

Author:

Jannelly Duran

Title:

Accommodation of Latinos on U of I campus

About the Author:

I am a freshmen here at U of I and I am a Political Science Major. My experience here at U of I has been good and I have enjoyed being here. My parents are both immigrants from Mexico and they both came looking for a better life and more opportunities. I was brought up in an environment where our Mexican culture was very important and essential.

Question:

What I talk about in my research paper is mainly how Latinos, including my self have accommodated here on the U of I campus. In my personal experience, it was very hard to accommodate, and be around people of other cultures and live in the same building with them. The question is, how did other Latinos here on campus accommodate. did they have trouble accommodate in their dorms? with their roommates? in their classes? or on the campus overall? what did they do to feel welcome? who did they go to if they did had trouble accommodating?

Latinos on U of I campus

When I first arrived to U of I, I was very excited to finally come to the campus in which I had heard so many great things about. I couldn't wait to feel independent from my parents and my siblings, and go out to the real world. I was excited to start my college life and explore new things and new people. After sometime I began to realize that I was going to have some trouble to get accustom to the campus: this frightened me a little but at the end I was excited of the new transition. As I soon realized that being a Latino on campus was not going to be easy especially the environment that I am use to back home. Here it was nothing like back home, so many people, I didn't even know who to talk to. I began thinking about the other Latinos on campus like me and how they must have felt or how they are feeling arriving here as well. This brings up my main point the accommodation of Latinos on campus and the things they have to do to feel welcome.

When I arrived I went to my room for the first time and I saw that my roommate had moved in already; her side of the room was very neat, too neat if you ask me. I started to fix my belongings and unpack the twenty million things that I had brought with me. My sister and her boyfriend helped me move in and get everything in place. After we were done I walked them out and of course tears came out as they left. When I got back to my room, my roommate was already there and I began to try to make conversation with her, but she was very quiet and very distant. I figured since we were complete strangers that it would be like that for the first couple of days. As the days passed by I began to realize that that was the way she was. I began to realize that we

had nothing in common, and that we came from two very different environments. On several occasions I tried to make conversation with her about many different topics and all she would say was “Yes,” “No,” or “Yeah.” Trust me -- if someone wants to drive me insane doing that, that is the way you do it. So after awhile I kind of gave up on trying to have an interesting conversation with her. Up until this day, my roommate and I don’t have even one conversation except “Hi” or “Bye”, which is sad because I like to socialize with people, but I can’t force anyone to. This was one of the things that was hard for me to accommodate to.

The other thing was getting use to all the people on my floor. They were from different places and were different from the people that I’m use to in many ways. They come from different cities and different schools, which makes it difficult to make a conversation with them. The day we had our floor meeting, we introduced were called into the lobby and introduced ourselves. There were so many girls that I didn’t even know where to sit, or who to sit next to. I felt kind of weird because I was the only Latina on this floor. I felt singled out, and un-welcomed. I could feel the looks from other girls who were sitting around me, probably because I was Latina or because I was the only Latina in the group. Over the next couple of days, my neighbors invited me over into their room to watch a movie and have popcorn, I felt good when I received that invitation. After that we would constantly hangout and got along. The only thing is that I only talked to my next door neighbors and no one else on the rest of the floor; no one else stopped by and said hi, even though I could hear other girls going to other rooms and introducing themselves.

This brings up many points, one of them being that I am pretty sure that I am not the only one that felt that way the first couple of weeks we arrived on campus. I was able to survey a total of ten Latinos and they too also felt un-welcome and isolated from the rest. As the people would take the survey, they would shake and nod their head as if they were agreeing with my questions. Nine out of the ten are currently rooming with a person of another race or ethnic background. Four out of those nine people hardly interact with their roommates and feel that don’t have anything in common. Six out of the ten people had trouble interacting with the people that surrounded them in their dorms the first couple of weeks. This made them feel isolated from everyone else making them feel uncomfortable and unwanted.

This was when I discovered that the majority of Latinos on campus did not feel welcome when they first arrived on campus. What I took out of this survey were many things, one being that Latinos have trouble accommodating to the campus, but also that not enough is being done so that minorities feel welcome here by the university. “ Once there is a distinction made amongst prominent Latino groups, understanding the background of the student will be important. (Garcia) If the university were to dedicate time so that minorities have a chance to feel welcome and be able to socialize with people before they were to start classes. This would make the transition from being in high school and going to college. If this were to happen, the issue of Latinos accommodating to campus would not be such a big deal like it is now.

During one of my interviews, I was also able to confirm some of what my surveys uncovered, but I was also able to find out additional information from the two people. The interview was done in the PAR cafeteria during late night; it took us a while to accommodate to the environment and start the interview since it was very noisy. When we were finally able to begin the interview we started with a simple conversation. We began to talk about how much she

missed home and that she could not wait until she went home. Then she began to tell me how much she missed her mom's cooking and she began describing her mom's different specialty plates. She mentioned, " Oh my God my mom makes the best enchiladas ever!" she smiled " My mouth is starting to water!" She then started to tell me that she missed being at home with her whole family. She described the relationship that she had with different members of her family. One of the major reasons why she missed home was because she missed her own personal space. She began to say that she disliked her roommate and how rude she was, and just the simple fact that she was not use to sharing a room with anyone else back home. This was her major problem. I asked her who she would go to if she had any questions about something, and she responded that she would ask some of the people at the front desk or other U of I employees. Then she began to describe how she was introduced to La Casa, (the Latino/a house established in the U of I campus in 1974, trying to deal with Latino issues on campus) and how welcome she felt the first time she attended one of the events. She was introduced to La Casa through one of her classmates with whom she was working on a project. Her classmate invited her to go to one of the first events that La Casa was having at the beginning of the year. When she arrived she never imagined that she would see that many Latinos under one roof at the U of I campus. Everyone would smile and would greet her. This is the first place where she felt that she was welcome out of all the places that she had been on the U of I campus. She began to see all different kinds of people from freshmen to seniors and many different sororities and fraternities.

This was when I began to realize that most Latinos here on campus were associated or at least knew La Casa. This organization helps Latinos feel welcome here on campus and helps them in many ways, academically and socially. This organization encourages all Latinos on campus to come out and make U of I experience the best that it can be. Even though there are lot of issues with Latinos on the U of I campus, and gives support to those students who want to feel like they are at home once in a while.

During one of our class discussions, one of my classmates asked me, "Why do Latinos segregate from other groups of people? Is there an explanation to why this happens?" This became a very interesting point in which I began to think about why that happened. I thought about the reason and I concluded that the reason why this happens is because most Latinos are in areas in which there are only other Latinos. Usually most Latinos live in areas where they can relate and be surrounded with people that they know. That is one of the reasons why when Latino are exposed to other environments where there are other groups of people, they tend to segregate and separate from the rest. This causes problems when it comes to socializing with others. "Self identification is altered through their background, upbringing, place of origin, cultural exposure, education, family, friendships, and language and how this influences the students experience at the University of Illinois. (Garcia) Latinos tend to be around other Latinos and sometimes prefer to be around them then with other groups of people. The same thing happens with other races. Races tend to be around their own race because they feel that they have something in common and they can relate to each other. This is why I think that Latinos feel like they don't fit in certain situations. The reason why Latinos tend to be around their own race is because I thing they want to be around people that have the same customs and traditions as they do. Another reason may be that they want to be around people that have the same economic status they have. Due to varieties of backgrounds and demographics of Latinos students, it is not an easy task to clearly fit

the criteria for Latino. (Garcia) I believe that this not also happens with only Latinos but with other races as well.

Even though times have changed and Latinos are seen more and more on the U of I campus, I still think that there are still problems with Latinos segregating and secluding themselves. There are organizations such as La Casa that helps with the interaction of Latinos on Campus, but in my opinion it think there should be more done about Latinos interacting with other groups of people not just among other Latinos. This could help the U of I experience be a better on than the experience expressed by Latinos in the past and the present. With this said the University should try to help those students who struggle to socialize with different groups of people. “ The goal of having extracurricular activities is to create spaces where students of particular ethnic or racial classification can interact and form social networks as they go through their transition from high school to college life.” (Lemus) When student is introduced to other races and ethnic backgrounds with the help of others that college transition will not be as hard as it is for some of the students.

In conclusion, there is a lot of work to be done with the aspect of the university and the way that it welcomes Latinos on campus. As I have mentioned before the transition from high school to college is hard enough already, but the transition from one social environment to another can be harder. The university should consider improving the way they welcome minorities to the campus, in doing so the conflicts will be less among Latinos and other races. In addition to that, in order to solve the problems of Latinos the university needs to know the background of Latinos in general. Their job is to give each student the best education possible, and with that comes the part of making them feel they are in a good social environment. The accommodation of Latinos on the U of I campus is very hard partially because of the previous social environments the student comes from and also the way the university chooses to welcome the students here at the UIUC campus.

Appendix A

Survey

1. What nationality are you?
2. Did you feel comfortable arriving on campus?
3. Do did you get along with your roommate at the beginning?
4. Do you get along with your roommate now?
5. Did you have any racial conflicts with anyone?
6. Did you get along with everyone on your floor?
7. Do you feel comfortable on campus at the moment?

Appendix B

In my first research proposal I decided to do an interview. There were to people that I interview and they are both freshmen. They are both part of La Casa and they both take part in the events that La Casa has. The things that I have found out through them are many of the accommodations that I had to make in order to accommodate myself here at the U of I campus.

The reason that I decided to interview them was because they were the perfect example of the people that I was looking to interview. They are both Latinas and they are both newly arrived here on campus.

The conversation that I had with both of them was a very interesting one. We started talking about the things that they did back home, what they missed, and overall their families. They described how hard it was to get use to the campus and what they had to do to get use to it. They told me details like their favorite food cooked at home, certain traditions, and different events that went on at home. Then finally that's when I actually started to interview them and ask them the questions that I needed.

The interview to me was very helpful because it confirmed things that I already knew about Latinos here on campus. The arguments that I have made and the arguments that other people who I know, and the people that I interviewed were all very similar in many ways. Such as that accommodations we had to make, the food change, the traditions that we had to stop doing once we arrived here on campus.

The first of two interviews was PAR in the cafeteria during late night. There were many people surrounding us and there was a lot of noise. It took us a while to be able to concentrate, but we were eventually able to. First we started with an interesting conversation about back home and how much we missed being there. We started talking about the kind of foods our moms make and how good it was, and how we wished we had it at that moment. Then we started talking about our siblings and the rest of the family, and how how we haven't seen some of our family members since this past summer. Then we finally shifted into how hard it was to adjust here to campus. She began to describe how she saw that other girls bonded very quickly with each other in the hall that she lives in, and she saw that it was hard for her to do so. It took her a while for her to even begin to talk to her roommate, it was even harder for her to talk to other girls around her. She sensed that she had a lot of differences with those girls and felt that if she went up to them they had nothing in common to talk about.

I began to ask her what helped her get use to the campus, she responded that she began to know a lot of new people in the events that went on during the first week of school, like Quad day, the late nighter, and that's where she met many of the people that she talks to currently. Then I asked her who did she go to if she wasn't sure about something, and she responded that at first she would ask her graduate advisor about any questions she had, then as she started knowing new people she began to socialize with them and then she would ask them if she ever had a question. I asked her what were some of the accommodations that she had to make when she arrived here on campus, she answered that first off she had to get use to sharing her room, then she had to get use to people that weren't of the same race that she was, since she had grown up around them. She said that she had to get use to the different environment and the actual town, but what was hardest for her was to not be close to her family, and not be able to eat her ethnic food. She missed having home cooked meals by her mom such as tamales, posole, mole and many of the other many other foods her mom made.

Appendix C

The first source that I found through IDEALS, was one written by a junior here at UIUC. This paper talks about overall Latinos here on campus here on campus. One of the author's main points is that there is a lot of racism against Latinos here on campus. The couple of Latinos that come here to campus end up joining Sororities or Fraternities just to belong to a community. This article also mentions how La Casa is an important part of the Latino community whether you belong to a Sorority or Fraternity or not. In this paper the author introduces an interview that the interviewee actually states that she does not feel welcome on campus. Later on in the paper there is another interviewee that really did not feel comfortable here on campus, especially in the dorms where she was staying her freshman year. She states that people on her floor made her feel very unwelcome, she says that it went to the extreme that one of the girls on her floor moved to another floor (mostly white), because she play music in Spanish. She also noticed that there are great differences in their priorities. This girl cared about having her essentials such as a blanket, a pillow, clothes, shoes, etc, while the other girls were concerned with how their room looked and the decorations pertaining to it.

I'm not sure how exactly will I integrate the information into my paper but it will definitely help me come up with new topics and ask more questions in my research process. This will definitely help my argument in that many Latinos feel that they are not welcome on campus. It brings up points such as Frats and Sororities and their objectives here on campus,

The second source that I found under ideals was a very interesting and talks more about how Latinos are looked upon here on campus. In other words how they are looked upon in classes where the majority of students are white, and how when discussions and issues arise during class, they automatically expect the Latino students to know about those issues. Another topic brought up in this paper is the typical stereotypes that others have upon Latinos, such as crazy parties, girls being pregnant, drug-dealers, and overall Latinos being violent. It is also discussed the LLS classes that are offered here on campus, and how many of the stereotypes that are made about Latinos disappear, but not all are broken.

The way that I can use this source is by using it as a little bit of background or as part of an introduction or perhaps as explanations in my argument/s. Like for example I can argue that the overall reason why Latinos are not welcome here on campus starts with the stereotypes that other races have about Latinos. This can affect the classroom as well.

The third source that I found is also a personal experience of adjusting here on campus. This person talks about personal experiences with racism and how it happened within the first few weeks after he had moved into campus. Then it actually starts going into details like why we are called Latino, and why the US gave us the name of Hispanics. It actually gives facts from an actual class here on campus and from actual literature written about Latinos. Later on in the paper it describes how he interview people and the people that he met and how he was introduced to La Casa. He describes that until then, he did not feel welcome, and he felt a great deal of discrimination.

This would be very helpful in my paper as a back up. This gives me personal interviews that will help me back up my overall argument. This will help me have actual literature back up for my paper. This will give me a little bit of background and explanation in my paper

Appendix D

In the text, *Survival of the Fittest: How Does Self-identification Determine the Latino Student Experience at the University of Illinois?* By Garcia, Edelmira P. There are many issues being addressed and discussed in this paper. For example, the many issue discussed in this paper is how when this student came to this university she did not feel welcome. She mentions that she went through a lot of struggles to be able to socialize and meet new people here on campus. She also mentions the different kinds of stereotypes that people had about Latinos such as gangs, drugs and teenage pregnancy. Her experiences when she first got here were not the best; she experienced acts of racism on campus within the first couple of weeks of arriving. Garcia gives examples such as looks or glances and pre-judgment from her classmates. And again like I have said before one of the first organizations that she was introduced to here on campus was La Casa Latina, all the Latino organizations somehow always link back to La Casa. She talks about a student whom she had a conversation with, this person was the founder of UNFA, this organization was founded after the founder left the university after being here for 2 years and not being able to accommodate. This conversation came up because Garcia had a racist incident at her dorm. She and her roommate had hung up Mexican Flag for Mexican independence outside of their dorm. The next morning they found that on their flag someone had written racist comments on it. They immediately told their RA through e-mail and days passed and they saw no response from their RA. They then began to mention this to other people and one junior specifically told them, “to get use to it” because this was only the beginning. Through many people they were able to meet that young lady who founded the UNFA, and were able to discuss the problem with her, and she assured them both that she knew exactly who their RA was and she assured them that that RA was racist.

Then this paper gives a little bit of history on campus all over the US, and how Americans were the ones who first started using the term “Hispanics”, and referred it to all Spanish speakers. The appropriate term is “Latinos” because it refers to all the people who come from Latin American countries.

The way I see this information into my paper is very important and essential because, most of the issues that are brought up in this paper are issues that I talk about in my paper. For example, I can use the example given about racial attitudes of other students towards Latinos on campus. How Latinos have trouble adjusting to campus because they feel unwelcome because of those attitudes. This paper gives a lot of information, including historical information for my paper.