOP but did not enroll until her second-year post-transfer. When asked to describe the kind of support that students received at the university, the four students referenced formal involvement with EOP at the university. However, all participants, including those receiving services from EOP, mentioned their continued connections with CAMP at the community college. With the exception of Saul, all of the students in this sample participated in institutionally-sponsored support programs geared toward serving underrepresented and underserved students, with the overwhelming majority of that support coming from the community college.

### Institutional Agents: The Continued Role of the Sending Institution

When asked to describe the kinds of support that students received during the transfer process, all students referred to at least one individual who played a key role in their decision to and ability to transfer. With the exception of two students, the *sending* institution employed all individuals who supported students in their transfer process, and who we identify as acting as institutional agents (see Table 3). This finding is perhaps a bit surprising, and unfortunately, wholly insufficient. While Dowd et al.'s (2013) research found that community college transfer students had individuals who acted as transfer agents at both the sending and receiving institutions, only two of the students in this sample identified someone at the university who was integral to their transfer success.

Table 3

#### *Institutional Agents Pre- and Post-Transfer\**

Name	At the Community College	At the University
Laura	Director of Student Services	
Blanca	CAMP Counselor	
Jorge	CAMP Counselor	CAMP Counselor
Alex	TRiO SSS advisor	Academic Counselor
Ruby		Academic Advisor
Saul	Faculty Member	

\*Table design borrowed from Dowd et al. (2013). The role of institutional agents in promoting transfer access. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 21(15), 1-38.

Three students mentioned an advisor as important to their ability to successfully understand the university setting. For one student, Ruby, it was an academic advisor at the university who assisted her in navigation. In describing the role of her academic advisor, she focused on the influence the academic advisor had on her ability to be successful at the university. She described that she initially met the woman through a CAMP welcome event and said:

I met a lady, she is an academic advisor from bio research. Really random, I just happened to meet her [at a CAMP event] and she has been more than an academic advisor. She has taken me to the university that I want to go to for

grad school. She got me into a club. She's helping me with my purpose of statement, with scholarships, with applications, like everything and, I mean, I'm not even from her department. I just happened to meet her and like within 20 minutes, probably, I introduced myself, and she said "sure come to my office and the we can talk" and then she brought me papers from different schools... you should apply here, there, over there, and here.

Ruby met the woman whom she refers to as an "academic advisor" through her participation in CAMP at the community college. It is important to point out that this person is not Ruby's official academic advisor but rather an advisor from a different department who is taking on a supportive and mentoring role for Ruby. In further describing their relationship, Ruby refers to this academic advisor as an "angel" who has reached out to help her:

In the way, she appeared into my life, it's kind of like an angel because it was random like nothing. And then now, she takes the time, I mean, to the point that she helps me like even say the words that I need to say, the words that I need to write.

It is clear that Ruby's self-described academic advisor is taking on a mentorship role outside of her required responsibilities and these kinds of activities align with the aims and actions of institutional agents. The fact that Ruby is not in the same department as her academic advisor is striking, particularly given the workload and responsibilities academic advisors have to their home departments. It is also worth asking if and to what extent Ruby's experiences might be different if she were being mentored from someone in her academic discipline.

Blanca's experience with a financial aid advisor who assisted in her transfer is similar to Ruby's. Blanca described a Latina financial aid advisor from CAMP that guided her during her transition to the receiving institution. The advisor not only helped her apply to the receiving institution, but also introduced her to EOP and visited her after enrolling in the receiving institution. Blanca explains:

The financial advisor (from CAMP) came to [name of receiving institution]. She did help me with the process of applying and making sure everything was right. But she came a couple of times after I transferred just to make sure I was ok.

She was the one that introduced me to EOP and some resources at [name of receiving institution].

The support from this institutional agent extended beyond the community college, and her basic job obligations associated with being a financial aid counselor at the community college. Because of the support provided by this advisor, Blanca was able to access additional resources such as EOP and the Academic Student Center that helped her balance school work.

Alex also identified an academic advisor at the university in addition to an academic counselor at the community college as pivotal in his ability to transfer and persist. Alex held reservations about his ability to access and be successful in higher education. When asked if there was someone who helped him during the transfer process, he first mentioned his TRiO SSS advisor at the community college:

Oh yeah, my [TRiO SSS] advisor. She helped me the most. She was always there and making appointments with me. I mean, she would actually leave the [campus tour] group to go to my appointments at the university because she was a little more savvy, I guess. She would walk with me to all my appointments, sit down, and ask questions. I felt like she knew more of the questions than I knew, and so she knew me better than I knew myself, or the questions I should have asked.

In expanding, Alex elaborates on what he sees as one of the major components of support that he received from his TRiO SSS advisor while enrolled at the university, which is caring:

The first few terms that I went there [university], I passed my first term and then the second and third term, I failed. She actually wrote me a letter, you know, because I was having personal problems. She really connected with me. She really showed me that she cared, and then I go into another class and found more people that cared... And having that type of support is what gave me the strength to keep going; hey keep trying, keep trying, there are people here that like you, there are people here trying to help you out, so try not to let them down.



Alex's TRiO SSS advisor at the community college played an essential role in his ability to persist at the receiving institution, in large part because of what he describes as caring and motivation. When Alex was placed on academic probation, his TRiO SSS advisor supported his appeal by being his advocate and, as he emphasized, by being someone in his life who cares. Her caring guidance allowed for him to identify other individuals at the receiving institution who cared for him, one person being his academic counselor.

The support received by students in the form of individuals who act as institutional agents is rooted in the community college. For Saul, a 29-year-old high school graduate who was also formerly incarcerated, a faculty member was critical in his decision to transfer to the university as well as his growing ethno-racial identity development. In describing the significant factors related to his decision to transfer, Saul explained how one faculty member inspired an awakening in him to a larger racialized political consciousness—which assisted in his desires and abilities to persist:

It wasn't until, I think it was maybe halfway towards my sophomore year when I took Chicano studies with [Faculty Member] when I really had an awaking. For once, I was kind of wow, you know, ethnic studies is something I found interesting and [Faculty Member] is somebody who challenged me. He made me think critically ... and more so [he] acknowledged me as a scholar. He would even call me Dr. [last name], you know. And for somebody to believe that, I know it was kind of like, it wasn't that I was a doctor but it was something to help me visualize by me hearing it, to actually start thinking—wow being a doctor is actually a possibility.

The kind of role that this faculty member played in Saul's life might be broadly described as inspirational or motivational. For Saul, his Chicano Studies faculty member acted as an institutional agent who empowered him by helping him to overcome learned stereotypes and negative perceptions of himself, expanding his vision of what is possible.

In describing individuals relevant in his transfer experience, Jorge's spoke of a CAMP adviser at the community college who guided him in fulfilling his transfer requirements. This advisor also connected him to CAMP at the receiving institution where he met CAMP advisors who supported him after transferring. Jorge explains:

There were a lot of people helping me out. I got into contact with the CAMP office from here [receiving institution] and they [academic advisors] were the ones actually trying to help me get everything I needed, such as my email set up and all that stuff. They also took time to advise me a little bit... Like how to go through the [name of receiving institution] registration system, and where to find what classes I needed to take in order to be in good standing.

The only participant that did not express having a key institutional agent supporting her post-transfer was Laura. However, she acknowledged that her TRIO advisor at the community college provided her with consistent support throughout the transfer process. After transferring to the receiving institution, Laura saw herself as academically positioned well and therefore she did not need extra support during her first year at the receiving institution. However, Laura did access EOP during her second-year post-transfer.

### **Discussion and Implications**

Overall, individuals employed by the community college played key roles in the lives of Mexican and Mexican American community college transfer students pre- and post-transfer. Without his advisor at the community college, it is likely that Alex would have faced challenges in identifying someone who was familiar with the university appeal process and who could have written him a strong letter of support. Ruby's reference to the faculty member as an "angel" is striking as she describes meeting the advisor as a chance encounter and her description indicates that she feels quite grateful for this person. Without her advisor's help, Blanca may have experienced challenges finding and accessing support programs and similarly, Jorge might have taken longer to adjust to the receiving institution's bureaucratic structures if he did not have access to CAMP advisors who helped facilitate his orientation to the bureaucracy of the university. Saul's discussion of the Chicano Studies faculty member speaks to the importance of encouragement and empowerment on behalf of institutional agents. A key aspect of institutional agents is their commitment to empowerment (Stanton-Salazar, 2011) and this stems, not from a savior mentality, but from an understanding of the ways minoritized students are positioned in disadvantageous ways within educational institutions (Valencia, 2010). Saul received what Rendón (1994) might refer to as validation from his relationship with the Chicano Studies

faculty member and it made a lasting difference in his ability to imagine himself pursuing a Ph.D. Institutional agents who are committed to empowerment are critically important for Latinx students who are socialized in a society structured by institutional racism. As a consequence, students of Color are at-risk of internalizing dominant ideas and assumptions about their potential, ability, and worth and students must be provided structured spaces to unlearn these falsehoods.

The kinds of support and guidance identified in this analysis are not easily categorized as they cover a spectrum of personal, socio-emotional, and procedural support. Many of the individuals who act as institutional agents share a Latinx ethno-racial identity with the students, which is important. As members of a marginalized population, students understood these individuals as not simply people who “cared,” but as people who provided access and navigational guidance to institutional structures and bureaucracies. However, it is also necessary to recognize that while representation is important, it should not be the burden of people of Color to solely serve as institutional agents. All faculty, staff, administrators, and institutional leaders need to build capacities for becoming transfer champions (Dowd et al., 2013) for community college transfer students of Color.

While the students in this study benefitted from a combination of programmatic support and individuals who acted as institutional agents in assisting them throughout the transfer process, it is clear that the majority of support is coming from the community college. Several of our participants noted that their previous academic advisor, employed by the structured student support program at the community college, continued to provide crucial support post-transfer. There are a couple dominant ways to interpret this disparity, one being a lack of support at the receiving institution. Indeed, it may be inferred that our participants did not have access to similar institutional agents at the receiving institution, therefore indicating that the receiving institution was not adequately supporting students (e.g., Jain, Herrera, Bernal & Solorzano, 2011). However, our data cannot specifically speak to this interpretation as the original study was not designed to address the reasons why students may not have connected with an institutional agent at the receiving institution. Future research may want to explore if and when Mexican and Mexican American community college transfer students connect with institutional agents during post-transfer and the mechanisms they use to do so.

Another way to interpret the difference in institutional agents between the sending and receiving institution is related to institutional mission. Relationships are important and simply because institutional agents are at the community college—individuals who have shown strong commitments to supporting students post-transfer, is not a negative thing. Rather, we see the continuity and continued development of these relationships as positive. It could be inferred that institutional agents from the community college are fulfilling the mission of the community college, working with students throughout the entire transfer process. Thus, it makes sense that we would find more institutional agents associated with the community college than with the receiving institution. The disparity may not necessarily be negative in this regard, but given that two-year schools generally have less funding and resources, it would behoove receiving institutions to better understand these relationships and their responsibility in ensuring pathways to completion for Latinx students. Future research should examine the continued role of institutional agents at the community college in the educational trajectories of Latinx students post-transfer and document the specific ways such agents do their work, how they understand the scope of their work—and, importantly, the kinds of formalized connections they have with (if any) the receiving institution.

### **Conclusion**

As four-year institutions continue to develop support programs for transfer students, it is important for student and academic affairs professionals to create formalized spaces where Latinx transfer students have access to institutional agents. It is also equally important to ensure that Latinx students develop relationships with faculty members early in the transfer process to ensure they have access to the information needed to successfully navigate the receiving institutions' academic and social environments. In addition, four-year universities need to understand the relationships community college transfer students have with institutional agents at sending institutions as well as collaborate with these schools to better support Latinx student transfer. Future research would be wise to further explore these relationships, both from the perspectives of students and agents—as well as from organizational viewpoints.

Mexican and Mexican American students in this study underscore the importance of student support services at both sending and receiving institutions, and point to the need for both sets of services to work in coordination with one another. For the students in this study,

it is important to note that they continued to rely upon support structures at the sending institution throughout their enrollment at the receiving institution, pointing to an opportunity for institutional collaboration. It is also equally important to note that the majority of students in this study were able to have access to institutional agents through their involvement in student support programs. The absence of these services can make it challenging to access the social capital needed to transfer and navigate the receiving institution.

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**Latinx and the Community College: Promoting Pathways to  
Postsecondary Degrees**

**Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley<sup>1</sup>**

**at the Latino Education and Advocacy Days, LEAD Summit VIII**

**Chancellor Ortiz Oakley:** I'm just going to take a few minutes to talk about what's on your mind and what's on my mind and that is Latino education, Latino student success, and then I welcome the opportunity to hear from our panelist and to answer any questions that they might have. You all understand the statistics, there's no point in me sitting here telling you and walking you through all the depressing statistics that we already know clearly exist, but as was mentioned, the California Community College system is the largest system of public higher education in the nation and in being so, opens the door to the majority of Latinos into higher education and that is a privilege that we have, and it's also a responsibility that our community colleges have and it's a responsibility that we're going to be talking a lot about over the next several years.

My good friend Sarita Brown who oversees an organization called *Excelencia* in Education, we talk a lot about this issue of Latino student success. You have institutions like the one I previously had the opportunity to lead, Long Beach City College or Cal State San Bernardino or hundreds of colleges and universities throughout the county which are now designated Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI) by the federal government through the Department of Education. And you become a Hispanic-Serving Institution by serving a large majority of Latinos. But that's really the only qualifications a Hispanic-Serving Institution has in order to be designated one. So we've been talking a lot about changing that dynamic and this is a roundabout to getting to my point, we need to become a Hispanic Graduating Institutions, not just Hispanic-Serving Institutions.

We need to give our young people credentials. So, certainly in our 113<sup>2</sup> colleges many of which are Hispanic-Serving Institutions, we want to ensure that the responsibility lies within each and every one of our colleges to become Hispanic Graduating Institutions or African

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<sup>1</sup> Reflects Q&A portion with Chancellor Oakley only. For video and complete panel presentation visit LEAD website.

<sup>2</sup> Number has since increased to 114 community colleges.

American Graduating Institutions, or Pacific Islander Graduating Institutions. We need to ensure that more young people, more working class adults, more people, more Californians have access to not just a quality education, but leave with a quality credential in their hand because what we know today, clearly week after week we can pick up the paper and read another study that says, clearly the gap between those with the high school education and those with a college credential continues to increase and as such we see a widening gap. This last presidential election showed us a lot, and in some cases showed us too much, but it did show us a lot. But what I want to focus on is the issue of more and more Californians, more and more Americans becoming disconnected from the economy, because at the end of the day it's all about the economy and the opportunity to engage in the economy in a meaningful way. And a high school diploma just doesn't get our kids there, our working age adults there any longer. So we have an imperative, you already know we have a crisis and we've tried the moral argument for years and years and years and years and we still are treading water using the moral argument, this is an economic argument.

In order for states like California to succeed, in order for our nation to succeed, we need to embrace every single asset in our community and it's evident that most of those assets are becoming brown, are becoming Black, are becoming Asian and Pacific Islander, we need to embrace all those assets and make sure that we provide them the opportunity for a quality credential. So I appreciate the work that you all are doing in continuing to lead the effort—to focus attention on Latino students. Our state depends on us being successful, our state will not continue as it was or as it should be if we are not successful at putting more quality credentials in the hands of Latino students and I am proud and privileged to have the opportunity to lead our 113 colleges on that journey and it's a journey that cannot take 5-15 years, it's a journey that has to take 1, 2, 3 years, we need to make progress today. We need to embrace the urgency of now; we cannot wait and continue to wait until tomorrow. So I hope that you join me in that journey and support our California Community College system, support the California State University system, which between the two are the workhorse for our economy in California. And our economy in California cannot do the work it needs to do without more Latinos meaningfully participating in the workforce. So we have a lot in front of us, I know you've heard about all of the data, were going to be putting a clear focus on that data and being very intentional about what's going on and very intentional about holding ourselves accountable

for what we need to do. So again I thank you for coming out here and continuing to support this effort and support the effort in all of your communities. We need to do this day in and day out, this can't be about coming to the LEAD conference once a year, it has to be about living the LEAD conference everyday in every single one of our communities and pushing and pushing all of our leaders until we see the results that will give us what we have been looking for and allow California to continue to be the leader that it has been.

**Dr. Nancy Acevedo-Gil:** Latino students have these aspirations to transfer, unfortunately we know that at least 85% of students who are coming into the community college system will be testing into developmental or remedial math and after four years of course work out of 100 students who actually enroll in developmental math, only 17 will complete a transfer level math course. At the institutional level the developmental education system is broken, the basic skills, remedial education whatever terminology you want to use.

Can you share with us your plan for transformative policies to promote equity and justice within the developmental education? While we have these great much needed programs beginning like, multiple measures and acceleration, systematically what measurements or credentials can you propose to address these deficit ideologies of instructors and administrators that, no matter how amazing the policy once it gets to the institutional implementation level it is going to create a barrier for our students and for other amazing leaders within these systems.

**Chancellor Ortiz Oakley:** Well that's the million-dollar question. I will try to give you as succinct an answer as possible because I can probably literally spend all day talking to you about just this question. Because it has many many tentacles, many many reasons, and the conspiracy theorist in me would say that it has been complicated on purpose.

Let me begin with saying clearly that you used a phrase in your question that thousands and thousands of students test in the developmental level and let me focus on the word *test*. It has certainly been my experience when I worked at Long Beach City College and the work I've seen happen across the nation that standardize placement exams are some of the *worst* predictors of college success that exist in our system throughout the country and we need to end the use of standardized placement exams, period. I can tell you that the California

Community Colleges will move in that direction at an accelerating pace. We are looking at ways to create a multiple measures platform that allows every college to use multiple measures whether that be high school transcripts, other information that gives us better information about whether or not a student can be successful in a college level course.

There are a lot of things we need to do to get there. We need to have better data, we need to have greater access to high school transcripts in a real time basis, but the importance of this is tremendous. One because my experience at Long Beach was that, the semester after we implemented a multiple measures framework for all Long Beach Unified students coming to Long Beach City College, we saw a three hundred percent increase in the number of students of color that placed in a college level math. Think about that. No student is transferring without successfully navigating college level or transfer level math, that's just a period, you can put a period at the end of that.

So, when I got to Long Beach City College we literally had success rates of Latino students in college level math, in the single digits. So it's no surprise what's happening on the other end of that funnel, very few students are getting through to the other end. And you can say the same thing about African American students, you can say the same thing about Southeast Asian students, Pacific Islander students, any student who is socio-economically disadvantaged, it's the same story. And you can play this tune across the entire nation. There has been a lot of great work that has been done at the Community College Research Center of Columbia Teachers College, that clearly shows that we need to move away from these standardized placement exams and we are going to do that.

As I'm sure you've heard, there is a bill in the legislature that would allow us to do that even faster, but regardless of bills, we know what needs to be done and we are going to set to work on getting it done. It will take a little bit of time because we have 113 colleges and believe it or not I can't just tell 113 colleges what to do. I have to *slowly* convince them what to do but we're going to speed that up. The other thing that needs to happen is, I mean, if you take a step back, why do we have standardized placement exams? Why? Because faculty don't trust faculty. Community college faculty don't trust high school faculty, Cal State faculty don't trust Community College faculty and the UC faculty doesn't trust anyone, so that is a fundamental problem.

How do we get consistency across all segments of public education to ensure that if somebody graduates from Garfield High or Pacific Palisades or anywhere in the state of California those grades are consistently applied to wherever class they need to be placed in. That's the way it should work, but then we've created all these complicated structures to try and weed out students from this high school or that high school because we don't trust their curriculum at their high school or we don't trust the graduation rates at that high school and the students coming from this high school are much better quality than that high school. That's craziness. Again, that plays the notion that the zip code you're born into will dictate your path in life and we need to end that.

So, things like common core implementation, you know we can beat ourselves over the head a lot about whether we're doing it right, whether we're doing it wrong, whether Local Control Funding Formula is going to get us there, but we need to get behind initiatives that level the playing field and it's going to take time but we've got to get it done. So that's a long term solution, in the short term I know that the Cal State system is also, I heard from Chancellor White that they're looking at their placement exams. I think you're going to see this across the country, more and better ways to assess students ability to succeed and then once we do that, yes we still have a problem with remediation, so we're investing a lot of resources right now to improve our ability to continue to move students forward regardless of where their gaps might exist. We've seen a lot of great practices across the country and we're going to try and accelerate the adoption of those practices right now and hopefully move those students that still need some remedial support an opportunity to do that in a timely manner without having to sit through three semesters before they get to a college level class.

**Dr. Edna Martinez:** Chancellor Oakley, we've talked a little bit about developmental education and a little bit about transfer education. I'm hoping you can talk to us a little bit about the California Community Colleges Baccalaureate Degree Pilot Program. The discourse surrounding the pilot program is very much centered on "meeting state and local workforce needs," but the question being, what does it mean for our students?

Twelve of the 15 pilot sites are Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), and 2 are designated as emerging HSIs, so again what does the pilot program mean for our students? Is it a potential opportunity to increase baccalaureate degree attainment for Latino students?

**Chancellor Ortiz Oakley:** So, the short answer is yes, it is an opportunity to increase baccalaureate attainment; there are some challenges with that construct though. First, the real answer to the challenge is increase capacity at the California State University system. That is the ultimate solution. We are now trying to find ways around the lack of capacity at the Cal State University system and so we are looking at ways to get the Community Colleges to provide access to workforce needs, and that runs contrary to the way that we set up our system in California. We have asked the community colleges to serve many, many missions and now we are asking them to serve another.

My concern is that California Community Colleges are already underfunded, per student funding is some of the worst in the country, and now we are asking them to offer quality, and they will, quality baccalaureate degrees, and I'm sure the legislature is going to think, and no offense to my friends in the legislature, but they are going to think we can do it cheaper in the California community colleges. We don't want cheaper for our students, we want the highest quality for our students, so we have to be careful, we have to be careful if we go down this road that we are not bifurcating paths for, you know the Latino or Black students who can't afford, or can't get access to the Cal State system, they can go get a cheaper bachelors degree. That's not what we want. So I am all for doing everything possible to support the existing pilots, but not without the conversation about what kind of access we need for our students at the CSU and why aren't we funding it and that we will not be the release valve for the legislature when they don't feel that they want to fund the Cal State System anymore and that they believe that we can do it cheaper in the community college system.

So, this is going to be a delicate balance, at the end of the day, yes there are communities in the state that don't have easy access to a Cal State campus, and in those situation, yes, we should be allowing a community college to provide whatever access that community needs, but not because it is a cheaper way of doing it or not because we don't want to fund the Cal State system.

## A Real Tragedy

Martha Rivas

University of California, Riverside

We often assume—

*(We know what that means, no?)*

When we continue to name

oppressive experiences faced

by Latinx community college students,

we are shut down as these “are things of the past.”

After all, Latinx are the largest growing “minority,”

we have studies dating back 10-20-30-40 years.

We assume

We “know” the challenges.

We “know” the barriers.

Yet, as an activist-scholar-administrator in this field,

shit is still real.

Too damn real not to name it.

*Asi que...*

When we shame our students

for not knowing,

not naming,

nor having the terminology

to name

what they aspire to do

at the community college—

it assumes

it assumes

it assumes we do a really good job or

that we do our job

of explaining the purpose of a three-tier college system—

that’s a real tragedy.

Because some folks working in the “system”

are so removed

disconnected

they’ve forgotten

or pretend they don’t know or

they don’t know,

nor care,

don’t care to know,

don't know to care  
 realities experienced in our communities,  
 nor about the historical underpinnings;  
 white supremacist underpinnings  
     that built educational institutions in this country—  
 that's a real tragedy.

Instead,  
 they lash to say how dare we speak?

    Don't speak—not us—  
 How dare we speak?  
     How dare we speak  
 about graduate school  
     or medical school  
     or law school  
     or anything to challenge and change the status quo.

How dare we speak  
     to community college students  
     about these things;  
 these students aren't going ...  
     aren't going...

                                    to make it that far, right?—  
 that's a real tragedy.

Yet we know,  
     we see  
     we hear  
     we feel—

We know the truth.  
     We know our strength.  
     We know their strength.  
     We know their resilience.

When 1 of 4 Chicanas/os Ph.D. scholars  
 produced in 1990-2000 for the entire country,  
     started at the community colleges!<sup>1</sup>

We know our strength,  
     we know the power they be!

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<sup>1</sup> Rivas, Martha A., Jeanette Pérez, Crystal A. Alvarez, and Daniel G. Solórzano. (2007). An Examination of Latina/o Transfer Students in California's Postsecondary Institutions. CSRC Latino Policy and Issues Brief No. 16. Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press.

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When you have to convince folks  
our students are resilient,  
determined,  
beautiful,  
and committed  
to their education,  
their families,  
themselves.  
We have to convince folks  
-Hard-  
because their lenses are fogged  
*tapados*  
with deficit ideologies  
continuing to brainwash folks  
to believe  
and exacerbate the opposite—  
that's a real tragedy.

When we refuse to call it  
white supremacy  
or racism,  
or classism,  
or misogyny,  
or ageism,  
because well, we may not  
have the language to name it  
-or-  
because we are too.damn.comfortable  
too.damn.comfortable  
with our six-figure paychecks—  
that's a real tragedy.

When our students' parents  
may not know what college is about;  
instead of stepping in to engage them,  
we stand quick to point fingers and blame them—  
that's a real tragedy.

Because 60-years in the process  
we finally realize we've been  
marginalizing,  
shackling,

oppressing and  
 neglecting  
 too many,  
     too many,  
         too many;  
 an overwhelming many  
 of our students  
 in not transferring,  
     in not accessing the right courses,  
         in complicating the process,  
 or misplacing them in mismatch courses,  
     relegating and corralling them  
         in remedial courses—  
 that's a real tragedy.

The new response  
     (or magic wand) is  
 a “holistic approach” to place students  
     through MMAP<sup>2</sup>,  
 Yet, it doesn't take into account  
     real accounts—  
         real things,  
         warranted things,  
         systemic things,  
 like the fact  
 MMAP will not replicate the few  
     nor hire critical pedagogues,  
 MMAP will not replicate the few  
     nor hire conscious counselors,  
 MMAP will not replicate the few  
     nor hire radically capable administrators,  
 Because MMAP does not eradicate  
 deficit ideologies,  
     racism,  
     classism,  
     homophobia,  
     xenophobia,  
     or all the ignorance  
 that continue

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<sup>2</sup> Multiple Measures of Assessment and Placement (MMAP).  
<http://rpgroup.org/All-Projects/ctl/ArticleView/mid/1686/articleId/118/Multiple-Measures-Assessment-Project-MMAP>

continue  
continue  
to “cool out”  
marginalize  
dehumanize  
silence  
oppress  
our students  
and their aspirations—  
that’s a real tragedy.

See now,  
Now!  
now it’s time for  
student equity.  
We talk about it.  
We plan for it.  
We meet to talk and plan.  
We plan to talk and meet.  
But folks bluff to understand  
Equity.  
Why would we need a special  
*special initiative?*  
(*everyone listen up*)  
...because there’s tons of funding there  
so  
listen up!  
Plan to meet.  
Meet to plan.  
But nowhere is there assurance  
Folks know what equity means—  
that’s a real tragedy.

When we speak of equity  
we conjure  
we evoke  
we recall  
we remember  
the legacies of struggle,  
legacies of exclusion,  
legacies of sacrifices,  
generations-after-generations-after-generations  
before have endured.

That is pedagogy of memory.  
 That is pedagogy of hope.  
 You see—  
     Equity does not equate diversity.  
 We do not pause to plan  
 to celebrate who is in the room.  
 We have to pause  
     to see  
         to fight  
         to voice  
 to name  
     to acknowledge  
 who is fighting  
 to be in the room.  
     Legacies of exclusion.  
 Legacies of a three-tiered system.  
     Legacies of continued marginalization.  
 Legacies of corralling Students of Color  
         in the perceived bottom sector of higher education.  
 That's a real tragedy.

But the real tragedy is in knowing  
     folks will read this in disagreement.  
 Because then, they too are part of this tragedy  
*Y si les queda el saco, ya saben!*  
 The beauty in this is  
     knowing our students resist!  
 They have,  
     they will.  
 We must, together.  
 There are critical folks that have been there this entire time...  
     voicing,  
         pushing,  
         encouraging,  
         challenging—  
 not often heard  
     often silenced  
         ignored,  
         oppressed,  
         released,  
 killed in their attempt to defend our students.  
 That's a real tragedy.

But just as they've collared

and relegated  
    to oppress—  
We will fight back.  
    We will challenge—  
    we will create systemic changes!  
Rooted in community,  
    nurtured within our own legacies,  
centered on advocacy y resiliency  
along with our students,  
    because of our students  
    because of our communities  
    because of the generations-after-generations  
of teaching and inculcating resilience  
    we are ready.  
We've been ready!  
To name-confront-challenge  
all the f'ing—isms  
    *ahorita*  
*porque no hay de otra!*  
    Simply  
    because  
We cannot afford to accept another tragedy.

This is our **strategy**.

***Hanging Out and Hanging On: From the Projects to the Campus.***  
**Núñez, Elsa. (2014). Landham, MA: Roman & Littlefield. 160 pp.**  
**ISSBN: 978-1475802436. \$36.00 (Paperback)**

**Madeline Pérez De Jesús**

*The University of Saint Joseph*

In 2012, I attended a fundraising gala for a community organization that serves families in Hartford. The gala's speaker was Dr. Elsa Núñez, the President of Eastern Connecticut State University. Her talk was an early draft of what later became her book, *Hanging Out and Hanging On: From the Projects to the Campus*. In this text, Núñez documents the six-year history of the Dual College Enrollment Program (DCEP), which was an innovative partnership between her university, Quinebaug Valley Community College (QVCC), and Hartford High School. It served as a college recruitment and retention program for first-generation, immigrant, and low-income youth.

Núñez argues, in *Hanging Out*, that through the use of institutional partnerships, college access and affordability can improve for underrepresented students. The central idea of DCEP was to identify high school youth who have what Núñez and her colleagues refer to as a "spark" (2014, p. viii). That is, not-yet-achieving youth who express a drive to obtain a college degree and contribute to their communities. Those students would then start taking college classes at QVCC but be housed on the campus at Eastern (which is a short walk away). Núñez explains that the housing arrangement fulfilled two purposes: it minimized the stigma associated with attending community college and it supported students by providing a temporary respite from their (often dangerous) neighborhoods. DCEP's goal was to address the achievement gap. Its establishment here in Connecticut met a dire need. The state of Connecticut has the widest achievement gap in the country. Using National Center for Education Statistics, Núñez (2014) highlights that "as Latinos and African American students in Connecticut move through the school system, the gap between their test scores and those of Connecticut's white students actually worsens" (p. 43).

Núñez organized the book into four parts. First, she grounds the reader in sharing her personal and professional background. The second section defines the need for and history of

the DCEP program. The third section includes stories from six alumni of DCEP. The book's last segment shares some lessons learned. The integration of a multi-faceted understanding of the program—from Núñez to her colleagues to the students themselves—is a major contribution of this volume. For example, one of Núñez's colleagues from Eastern contributed a chapter. Some authors might shy away from such a structure, as it takes more time and patience to write with co-authors, especially first-time authors, such as the DCEP alums. Núñez's decision to do this speaks to her firm commitment in the leadership of her students and her stance on viewing her colleagues as true partners in this endeavor.

The fundamental argument of *Hanging Out* is that societal inequities—such as the education achievement gap—do not operate in isolation. They are the result of economic, social, political and cultural forces that impact the lives of students. Núñez provides a macro perspective in using archival data to showcase how Puerto Rican migrants were treated in the 1950s and how this history leaves a residue in the current decline of inner city communities. (“If you couldn't speak English, they would just put you in special ed” (Núñez, 2014, p. 29)—recounted a Connecticut Latino.) Núñez effectively immerses us in the present-day situation in Connecticut and illustrates the sociohistorical perspective from Connecticut and Puerto Rico. This stylistic approach in writing reminds me of Jean Anyon's (1997) *Ghetto Schooling* where she argues in a similar vein, that “schools—like people—are products of their past, as well as of the present” (p. xv). A micro perspective is showcased through the voices of the students and Núñez's own life story. Her memoir chapters are reminiscent of two other Latina educational leaders, Antonia Pantoja's (2002) *Memoir of a Visionary* and the more recent *Brooklyn Dreams* by Multicultural educator, Sonia Nieto (2015), where they all marry the personal, the professional, and the political.

The author's writing style is engaging and vivid. For instance, in painting a picture of her childhood in a poor town in Puerto Rico, she describes her terror in seeing her grandmother killing a chicken to make soup. (This made me smile, as it is a popular shared memory of many of us who traveled to Puerto Rico as children to spend time with our relatives on the farm.)

*Hanging Out* would benefit from more details about what occurred when the DCEP program ended. Knowing that such programs are meant to function as pilots of innovation, in what ways did the program influence any of the policies and procedures at the three partner institutions? Moreover, a Methodological Appendix that speaks to how field notes, interviews,

and student outcome data were used would encourage readers who are engaged in similar initiatives, and are so involved in the never-ending work of battling oppression, to carve out time to document and analyze the work.

I see two audiences for *Hanging Out*. One audience is folks like me—faculty members and others who work in the higher education system and seek to explore ways that they can establish pipelines of progress for inner-city students who arrive to college already impacted by the achievement gap in their K-12 education. The other audience is college students themselves who seek affirmation about their attempts to go into the unknown land of college. After reviewing the book, I adopted it as the main text for the Latino diversity class that I teach.

In addition to my faculty role, I also direct an Institute for Latino Community Practice (I-LCP) at my home institution, which is committed to supporting college completion of Latino/as and others who are committed to serving Latino communities. There are two important take-away from this text that influence my work with I-LCP: (1) No matter how passionate one is about influencing social justice, it simply is *not enough* to be a lone institutional change agent. Initiatives such as DCEP need to be a team effort and commitment has to come from the highest-ranking decision-makers at a multitude of institutions; (2) Those of us involved in social change work must document these initiatives and contribute this to our collective knowledge-base from which to inform and re-inspire ourselves to combat oppression. Both educators and students in the classroom will appreciate how this text not only aids them in understanding the larger structures that impact inequity, but also provides a model for how to interrupt that inequity. I did. And my students did.



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Dr. Abrica is an Assistant Professor in Educational Administration at University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) with a research expertise in community college, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), and institutional research and assessment contexts. Professionally, Dr. Abrica has worked in institutional research and assessment across both four-year and two-year institutional contexts since 2009, specializing in qualitative and quantitative data collection, analysis, and reporting for institutional improvement. Dr. Abrica is a faculty affiliate of the Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools (CYFS) at Nebraska and Project M.A.L.E.S at the University of Texas at Austin. She has published research in *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* and the *Journal of Applied Research in the Community College*. Dr. Abrica received her B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).

### **Nancy Acevedo-Gil**

Dr. Nancy Acevedo-Gil is an Assistant Professor in the Doctoral Studies Program within the Department of Educational Leadership at California State University, San Bernardino. As an interdisciplinary scholar, Dr. Acevedo-Gil uses critical race and Chicana feminist theories to examine transitions along the higher education pipeline for Chicanx/Latinx students. As a previous college advisor at under-resourced high schools, Dr. Acevedo-Gil's professional experiences inform her commitment to social justice; through her research, she advocates for equitable opportunities to college preparation and aligning college access with college completion. Her research juxtaposes the policing and control that is fostered in schools alongside college-going efforts. She also examines the experiences of students who place below college-level courses into developmental education at community colleges. Her research has received several recognitions and she has authored book chapters and journal articles, some of which are published in the *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education* and *Race, Ethnicity, and Education*.

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Edén Cortes Lopez is an advance Ph.D. student in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy at the University of Utah. His research focuses on examining institutional policies and practices influence Latinx community college transfer students' educational experiences at the four-year universities, as well as analyzes how institutional structures impact students' intersectional identities.

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Dr. García-Louis' research seeks to disrupt deficit thinking about communities of color, disadvantaged populations, and underrepresented students by expanding the definitions of Latinidad and Blackness in higher education. She is a Project MALES Faculty Research affiliate and contributes to the literature on young men of color in higher education by highlighting the experiences of AfroLatino males. She received her Ph.D. in Higher Education Leadership from the University of Texas Austin, a Master's degree from Seattle University, and a B.A. and B.S. from Oregon State University.

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Hortencia Jiménez born in Nayarit, México and raised in Watsonville, California. She is first generation college graduate. She earned her Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Texas, Austin. Hortencia is a faculty member in the Department of Sociology at Hartnell College. Her writing has appeared in *Latinos Studies*, *Social Problems*, *Community College Moment*, and *Chicana/Latina Studies: The Journal of Mujeres Activas En Letras y Cambio Social*. Hortencia is the author of the book *Challenging Inequalities: Readings in Race, Ethnicity, and Immigration* published by Cognella Academic Publishing.

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Gabriela Kovats Sánchez is a Ph.D. candidate in the Joint Doctoral Program in Education at San Diego State University and Claremont Graduate University. She serves as senior research analyst for the Research and Equity Scholarship Institute on Student Trajectories in Education (RESISTE) at San Diego State University. Gabriela is also adjunct faculty at San Diego City College in the Department of Chicana/o Studies. Gabriela's research addresses the educational experiences of Mexican Indigenous youth in the U.S., distinguishing these experiences from the broader pan-Latinx student context and paying close attention to the intersecting ways colonialism and coloniality from the U.S. and Mexico impact students' construction of identity. Formerly, Gabriela was Director of College and Career Success at Barrio Logan College Institute, a nonprofit organization dedicated to serving Latinx, first generation college-bound students.

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Dr. Edna Martinez is an Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership at California State University, San Bernardino. Her research centers on understanding how organizational behaviors and structures shape students' educational experiences and opportunities. Dr. Martinez's most recent work concerns baccalaureate degree-granting community colleges. An additional focus she has developed in her research is the study of faculty work and careers within striving contexts. She has published articles in the *Community College Review*, *Studies in Higher Education*, and *Journal of Critical Thought and Praxis*, as well as book chapters, co-edited

books, and a co-authored ASHE monograph. Dr. Martinez is the 2016 co-recipient of the NACADA Research Grant.

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Dr. Mercédez has been in education for over 26 years. She was an active member of the research team for the men of color, Project MALES initiative, where research was put into practice through supporting men of color through mentoring. At the Longhorn Center for Academic Excellence, Gateway Scholars program, she led Achieving College Excellence workshops to help first-generation students from underrepresented populations succeed in college. She received her Ph.D. in Higher Education Leadership from The University of Texas-Austin, a Master's degree in Mathematics, from The University of Texas-Austin, and a Bachelor's degree from Brigham Young University-Provo.

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Enrique G. Murillo, Jr., Ph.D. is Professor of Education at California State University, San Bernardino. He is a first-generation Chicano, born and raised in the greater East side of Los Angeles, and a native bilingual speaker in Spanish/English. He completed his Ph.D. in the Social Foundations of Education program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His master's degree from Cal State Los Angeles is in the same area, with coursework toward the bilingual multiple-subject teaching credential; and his bachelor's degree in Psychology from UCLA. Dr. Murillo is the founding Editor-in-Chief of both *Journal of Latino and Education (JLE)* and *Handbook of Latinos and Education (HLE)* by Routledge Books. He is also founder and executive director of the LEAD organization. Most recently, Dr. Murillo serves as President of the Southern California Consortium of Hispanic-Serving Institutions.

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Nereida Oliva is a first-generation Chicana from Gonzales, CA. She earned a Bachelor's Degree from California State University, Monterey Bay, a Master's in Education and Ph.D. from the University of Utah. Nereida currently teaches in the Department of Ethnic Studies at Hartnell College. Her own educational experiences and academic background inform and guide her pedagogy and research interests that include critical race theory, *muxerista* (womanist) pedagogies, K-16 educational pathways, parent leadership and advocacy, and educational policy. Nereida hopes to continue supporting students in higher education through teaching, learning, and research.

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Dr. Martha A. Rivas is a critical race theorist and, self-proclaimed, Chicana feminist praxista. She holds a Ph.D. and master's degree in Education, and baccalaureate degrees in Chicana/o Studies and comparative literature, all from UCLA. Her research deepens our understanding of marginalized perspectives, critiquing white supremacy and heteropatriarchy, as evidenced in schooling and postsecondary practices. She taught undergraduate and graduate courses in research methodology, Chicana Studies, and educational policy. Dr. Rivas holds over 20 years of experience leading research, policy, and evaluation work within the community college sector, federal, and nonprofit organizations. Currently, Dr. Rivas is a visiting scholar in the Latin American Studies Department at the University of California, Riverside. Her greatest achievement, however, is raising two daughters, Alicia-Ixchel and Sol-Inez, while writing poetry and creating visual protests with life partner and artist, Carlos Castro. They create and live in the Inland Empire, where Dr. Rivas was raised.

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