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Embracing Familismo within the Latinx Population at Community Colleges

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Abstract

Research indicates Latinx students are disproportionality attending community colleges, yet graduation and transfer rates for Latinx students attending this institution type are dismal. Literature indicates that Latinx students' sense of belonging in the higher education setting can be cultivated by feeling connected to peers and family, feeling connected to their culture, and minimizing the number of academic and cultural stress factors. Latinx students arrive on campus equipped with strengths and experiences that have given them the ability to persist and survive in the face of oppression and racial hostility. Community college orientations and programming can be designed to celebrate and empower Latinx students and the knowledge and experiences these students possess. Using a framework that values Latinx cultural capital, this project embraces Latinx values to develop an orientation and holistic programming to support Latinx students toward degree persistence and foster a sense of belonging. This program will encourage and develop feelings of connectedness through the Latinx cultural value of familismo and will heavily support the inclusion of family within the community college setting. The proposed project will consist of a Latinx-specific family orientation, a Latinx mentorship program, and familismo-grounded programming that will extend throughout the academic year. The program will contain resources that support Latinx students' academic, cultural, and emotional well-being.

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction

Problem Statement

Latinx students are increasing within the higher education system in the United States resulting in an overrepresentation at community colleges and an underwhelming degree completion rate (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Gándara & Moreno, 2002). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019b), nearly half (49%) of Latinx students attend a public two-year institution, the highest share of any student ethnicity group. Fewer than 15% of Latinx students who begin at a two-year community college complete a bachelor's degree within a 6- or 8-year time frame (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Hoachlander et al., 2003). These numbers provide evidence that two-year community colleges fail to provide a bridge for Latinx students to successfully transfer to and complete a degree at four-year institutions.

Latinx degree persistence is connected to a unique set of cultural challenges including deficit-based perspectives from practitioners (Carales & López, 2020) and negative experiences regarding racial hostility (Hernandez, 2000). Addressing cultural factors through Latinx-specific programming can contribute to an increase in Latinx students' sense of belonging (Chun et al., 2016). Deficit-based perspectives often frame Latinx cultural and familial traits as disadvantages that lead to a lack of preparation for higher education. However, strength-based perspectives seek out the value and strength in Latinx student characteristics and see opportunities in supporting Latinx students rather than challenges (Carales & López, 2020). Strength-based perspectives serve as a valuable lens for understanding and appreciating the lived experiences, values, and backgrounds of Latinx students (Yosso, 2005). Community colleges must welcome Latinx students onto a campus that is supportive and conducive to success, with a greater focus on strength-based institutional programming and

policy to support Latinx students towards degree completion (Kurlaendar & Long, 2009).

Expanding community college orientations to include dedicated, holistic Latinx student support

aims to increase students' sense of belonging on campus and lead toward degree completion.

Importance and Rationale of the Project

An increase in U.S. Latinx undergraduate enrollment paired with an underrepresentation

of Latinx degree attainment demonstrates a need to better assist Latinx students in higher

education (Gándara & Moreno, 2002; Hernandez, 2000). Latinx undergraduate enrollment more

than doubled between 2000 and 2016, from 1.4 million to 3.2 million students (National Center

for Education Statistics [NCES], 2019a). While Latinx access to higher education has improved

over time, a truer representation of academic success lies in retention rates and degree

completion. A lack of Latinx student retention extends beyond the community college setting

and stretches across various higher education institution types. The six-year college graduation

rate for Latinx full-time undergraduate students in pursuit of a bachelor's degree at a four-year

institution sits at 54%, among the lowest in the nation for ethnicity groups (NCES, 2019b).

Latinx students hold both the title of fastest-growing student demographic in the United States,

as well as the least educated ethnicity group (NCES, 2019a). In 2016, only 15% of Latinx adults

aged 25 and older held a bachelor's degree or higher. This lack of continued education is directly

related to the U.S. education system, with a startling 33% of Latinx adults who are 25 and older

not having completed high school education (NCES, 2019c). This lack of education significantly

limits Latinx individuals' potential for economic and financial success, career advancement, and

societal and personal benefits.

There is a significant demand for higher education from Latinx students. For Latinx

students ages 18 to 24, the immediate enrollment rate (enrolled in a degree-granting institution in

the Fall immediately following high school completion) increased from 49% in 2000 to 71% in 2016 (NCES, 2019a). With Latinx students disproportionally gravitating towards community college, efforts should be made to assist in persistence towards degree attainment.

It is in the best interest of higher education institutions of every type to increase student retention rates. Students who persist towards graduation will provide imperative funds to institutions through tuition and fees. The academic achievement and accomplishments of students persisting to graduation are also favorable to the reputation of institutions (Burke, 2019). Beyond the realm of higher education, the U.S. economy also stands to benefit from increased graduation rates. A study examining a potential 10% increase in graduation rates from community colleges and universities yielded a 1.3% GDP growth impact. Furthermore, the study also suggests quicker degree completion positively impacts the U.S. economy. (Tyndorf & Martin, 2018).

Latinx students in higher education report low sense of belonging, a clash in cultural fit, and a lack of connection and mattering in the university setting (Dueñas & Gloria, 2020; Lopez, 2005). Lopez (2005) found high levels of academic performance stress in Latinx students stemming from racist experiences and familial support systems. The unique experiences, backgrounds, and challenges faced by Latinx students demonstrate a need to provide specific resources to this student population. Institutional programming based on specific student attributes can play a major role in retention rates (Millea et al., 2018).

Background of the Project

The United States population is currently experiencing dramatic demographic shifts. According to the latest U.S. Census, Latinxs make up 18.5% of the total population in the U.S., the largest minority group in the nation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). That number is predicted to

reach 28% of the total population by the year 2060 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). The Latinx

population transformation is brought on by changing immigration patterns and legislation

restricting immigration. Since 1970, the Latinx population has grown 592%, largely because of

the arrival of new immigrants from Latin American countries, a major contributor being Mexico

(Krogstad, 2020). While rates of immigrants of Mexican origin have decreased under the Trump

administration, there is increased immigration to the United States from other Latin American

countries (Krogstad, 2020). Latinx birth rates also impact population growth. Although

immigration patterns have a historically large impact on the U.S. Latinx population, Latinx birth

rates exceeded the number of new Latinx immigrants in recent years (Krogstad, 2014).

Education patterns in the Latinx population have demonstrated an increased interest in

college enrollment. Between 1993 and 2014, Latinxs ages 18 to 24 experienced a 13-percentage-

point increase in college enrollment (Krogstad, 2020). However, college enrollment patterns in

the Latinx population display a disproportionate rate of attending two-year institutions. 49% of

Latinxs enrolled in college were attending two-year institutions, compared to 30% of Whites,

32% of Asians, and 36% of African Americans (Krogstad & Fry, 2020). Latinx college students'

degree attainment falters compared to other racial counterparts. In 2014, only 15% of Latinx ages

25 to 29 had a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 41% of Whites, 22% of African

Americans, and 63% of Asians (Krogstad, 2020).

Latinx individuals consisted of 15% of the workforce in 2010, with predicted growth

reaching 30% in 2050 (Durán, 2020). The large share of Latinx individuals in the workforce

demonstrates the dependency the U.S. economy has on this population, therefore it is wise to

consider whether the future economy benefits from Latinx workers who have attained necessary

skills and knowledge in their prospective fields throughout their postsecondary education

(Durán, 2020). Jobs formerly requiring less qualification are consistently expecting increased formal knowledge for entry-level positions, many involving advanced college degrees. Historically, first and second-generation Latinx immigrants' job roles are limited to low-paying jobs that restrict social mobility and contribute to wealth inequality (Durán, 2020). Population and enrollment growth rates, coupled with a lack of degree attainment demonstrate a high need for investments that create positive experiences and a sense of belonging on campus for Latinx students (Gándara & Moreno, 2002; Hernandez, 2000; Krogstad, 2020)

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this project is to develop a Latinx student orientation and a Latinx Student Program rooted in familismo that establishes a sense of belonging at the community college level. The Latinx cultural value of family will be emphasized in the orientation, as well as in Latinx-specific programming that extends throughout the academic year. Yosso's (2005) framework of community cultural wealth will be used in the design of the programming and orientation to honor the six cultural capitals that Latinx students bring with them to the higher education environment. The orientation will include presentations and materials in both Spanish and English, with the opportunity to ask questions of panels of faculty, current students, and current Latinx parents. At the orientation, families and students will be able to meet and speak with their faculty and peer mentors. A student organization showcase will highlight student-life opportunities and involvement, with on-site sign-ups available. The concept of micro-

scholarships will be introduced at the orientation and will be utilized to encourage attendance and participation in the familismo based programming held throughout the academic year.

Objectives of the Project

The orientation and Latinx Student Program will encourage students to explore and celebrate their culture and heritage. Additionally, parents and guardians will be provided with the tools and resources to support their students. Desired outcomes for the Latinx student orientation include disseminating essential campus resources and information, increasing students' comfortability of expressing their culture on-campus, and establishing trust between students, parents, and the institution. Desired outcomes for the Latinx Student Program include elevating aspirational capital, creating a sense of belonging, and building kinship. Both the orientation and the Latinx Student Program provide avenues for growth and support in Latinx students' academic, personal, and emotional well-being.

Definition of Terms

Familismo: a strong sense of identification with, and loyalty to, nuclear and extended family. Also includes a sense of protection of familial honor, respect, and cooperation among family members (Gallardo & Paoliello, 2008, p.342).

Latinx students: the gender-neutral term for the student group of Latin American origin or descent.

Latinx-specific programming: culturally-based organizations and events promoting community, offering safe space on campus, or assisting members in reaching the social and academic demands of college (Luedke, 2019).

Sense of belonging: the feeling that one matters to others and that they have their place within a group (O'Keeffe, 2013).

A Note on Terminology

Throughout this paper, the term *Latinx* is used to be inclusive of all gender identities. Direct quotes from literature may use a different form of the word. This paper uses the terms *community college* and *two-year institution* interchangeably.

Scope of the Project

Latinx students that start higher education at the community college level are persisting to graduation at disproportionate rates compared to racial counterparts (Arbona & Nora, 2007). This project is specifically related to Latinx community college students and will aim to increase students' sense of belonging to increase Latinx graduation and transfer rates. This project does not determine the factors that cause Latinx students to disproportionally chose to attend community colleges. While aspects of this project can also be implemented at four-year universities and other institution types, the inclusion of family presence and participation in the campus environment is unique to the setting of community colleges. Due to large numbers of students living in the home environment, community colleges can actively engage family members. Limitations for implementing this project at other institution types include family participation due to proximity. Additional barriers to implementation will include institutional budget, resource availability, and student and faculty population demographics. This project would likely best be implemented at community colleges that qualify as Hispanic-serving institutions.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

Latinx students' sense of belonging in the higher education setting can be cultivated by feeling connected to peers and family, feeling connected to their culture, and minimizing the number of academic and cultural stress factors (Chun et al., 2016). Institutions must encourage and develop feelings of connectedness, an important component for building support systems and navigating the social and academic aspects of an institution. Yosso's (2005) concept of community cultural wealth will be used as a theoretical framework to examine how current conditions in higher education could better value and support Latinx cultural capital. Community cultural wealth challenges dominant views and provides an important perspective that sees Latinx students as valuable for the cultural strengths and skills they possessed prior to attending college. This literature review will address Latinx familial relationships, student organizations, mentorship programs, and the community college and orientation environments. All of these areas of review are areas in which Yosso's (2005) concept of community cultural wealth can be applied to increase Latinx student belonging within the community college environment.

Theoretical Framework

Yosso's (2005) theoretical perspective was born as a critique of Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) argument stating the knowledge of the upper and middle-class are valuable capital in our society. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argued that if an individual is not born into a family with knowledge deemed valuable, they can access the knowledge of the upper and middle class through a hierarchical move attained through formal education. This assumption assumes People of Color will stall in social mobility due to a 'lack' of both social and cultural capital. This argument is often used to explain the significant disproportion in social, financial, and academic

outcomes between People of Color and Whites. Institutions and educators operating with Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) theoretical perspective often view the creation of identity-based programming as an opportunity to "help 'disadvantaged' students whose race and class background has left them lacking necessary knowledge, social skills, abilities, and cultural capital" (Yosso, 2005, p.70.)

Yosso (2005) calls for a change in the way dominant societies and institutions identify knowledge as valuable or inferior. The framework is viewed and built from a critical race theory lens that recognizes that marginalized groups bring cultural capital that traditional cultural capital theories do not value or appreciate (Yosso, 2005). The capital described in community cultural wealth consists of the knowledge, skills, abilities, contacts, and kinship that is utilized by communities of color to combat and practice resilience in the face of oppression and racism. Yosso (2005) identified six forms of capital that strengthen the whole part of community cultural wealth: aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital. Each distinctive form of capital builds upon the other forms in an overlapping, coexisting manner. Aspirational capital refers to strong hope and dreams beyond current circumstances and the resiliency to achieve goals despite barriers. Communication skills and knowledge attained from the ability to speak more than one language is referred to as linguistic capital. Familial capital refers to the cultural knowledge built by communities, kinship, history, and shared cultural issues. Networks and communities that exchange knowledge and experience to navigate society and institutions makes up social capital. Navigational capital can be understood as maneuvering through institutions built without consideration of the experiences of marginalized populations. This includes settings that create environments that can be made racially hostile or biased. Resistant capital is the knowledge and skills built through actions and behaviors that commit to

social justice and challenging unjust systems (Yosso, 2005). The six distinctive capitals overlap to combine into a strong abundance of cultural wealth that marginalized student populations can bring into classroom and campus communities.

The concept of community cultural wealth has the power to transform educational programming to celebrate and empower People of Color. Specifically for the context of this project, community cultural wealth can be utilized to design Latinx student programming to increase a sense of belonging through the assets and knowledge students already possess (Yosso, 2005). Yosso (2005) operates under the assumption that student success is a social construct and society has created value for only certain forms of capital. Research has supported Yosso's (2005) perspective and maintained that fostering student success can be accomplished when educators abandon privileged ideologies and approach students of color with an appreciation of their strengths (Perez et al., 2017). Practitioners must shift away from a deficit-based perspective that represents Latinxs students as poverty-stricken or disadvantaged and embrace a lens of community cultural wealth that recognizes the assets Latinx students bring to higher education institutions. Community cultural wealth, through the acknowledgment and application of the six funds of knowledge, provides practitioners with an authentic way to offer students validation of belonging within higher education (Yosso, 2005). This theoretical concept can be practiced through representation (on-campus, structural, and curriculum-based), family involvement within higher education, Latinx mentorship, and celebrations of Latinx culture.

Research and Evaluation

As students transition into higher education, an abundance of changes takes place. Some of these changes include an increase in academic rigor, a transition to a new environment, and increased independence and authority. These adjustments can combine to create new stress on a

student. Latinx students' unique cultural backgrounds and experiences create an opportunity to address this transition through resources that support their academic, cultural, and emotional well-being and operate through an anti-deficit perspective.

Familismo

A recurring theme throughout the exploration of Latinx students' transition is *familismo*. Familismo is a value common in Latinx culture that refers to the dedication, commitment, and loyalty to immediate and extended family. It includes the protection and priority of family honor and respect (Gallardo & Paoliello, 2008). Latinx culture is collectivist in nature and tends to hold family relationships in the highest regard, with high levels of involvement and connection throughout the extended family (Mendoza & Whitney, 2011). Furthermore, family has a significant impact on Latinx students' identity development (Mendoza & Whitney, 2011; Torres, 2003). Torres (2003) found a deeper connection to the Latinx ethnic identity in students who participated in cultural events at home, attended Latinx functions, and spoke Spanish within the household. It is evident that family is an important value in Latinx culture. Family engagement should be considered in programming that promotes Latinx students' sense of belonging. Engaging Latinx family members can create a more trusting relationship between families, students, and the institution (Witkowsky et al., 2020). Spanish language parent and family member orientations (PFMOs) using native language resulted in a new level of transparency and increased trust in the institution for Latinx parents. A culturally responsive approach that infuses familismo within the content of the program resulted in positive parental associations with the institution's intentions for educating and securing a student's place in the campus community (Witkowsky et al., 2020).

Familial relationships can also impact Latinx student's college choice, many choosing community colleges to stay close to home, family, and their cultural community. Latinx students heavily trust and rely upon advice from extended family that experienced college themselves, playing a pivotal role in knowledge sharing for the college choice decision (Perez & McDonough, 2008). Additionally, the immigration status of family members influences the college-going behaviors of Latinx students. College-going Latinx students who were recipients of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) reported that although they had protected status, the weight of their family's risk of being deported resulted in high levels of stress and anxiety. The possibility of parental deportation resulted in a desire to be near family members, compelling students to choose colleges closer to home, often two-year institutions (Monico & Duncan, 2020).

Although family remains an important cultural value within the Latinx community, negative influences can result from a strong familial connection. While families can serve as sources of support and encouragement, pressures in the form of academic, social, and cultural can be present. Immense pressure to succeed in academic performance can create a fear of disappointment or negative perceptions from Latinx family members (Hernandez, 2000; Torres, 2003). Torres (2003) also found Latinx students who identify as first-generation struggle to balance unknown college expectations with those that their parents have constructed and noted difficulties relating to non-Latinx students related to parental pressure. The blend of struggles between family values, cultural expectations, and academic performance pressures can be difficult for Latinx students to bear throughout their time in higher education. Latinx students' close relationships with family permeate throughout the college experience, from their initial college choice to success in degree attainment. Recognizing, respecting, and including family

members translates to Latinx student success and can promote a sense of familismo between a student's home life and campus community (Witkowsky et al., 2020). Practitioners must honor and respect this strong family bond and make efforts to include Latinx parents/supporters in the college experience to increase students' sense of belonging.

Latinx Student Organizations

The transition to higher education is made significantly easier when students are properly acclimated to the institutional environment. Navigating an institution goes beyond the physical campus and includes a greater understanding of academic rigor, on-campus resources, career opportunities, and social circles. Latinx students use social capital from friends and peers to develop an understanding and make use of their new environment (Luedke, 2019; Perez & McDonough, 2008). Student organizations specific to Latinx identity can allow students to place their ethnic identity at the forefront of conversation and develop relationships with others that share similar cultural experiences and backgrounds. Seeing the Latinx identity represented in on-campus role models creates comfortability for new Latinx students to utilize on-campus resources and seek out kinship within student organizations. (Ludeke, 2019). Latinx student organizations generate a familial foundation within the new college environment that is supportive of capital sharing between students (Luedke, 2019). A sense of familismo flows throughout these student organizations to nourish students' sense of belonging, mattering, and academic development, while decreasing feelings of isolation (Dueñas & Gloria, 2020). Hurtado and Carter (1997) linked an increased sense of social support to Latinx students having a deeper sense of belonging. The creation of these identity-driven spaces allows students to retreat from the larger campus to a smaller, tight-knit community that shares common experiences and relatability (Luedke, 2019; Hernandez, 2000). Participants of Latinx student organizations

encourage the expansion of social capital within their organization by demonstrating the use of on-campus resources (Luedke, 2019; Hernandez, 2000). Thus, positive academic and well-being behaviors were modeled by peers within role model positions.

Latinx student organizations also play a large role in how Latinx students react to race-related stressors, a trauma that greatly affects students' sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Lopez (2005) examined the stress of first-year Latinx students and found students reported a dramatic increase in racism and race-related stress as the year progressed. Students combatted this hostile racial climate by socializing with students that share similar experiences of racism and discrimination. Lopez (2005) also found Latinx students reported an increase in alienated cultural orientation, which directly and negatively impacted a student's sense of belonging and resulted in a decrease in social and academic integration. Through the acknowledgment and understanding of Latinx peers, Latinx student organizations can serve as a place of refuge and support from racist experiences on campus. Latinx students attending predominately White institutions (PWIs) may feel that the dominant institutional culture does not value or recognize their culture, or may, in fact, actively dismiss it (Hernandez, 2000; Rudick, 2017). Therefore, Latinx student organizations emerge as crucial social circles for nurturing and navigating one's ethnic identity and culture within an institution.

Latinx Mentoring Programs

A shared racial identity can result in similar values, interests, and backgrounds that translate to a deeper understanding of the experiences Latinx students face in higher education. Latinx faculty and staff can use these shared experiences with students to cultivate a sense of belonging within an institution. Latinx students' college adjustment needs, sense of community, and necessary knowledge to navigate campus can be addressed and equipped through faculty

mentoring programs (Hernandez, 2000; Santos & Reigadas, 2002). Mentors can provide emotional support and resources, help students pursue and fulfill personal and career goals, and foster a sense of belonging within the campus community. Within Latinx faculty mentoring programs (FMP) students show an improved ability to establish and define academic goals and an increase in self-efficacy. The growth of these two qualities cultivated a positive academic identity among Latinx mentees (Santos & Reigadas, 2002). Providing students with a mentor of the same ethnicity resulted in students feeling a greater sense of commitment from mentors in furthering their development, both academically and personally. Similarities in Latinx culture and values have been shown to enhance the mentor-mentee relationship and have a positive influence on student retention (Hernandez, 2000; Santos & Reigadas, 2002).

Capers (2019) found that Latinx ethnic identity representation in the staff and faculty of an institution has effects on Latinx student graduation rates, heightening the importance of student exposure to these individuals. Faculty mentoring programs with mentors of the same ethnicity as students provide a valuable sense of belonging (Rodriguez et al., 2016). Within mentoring programs, students' sense of belonging is impacted by the accessibility of the faculty member, as well as the level of authentic care exhibited by the faculty member. Faculty members that were approachable and reached out to students frequently, had results indicating greater student satisfaction (Rodriguez et al., 2016). These findings are crucial to keeping at the forefront of the development of new faculty mentor programs. Overall, academic performance, navigation of campus, and positive sense of belonging increased with a greater frequency of contact between the students and mentors and with an authentic sense of care and belief from the faculty mentor (Hernandez, 2000; Rodriguez et al., 2016; Santos & Reigadas, 2002).

Community Colleges

Nearly half of all Latinx students attend a public two-year institution (NCES, 2019b),

therefore, it is critical practitioners understand the driving factors leading these students to

choose community colleges and the experiences students have while enrolled. Two-year colleges

are attractive to many Latinx students due to lower tuition costs and closer proximity to home

and family (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Salas et al., 2018). Closer proximity to family potentially

results in lower transportation costs, eliminates an on-campus residence cost, and embraces the

value of familismo held highly in Latinx culture (Arbona & Nora, 2007). Salas et al. (2018)

found that 38% of Latinx students viewed community college as the only available option for

higher education. Affordability is a primary driver of Latinx college choice, leading many low-

income and first-generation Latinx students to choose a two-year institution and may push

students away from attending four-year institutions (Salas et al., 2018). Exposure to the college

environment either through the acquisition of knowledge capital through family and friends or

on-campus visits increases the likelihood Latinx students will apply for college. The high rate of

Latinx peers attending two-year institutions and the availability of a campus visit due to

closeness may propel Latinx students to apply for two-year institutions (Perez & McDonough,

2008).

Salas et al. (2018) found that Latinx students' perspectives about community colleges

showed that 82% of Latinx students believed a degree from a community college would result in

securing a local job upon graduation, and 66% of Latinx students aspired to transfer to a four-

year institution. Additionally, those educational aspirations increased after enrolling and

attending community college, with students having an increased desire to transfer to a four-year

institution for degree completion (Salas et al., 2018). This is problematic as student aspirations

do not align with Latinx degree completion rates. Community colleges serving higher percentages of Latinx students have significantly lower six-year transfer rates, with many students stopping or dropping out of higher education altogether (Wassmer et al., 2004). Commitment to participating in higher education also impacts Latinx degree attainment. Latinx college students who attended college within six months after graduating high school, and who continually enrolled in college without stopping out, were more likely to complete their degree than students who experienced an interruption in degree completion (Arbona & Nora, 2007). These findings support implementing policies and practices at community colleges that encourage and produce a successful transfer process.

Orientation

Orientation programming is designed to introduce students to campus and provide a degree of acclimation to the new environment. Important information about academics, campus culture, and support resources are typical features in orientation programs, all while allowing students the opportunity to connect with peers, faculty, and administrators. Evidence suggests that community college students who participate in orientation experience higher rates of degree completion and are more likely to transfer to a four-year institution (Derby & Smith, 2004). Moore and Shulock (2007) examined the six-year degree completion of community college Latinx students and found that students who participated in orientation had a degree completion rate of 24% compared to 17% for those who did not participate. For first-generation Latinx students whose parents may not have formal experience with higher education, orientation programming can serve as a valuable source of navigational capital and guidance in accessing resources vital to success in a new academic and social setting (Perez & Ceja, 2010).

Summary

Research indicates that Latinx students' sense of belonging, and ultimately degree completion, are impacted by peer influence and connectedness, shared experiences with staff and faculty, institutional ethnic representation, familial relationships, and campus racial climate. Yosso's (2005) theoretical perspective of cultural capital wealth recognizes the cultural strengths Latinx students are equipped with prior to coming to campus. Anti-deficit perspectives view Latinx students as sources of valuable aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital. Campuses that engage Latinx family members can create a healthy relationship between families, students, and the institution. Research indicates that recognizing and respecting the cultural bond between Latinx family members and students translates to student success and promotes a sense of familismo on-campus (Witkowsky et al., 2020). According to Luedke (2019), a sense of familismo can be found in Latinx student organizations and provide peer support in self and academic development. Spaces dedicated to Latinx organizations allow navigational and social capital to be shared amongst peers that share similar experiences and backgrounds (Luedke, 2019). Mentorship programs are also a beneficial way to address the college adjustment needs of Latinx students. Within faculty mentoring programs, students showed an improved ability to establish and define academic goals (Santos & Reigadas, 2002). These academic goals can be initially established through college orientations, which serve as important sources of navigational capital and guidance in accessing resources vital to success in a new academic and social setting (Perez & Ceja, 2010). Orientations are especially important for a successful transition of Latinx students to the community college environment (Moore & Shulock, 2007). Within all Latinx programming, anti-deficit perspectives and the recognition of

community cultural wealth are important practices for student affairs professionals to cultivate a sense of belonging in Latinx students (Yosso, 2005).

Conclusion

Research shows that Latinx students experience unique cultural stressors when attending college that can be reduced through peer relationships in Latinx organizations, institutional ethnic representation, family relationships, and mentorship programs (Luedke, 2019; Santos & Reigadas, 2002; Witkowsky et al., 2020). Community colleges are in a unique position to serve Latinx populations who disproportionally attend this institution type (NCES, 2019b). As a result, community colleges should focus on creating programming that supports Latinx students' sense of belonging to provide relief and community from potentially hostile campus environments and factors increasing stop-outs. Specifically, using anti-deficit perspectives to recognize the strengths of Latinx students when designing this programming is key. The following chapter outlines a holistic Latinx orientation program rooted in anti-deficit perspectives with the intention of increasing the sense of belonging in Latinx community college students.

Chapter Three: Project Description

Introduction

Two-year community colleges are failing to adequately assist Latinx students towards degree completion or transfer to four-year institutions (Arbona & Nora, 2007). Latinx students attend community colleges at a disproportionate rate compared to other racial-ethnic groups. Cultural factors, affordability, proximity to family, and peer influence all play a role in the Latinx college decision-making process, with many Latinx students perceiving community college as the only higher education option (Perez & McDonough, 2008; Salas et al., 2018). Student affairs professionals must begin to focus on institutional practices at community colleges and critically examine how these practices create a positive or negative climate that encourages degree persistence and a sense of belonging for Latinx students. Expanding community college orientations to include dedicated, holistic Latinx support aims to increase students' sense of belonging on campus and lead toward degree completion.

A reoccurring theme within relevant literature is the concept of familismo, which encompasses the loyalty, respect, and cooperation within the Latinx family unit (Gallardo & Paoliello, 2008). Literature supports the inclusion of Latinx family members within the campus experience to improve student success and create a sense of belonging (Witkowsky et al., 2020). The collectivist nature and connectedness of Latinx family members fall within the familial capital of Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth framework and should be viewed as an asset. Latinx students transitioning to higher education may leave behind a sense of familismo, but due to proximity to students' home environments, community colleges have the unique opportunity to bring students' current sense of familismo onto campus. To honor and respect this strong family bond, I propose a Latinx student and parent orientation designed specifically for

community colleges. This orientation will serve as the foundation for a holistic Latinx Student Program featuring family-based programming, mentorship, and student organizations that will extend throughout the academic year to create motivation for Latinx students to persist towards graduation. This program will contain resources that support Latinx students' academic, cultural, and emotional well-being.

Latinx students arrive on campus equipped with strengths and experiences that have given them the ability to persist and survive in the face of oppression and racial hostility (Yosso, 2005). Using the framework of community cultural wealth, community college orientation programming can be designed to celebrate and empower Latinx students and increase a sense of belonging through the knowledge and experiences these students possess. Yosso (2005) identified six forms of capital that strengthen the whole part of community cultural wealth: aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capitals. Throughout the design of the proposed community college orientation, each form of capital will be addressed and intentional efforts will be made to celebrate cultural knowledge, skills, and community. The application of these six forms of capital provides practitioners with an authentic way to offer students validation of belonging within higher education (Yosso, 2005). The following chapter will address the necessary components for the proposed program, evaluation efforts to determine success in the program, and offer implementation plans.

Project Components

The design of this program is two-fold. First, I have designed a Latinx student and parent community college orientation. Desired outcomes from this orientation include disseminating essential campus resources and information, increasing students' comfortability in expressing their culture on-campus, and establishing trust between students, parents, and the institution.

Linguistic capital, familial capital, and social capital will be a focus in building community and connection. Secondly, I have developed a Latinx Student Program with a peer and faculty mentorship component and familial-based events to be implemented throughout the academic year. Aspects of the programming will be initially introduced to students during the orientation. Desired outcomes for the Latinx Student Program include elevating aspirational capital, creating a sense of belonging, and building kinship. Latinx students' sense of belonging will be cultivated by encouraging connections with peers and family through Latinx-specific programming.

Schedule

This orientation event will be one day only and recorded virtually for those that cannot attend. The event will start with a welcome address. Parents and students will then split into groups to attend specifically designed orientation sessions. The groups will recombine to meet the peer and faculty/staff mentors, view the student organization showcase, and learn about micro-scholarships that can be earned for participation in the programming throughout the academic year. Where possible, this orientation will be conducted by individuals that share the Latinx identity, as representation in programming and practices is an important predictor for Latinx degree completion (Capers, 2019). A director position for the Latinx Student Program will be created and the creation of the orientation and Latinx-specific events will fall within the scope of their responsibilities. A full schedule for the orientation can be found in Appendix A.

Dual Language Orientation

Yosso (2005) recognized linguistic capital as the communication skills and knowledge attained from the ability to speak more than one language. Hosting a Latinx orientation in both English and Spanish celebrates linguistic capital within this student population and provides an inclusive option for participation from both students and parents. All orientation and campus

hand-outs or materials will be provided in both English and Spanish. Presenters will present and cover information in both languages, alternating between English and Spanish. This intentional effort seeks to minimize necessary translations between parents and students. Participants will be able to hear the information directly from speakers and campus representatives in their preferred language, leaving no room for gaps in the information to occur. Witkowsky et al. (2020) found that the use of Spanish in parent orientations increased trust in the institution and added a new level of transparency. Conducting the orientation in both English and Spanish aims to increase students' comfort in expressing their culture on campus. It also aims to increase parent participation, confidence, and knowledge of the institution. Intentional use of the Spanish language and welcoming Latinx culture will cultivate a sense of belonging in Latinx students. English is also used to acknowledge that the Latinx identity is not bound by speaking Spanish and allows the orientation to be inclusive of all participants.

Latinx Parent Orientation

A culturally responsive approach to the parent orientation will include the cultural understanding of familismo infused into the content, rather than simply providing a translated version of the campuses' general parent orientation (Witkowsky et al., 2020). In doing this, on-campus resources that are supportive and replicate a familial environment will be highlighted. Special attention and time will be dedicated to explaining multicultural affairs departments, identity-based student organizations, student support groups, and counseling centers. Parents will be well-versed in these campus resources, equipped with information and ways to encourage students to take advantage of these resources. Lastly, participants will hear from and be able to ask questions to a panel of Latinx faculty and staff members. Moderators will begin the panel with a list of questions (see Appendix B) that focus on culturally inclusive material/courses,

hopes and concerns for the Latinx campus community, instances of Latinx identity growth in students, and methods of support for student academic and social success. The panel will then be opened to take questions directly from the families and supporters.

Latinx Student Orientation

Research shows that attending a community college orientation results in a substantial increase in degree completion for Latinx students (Moore & Shulock, 2007). Hosting an orientation specifically for Latinx students aims to create an immediate sense of belonging and community on campus which may result in increased transfer and graduation rates. Within this orientation, general campus information will be shared, including academic success strategies, emotional health and well-being resources, major advising, etc. Additionally, specific information about resources dedicated to students who identify as first-generation, DACA, and/or Latinx will be highlighted within this session. Brief information can be shared about Latinx student groups and clubs, as this will be covered in greater detail within the student organization showcase. Lastly, participants will hear from and ask questions of a panel of current Latinx students. Moderators will ask the panel a set of questions (see Appendix C) that focus on their ethnic identity development through campus programming, information about the transition into the college environment, and how their cultural capital has prepared them for success on campus. The panel will then be opened to taking questions directly from the audience.

Overview of Orientation Materials

Both parent and student orientation sessions will include elements of traditional orientation, including academic success strategies, college adjustment/transition, involvement in student life, policies and standards, etc. The proposed orientation will also contain specific campus information to ensure Latinx students feel safe on-campus, physically, emotionally, and

psychologically. This information will include educational resources and support for students who speak English as a second language, first-generation students, and undocumented students. The university's diversity statement will be shared. Additionally, transparent information about the retention and graduation rates of students of color and institutional steps and commitments to raising these will be shared. Information will be shared on the tenured status of faculty of Latinx identity and efforts to increase representation on-campus. An overview will be provided of the academic classes that focus on race-specific topics and inclusive academic materials. Lastly, the steps, reporting procedures, and statistics of bias incident reporting will be covered.

Mentor Meet and Greet

Mentorship programs featuring mentors and mentees of the same ethnicity can result in similar values, interests, and backgrounds that translate to a deeper understanding of the experiences Latinx students face in higher education (Santos & Reigadas, 2002). Therefore, a mentorship component will be included to generate students' sense of belonging on campus. Yosso (2005) defined 'social capital' as the networks and communities that exchange knowledge and experience and 'navigational capital' as information shared to navigate through institutions built without consideration of the experiences of marginalized populations. To deepen Latinx students' sense of belonging on campus, it is essential to create multiple avenues for capital sharing and exploration to take place. Students in the mentorship program will have both a peer and faculty mentor, providing two distinct and valuable forms of capital essential to transitioning to the campus environment. Mentors will be identified through a voluntary process. Participation in the program for the mentors will be incentivized through micro-scholarships, covered in the implementation section of this chapter. If mentors cannot be identified, the director position should take on this role in a limited capacity.

Engaging Latinx family members can create a more trusting relationship between families, students, and the institution (Witkowsky et al., 2020). At this time in the orientation, peer and faculty mentors will meet and converse with their mentee and the mentee's family. This initial meeting will be informal to share general information about themselves and establish contact information. The inclusion of family in this process allows the opportunity for trust to be established between parents, students, and mentors. Including Latinx family members can promote success between a student's home life and campus community. The initial bond formed with a Latinx member of the university will aim to immediately create a sense of belonging and establish a smaller community within a larger campus community.

Orientation leaders will include ice breaker questions during the meet and greet pertaining to campus life and hobbies. Details of the mentorship program will be included in a handout, printed in English and Spanish. This handout will include information on meetings for the academic year and communication expectations. An in-person meeting with mentors and mentees will take place within the first four weeks of the first semester. Additionally, mentor/mentee check-ins will be conducted monthly (virtually or in-person) throughout the academic year, with ideally one in-person meeting or event per semester. These meetings will support students' sense of belonging throughout their time at the institution, while also serving as an encouraging source of support and accountability for students to achieve their academic goals.

Student Organization Showcase

Latinx students utilize student groups and organizations to navigate an institution and develop a greater understanding of academic rigor and campus resources (Luedke, 2019). During the student organization showcase, the institution's student-run Latinx or ethnic identity-based organizations will be highlighted. Student representatives from each organization will share a

five-minute pitch of their organization and its goals and purpose. Sign-up sheets for each student

organization will be available for interested students. Community colleges often serve small

student populations that may not be large enough to support several Latinx student groups. In

this case, additional campus resources and speakers from various departments may be

highlighted. Student organizations are hubs for sharing the navigational and social capital

defined by Yosso (2005). These types of organizations can also generate the sharing of 'resistant

capital', which consists of the knowledge and skills built through actions and behaviors of

challenging unjust systems (Yosso, 2005). Through shared organizational goals, student clubs

can be utilized to build community resistance for the Latinx identity. The student organization

showcase will demonstrate to Latinx students and parents that these social circles are beneficial

to navigating one's ethnic identity and culture within an institution.

Familismo Programming

This section of the orientation will introduce parents and students to the cultural

programming specific to Latinx students slated for the upcoming academic year. Programming

will vary by campus size, allocated budget, and student population. Ideally, for the purpose of

this project and the community college environment, one quarter of all programming will be

open to family members to attend in-person, virtually, or contribute to in other meaningful ways.

Latinx-specific programming that is open to families will be designed with Yosso's (2005) six

forms of capital in mind, with special attention to familial capital. Programming will focus on

community kinship, history, and shared cultural values and issues. The expansion of including

family members within Latinx-specific programming celebrates the common cultural tight-knit

bond that Latinx students have with their parents, siblings, and extended family. Contents of the

parent orientation and the programming extending throughout the academic year aim to create

positive parental associations with the institution and motivate parents to support their students'

identity development and sense of belonging on campus. The inclusion of Latinx family

members within the campus experience improves student success and sense of belonging

(Witkowsky et al., 2020). The influence that immediate and extended family has on Latinx

students may be exaggerated for community college students, because many live at home. It is

essential to equip parents with trust in the institution and the tools to best support their student's

academic and personal growth. Programming that promotes in-person family participation may

include Latinx culture celebrations and Latinx guest speakers on-campus. Virtual or passive

familial programming may include a book club focused on Latinx stories or the creation of a

shared collection of campus Latinx-family stories, written in collaboration with students and

parents. Online parent support groups and resources may be established. With many Latinx

students committed to transferring to a four-year institution (Salas et al., 2018), an event on the

topic of transfer resources would be beneficial to students and to the families that will be

supporting them through the transfer process. Aspirational capital refers to strong hope and

dreams beyond current circumstances and the resiliency to achieve goals despite barriers (Yosso,

2005). One goal of the programming is to elevate the aspirational capital that students carry with

them and propel students toward achieving their goals. Programming will be designed to increase

Latinx students' sense of belonging through community, familismo, connection to peers, and

identity/culture development.

Project Evaluation

Evaluation measures will be put in place for both the orientation and for the Latinx

Student Program mentorship and events. Following orientation, a survey will be sent to both

parents and students. Survey questions will be designed to measure the effectiveness in reaching

the desired outcomes of the orientation, which included disseminating essential campus resources and information, increasing students' comfortability of expressing their culture on-campus, and establishing trust between students, parents, and the institution. Open-ended response questions will be dedicated to allowing participants to voice suggestions or concerns for the orientation. A Likert-scale question will be designed to gauge the likelihood of parent participation in academic year events. Ideally, parent and student satisfaction will be high and indicate the intention to participate in the Latinx Student Program throughout the year.

Evaluation of the Latinx Student Program will be conducted at the student and mentor levels. Peer and faculty mentors will be surveyed at the end of each semester on the perceived workload of participating in the program, the impact of the program on their ethnic identity development, and overall satisfaction. Students will also receive a similar survey that asks questions about their mentor's level of support and resource guidance, encouragement and assistance in personal and career goals, and the student's sense of belonging within the campus community. Both surveys will contain open-ended questions to voice concern, praise, or suggestions. The results of the surveys will be used to shape and reform the program for future semesters.

Additionally, attendees of events held by the Latinx Student Program will be surveyed in the days following an event. Both student and parent participants will be asked questions about their satisfaction with the event, knowledge and cultural value gained through participation, and the perceived level of belonging and community on-campus. Survey question design may vary by the event type. Gathering this data will indicate event types that contribute to creating a sense of familismo on-campus and promoting student success. Parent and student feedback will help shape future events and programming.

Student retention, persistence to degree, and successful transfer to a four-year institution are key goals of the Latinx orientation and Latinx Student Program. Long-term institutional data can be used to measure the effectiveness of the implementation of both programs. Measuring the graduation rate of Latinx students who participated in both the Latinx orientation and Latinx Student Program against the graduation rate of Latinx students who did not participate will help determine the validity and strengths of the programs.

Project Conclusions

Latinx students' sense of belonging can be cultivated through Latinx-specific programming (Chun et al., 2016). Programming can be designed to celebrate the assets that Latinx students are equipped with upon arrival on campus. Yosso's (2005) six capitals can be celebrated and elevated to lift Latinx students to academic and personal success. There is value in Latinx mentoring programs and orientations, and that value can be emphasized through the concepts of community cultural wealth and familismo. Community colleges' distinct environment allows the ability to engage and include family, an important Latinx cultural value, to promote students' sense of belonging and degree completion. The implementation of this program offers Latinx students an immediate sense of community that will lead to an academic year filled with opportunities to deepen their connection to their culture, family, and self.

Plans for Implementation

The proposed orientation and programming are designed for use at a two-year institution. However, many of the design elements could be mirrored and implemented within other institution types. Information about the orientation and Latinx Student Program will be posted on a dedicated webpage within the institution's website. An initial invitation to join the orientation and programming will be sent out two months before the event, with follow-up reminders via

mail and email to enforce the importance of this event and the benefits to students and parents alike. Programming and communications to Latinx students will be consistent and intentional in supporting the academic, ethnic, and emotional well-being of students. Practitioners must shift away from a deficit-based perspective and embrace a lens of community cultural wealth that celebrates the assets Latinx students bring to higher education institutions.

To encourage students to utilize the mentorship program and attend Latinx-specific programming hosted by the institution, micro-scholarships will be utilized. These 'scholarships' will be given to students enrolled in the Latinx Student Program in conjunction with participation in programming. Active participation will include maintaining communication with faculty and peer mentors and attending Latinx-specific events/programming. Faculty and peer mentors will report student participation, mentee communication, and meetings directly to the Latinx Student Program Director. Participation in each activity should earn a student $25 - $100. One lump sum of scholarship money will be calculated based on their active participation in the Latinx student programming and awarded at the end of the semester. The maximum earned scholarship amount will be determined by institutional funding and budget. Addressing cultural factors through Latinx-specific programming can contribute to an increase in Latinx students' sense of belonging (Chun et al., 2016). Encouraging attendance and participation in Latinx-specific programming with the use of micro-scholarships will place students in an environment that is conducive to success and may lead to higher levels of Latinx student degree persistence.

Future research should examine the familial bond that Latinx culture holds and the effects that bond has on college choice, retention, and degree completion. While research has been conducted in the areas of Latinx mentorship programs, Latinx student organizations, and Latinx ethnic identity development, there is little research dedicated to holistic institutional programs

benefitting Latinx students. Studies should be conducted to measure both the short-term and

long-term significance of these programs on Latinx degree completion and sense of belonging.

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Appendix A

Schedule for Latinx student orientation.

9:00 a.m.: Welcome, introductions of orientation leaders, and overview of the schedule.

9:20 a.m.: Split into parents and students. Each group attends a specific orientation with panels.

10:20 a.m.: Mentor meet and greet.

10:40 a.m.: Student organization showcase.

11:10 a.m.: Latinx family programming information.

11:25 a.m.: Introduction to micro-scholarships.

11:35 a.m.: Final thoughts, thank you, social media and contact information shared.

11:40 a.m.: Orientation concludes.

Appendix B

Featured Questions to be Asked by Moderators to Faculty and Staff Panel.

1. Do you feature culturally inclusive material into your courses and what is your view on the importance of featuring stories from different cultures?

2. What are your hopes and concerns for the Latinx campus community?

3. How have you seen your students explore and grow in their Latinx identity?

4. What methods of support have you found to be the most helpful in supporting Latinx student in academic, social, and well-being success?

Appendix C

Featured Questions to be Asked by Moderators to Student Panel

1. How has participation in the Latinx mentor programs and Latinx-specific programming helped shape your ethnic identity or other elements of your identity?

2. What piece of advice would you offer new Latinx students as they transition to campus life and academics?

3. How has your cultural identity and upbringing helped prepare you for higher education?