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FOR US BY US ABOUT US: CONSTRUCTING LATINX-CENTERED HIGHER
EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

A Dissertation Presented

by

CYNTHIA K. ORELLANA

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies,
University of Massachusetts Boston,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2023

Higher Education Program

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ABSTRACT

FOR US BY US ABOUT US: CONSTRUCTING LATINX-CENTERED HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

August 2023

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Higher education institutions' organizational identities, cultures, and praxis have neglected to honor the values, culture, and knowledge assets of Latinx communities, making it difficult to gain educational justice and equity, which could be attained through Latinx-centered models of higher education. The Latinx higher education experience needs to be deconstructed and reconstructed by resisting whiteness as normative and including People of Color as "holders and creators of knowledge" (Bernal, 2002). Alternatives to normative higher education institutions are limited in the literature, particularly those that have been founded by Latinx communities. Thus, the purpose of the study was to explore how organizational identity, culture, and praxis at higher education institutions founded by Latinx communities reflected Latinx-centered approaches that built upon, promoted, and centered the assets (knowledge, values, culture, and experiences) of Latinx People. As a

counternarrative, FUBU-*About Us* was considered a concept and approach for the study, informing decisions around literature, design, and centering of research participants (referred to as collaborators) in the findings.

Through a qualitative interpretive instrumental multi-case organizational study approach of two U.S. historically Latinx-founded institutions, data collected included 28 individual interviews and five focus groups, document and artifact reviews, and observations. A conceptual framework brought together organizational theories with asset-based concepts from Latinx theorists that helped guide the design of the study, data analysis, and discussion of the findings. Individual college portraits and distinct findings for each case were presented, for example for case 1: ownership as resistance and empowerment, integrated roles as a practical and values-oriented practice, and for case 2: rooting historical activism as central to identity and planning processes speaking to values, among others. In addition, an analysis of shared and nuanced findings across the cases revealed the importance of place; naming strengths in the midst of challenges; arts and culture as staples of institutional identity, culture, and practices; and counterspaces, among others. The study offers a discussion on contributions of the study to the literature, a revised conceptual to real-life framework for FUBU-*About Us* institutions of higher education, as well as implications for practice, policy, and future research.

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As a Latina who is first-generation to college and who did not grow up with PhDs in my community or family, the journey through the doctoral program has always been for, about, and because of my “us.” It took me over 10 years post graduate school to decide on whether I was capable enough to pursue a PhD. I managed to complete my PhD in just under 5 years while working full-time. None of it would have been possible without my “us” supporting and loving me in all the ways that one can receive these gifts from their community. My doctorate is dedicated to everyone who has lifted me up and even those that may have underestimated me along the way, as well as to the brown girls out there with dreams to manifest. I am grateful for all of it and all of you who have contributed to my growth and reason for doing what I do.

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Did you hear about the rose that grew from a crack in the concrete?

Proving nature's law is wrong it learned to walk without having feet.

Funny it seems, but by keeping its dreams, it learned to breathe fresh air.

Long live the rose that grew from concrete when no one else ever cared.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

I start to think, and then I sink

Into the paper, like I was ink

When I'm writing, I'm trapped in between the lines

I escape, when I finish. (Mos Def, 1999a)

My journey has not been easy. It is a story about a child with no childhood, awoken very early by the discriminate, poverty-stricken, othering world around her that seemed to be the “American” way. It is about a youth seeking an outlet from the disconnect and disappointment of educational systems, and an adult who is tired of swimming against the forceful, sinking tide of “business as usual.” My journey drove the motivation for this study. What follows are select parts of my journey told in three parts: 1. Grounding, 2. Coming of Age, and 3. Against the Tide, finishing with A Different Tide, which describes the inspiration for this study: For Us By Us—*About Us*.

Part 1: Grounding

My Umi says shine your light on the world, shine your light for the world to see.

(Mos Def, 1999b)

My earliest memories are of my three siblings, my parents, and me living in a one-bedroom apartment on the third floor of a multi-unit complex on Western Ave. The three of

us girls all shared the bedroom. As a little girl, I never paid attention to where my parents or my brother slept. On the weekends, our small apartment transformed into a lively restaurant and mecca for Salvadorans to enjoy a variety of home-cooked Salvadoran foods (including the Salvadoran signature pupusas), liquor, community, and the sounds of cumbia, mariachi, and boleros. La pupuseria,¹ as we referred to it, was on top of the two jobs my parents held during the weekday and it helped them make ends meet. As an adult, my papi told me that la pupuseria was what allowed them to save enough to move up the street to a three-bedroom apartment. La pupuseria was a family affair—all the siblings had to lend a hand; of course, I was too little and just stood as a witness to what felt like our normal routine to assemble and disassemble la pupuseria every weekend.

My parents had come to the United States in the late 70s, just as El Salvador was on the brink of civil war. My mom had a 1st-grade education, and my dad had only gone up to 3rd, but they were entrepreneurial, smart people—always finding ways to create businesses on the side to survive. La pupuseria was one of those survival ventures. As hard as they worked, money was always tight as they tried to nurture and keep up with their four growing kids. They took on several different service and labor jobs from cleaning houses on the wealthier side of the city, washing dishes in restaurants, serving food in cafeterias,

¹ For my personal narrative and study, I made the decision not to italicize words that are in Spanish as to not perpetuate the othering of multilingual people. In my dissertation, I italicized Spanish words when citing the work of scholars to honor their original work and intent. I later came across Vargas' (2017) opening to her novel, "If a Spanish word or phrase is not translated in the novel [songs/words], I do not offer a translation, so as to give readers the same effect they would have if they were reading [listening to] the novel [songs] and to honor the author's [artists'] linguistic decisions. In addition, I do not italicize the Spanish words I use, so as not to mark them as foreign and Other" (p. 197). Reading these words were an affirmation to resist the norm. Thus, for my personal narrative I have also chosen not to translate words written in Spanish. However, given the evaluative purpose of a doctoral dissertation study, I felt compelled to translate the voices of contributors so that the findings of this study could be understood by non-Spanish-speaking members of my dissertation committee and other scholars.

housekeeping at hotels, working in several different factories, to construction and biohazard and hazmat cleanup.

Since eating together at the table when time permitted was what we did, it was the time they used to talk amongst themselves about the bills, work, family, and life. I grew up hearing many stories of blatant discrimination and mistreatment against them at work and it was always by los blancos. I also witnessed first-hand the mistreatment they received from others because of their accents and for being Latinx.² When sharing their stories, they did not shy away from sharing details with me at the table, and often would infuse in their storytelling the message that I needed to make sure I got an education so that people (los blancos) could not step on me. So that I could “defend” myself in life and not wind up being “ignorant” like them (my parents). Funny thing is, I never saw them as ignorant people. I always admired what they were able to do with so much spirit, determination, and ingenuity. I looked up to them. Since their English was very limited, their children often assisted with important tasks. I was 8 years old when I was already helping write checks to pay bills and went to doctor visits with my mom to help translate—these are experiences that my siblings and I never thought about as skills we were learning from them about money and household management, communication, and work-ethic. As an adult, I have expressed to them how they were among my first educators in life.

² I use the designation Latinx as an inclusive, non-binary term to refer to people of Latin American descent living in the United States. Salinas and Lozano (2019) define Latinx as a “term that recognizes the intersectionality of sexuality, language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, and phenotype... as it is understood in different ways within different communities of people” (p. 312). Hence, Latinx is also applied in the spirit of social justice and liberatory, transformational paradigms that challenge dominant discourses identified by Critical Race Theory and LatCrit Scholars of Color (Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). The terms Latina/o/@ are used when direct quoting or recognizing gender specific scholarship to honor scholars’ original work.

I was the first to be born in the States and am the baby of the family, but my siblings migrated to the U.S. very young and seemed to quickly adopt the “American way.” Despite my parents’ commitment to preserving our Salvadoran culture and language at home, the family experienced many culture clashes with the “American way.” These clashes brought a lot of pain to the family as my siblings hit their teenage years and they also led to many disappointments that would chase us into adulthood. Up to this point, life at home and outside of the school building made me very aware of our condition, and of my parents’ unconditional love and sacrifice.

I attended my neighborhood pre-K–8 school named after Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. which, like my neighborhood, was predominantly Black and very multicultural. My school principal and vice principal were Black, and one of the most influential educators in my life at King School was a Black woman. Our school building had two large colorful murals that took up entire walls featuring, of course Dr. King, and other Black iconic figures, but also children of different shades and artistic renditions of everyday life. King School was generally comfortable for me because it mirrored my neighborhood experience, but as I reached the upper grades, my differences became more prevalent. There was the making fun of my parents’ accents by peers, and Black classmates influencing ideas about my identity. Classmates told me that I was Black because of my hair texture and my skin color, but when they felt spiteful would tell me I was not Black but a spic. The other few Latinx children in my classes were Puerto Rican and a Dominican. I was told by a Puertorriqueña that her mom told her she should not like Salvadorans and so she treated me accordingly. Through the behaviors of the other Latinxs and the way that they spoke to me, it was clear that not being Caribbean also made me “uncool.” As I thought about all of the compounding experiences of

my family, neighborhood, and school days, I started to wonder where I fit in and where this was reflected in what I was learning in school.

Part 2: Coming of Age

Let me begin by saying that I came to theory because I was hurting—the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend—to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then a location for healing. (hooks, 1991, p. 59)

My coming of age was filled with frustration and several critical questions about why things were the way that they were. I also experienced a different take on my identity, and once again, the questions of where I and my cultural perspective fit in. High school was a much more integrated experience. As the only public high school in the city, kids from all different neighborhoods, schools, and economic statuses were now in the same building. I do not remember how, but I found a Latinx center in the high school that had been established as part of a local nonprofit organization that served the Latinx community. It quickly turned into my first home away from home. The staff were all Latinx, and they cared for us like family. They exposed us to important topics and created spaces for us to focus on school and talk about home. It was the only space where people in the building cared to know my parents, and where my parents knew people that they could trust with their niña and could communicate with about school.

The center created activities that celebrated a pan-ethnic identity, but the social and cultural celebrations quickly became insufficient to fill my critical mind and continuous questions about why things were how they were. So, I joined a youth group that some of my

Latinx center friends had joined that was unaffiliated with the high school to do peace and justice training and community-building. I learned terms like “racism,” “sexism,” “neoliberalism,” “capitalism,” “homophobia,” and “classism”—a new language for some of the experiences and ideas I had had such a difficult time articulating over the years. Through this group, I also engaged in transnational solidarity work with El Salvador where, for the first time in my life, I had started learning about the history and political struggle and resilience of Salvadoran people. It put into context for me why my parents and many other Salvadoran people fled to the U.S. during and after the war. I started building an immense sense of pride in being Salvadoreña.

By the time I was a senior in high school, I had achieved a better sense of my identity, had fed some of my hunger to know and understand more, but still felt unsatisfied and was now feeling angry. I looked back and felt so robbed of my education. Why couldn’t my critical questions about the socio-economic and political condition of poor, immigrant, and Black and Brown people be tapped into and answered through my school education? Why did it take being part of organizations indirectly affiliated with the high school to get a taste of the answers I was seeking? By now, I realized why so many of my friends were so disengaged with school. My parents had drilled that an education would help me “defend myself.” Education was, therefore, meant to be armor. So, while I did not enjoy school and what I was being taught, I learned how to get by and get the grades I needed because that should be my ticket to a diploma and good life prospects from there on out.

When it came time to apply for college, I learned about college-going from overhearing white students talking about college visits and applications. When I went to my guidance counselor, a white older man, to discuss what I was hearing and that I wanted to go

to college, his response was that I should attend the local community college and that the local public university would be my “reach school.” I was so confused because of my stellar academic standing and extra-curricular record. Spiteful, I turned to one of my friends who was already a first-year student in college to help me fill out my first application. I went on to achieve a master’s and a bachelor’s degree from two prestigious private universities, and I am now a PhD candidate.

The feelings of frustration, unanswered questions, and invisibility kept building through college, graduate school, and the beginning of my professional journey. I immersed myself in Black and Latinx centers and ethnic studies programs and worked for a local Latinx political nonprofit organization to find a home within (and away from) institutions that were predominantly white and that made it clear that I did not fit in. The more ethnic studies courses that I took, the more I realized how much I had missed in my K–12 education and how the courses in my major continued to perpetuate the marginalization and invisibility of Latinx people. At the same time, I felt frustrated that the Latinx spaces on campus were not talking about concepts of liberation and were not offering dialogue about injustice and how we work toward justice. They were focused on celebrating and creating social events and lacked a criticality needed to push the status quo. Simultaneously, the more I worked in the field, the more I was exposed to disparities in funding, policies, and practices that presented significant daily challenges for Latinx people. I was also charged by the innovation and self-determination that I was seeing in the community. I was ready for a career that was linked to my values of community building, bridging, and empowerment specifically for People of Color to move away from the margins and into the light.

Part 3: Against the Tide

The people closest to the pain should be closest to the power.

—Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley

You cannot unknow what you know and, the more you know, the more responsibility you have for the things that you know. What I have known and lived through has compelled me to take professional roles that would allow me to drive impact and change for Communities of Color and disenfranchised people. I started my practice as a community organizer, and while I chose to move into more political and administrative roles, the organizer identity and skills have always remained. While the greater part of my career has been in public service, operating within large bureaucracies, I have kept my hands in multiple community-created initiatives that have been unrelated to my “day job.” In nearly all my roles, I have been hired to move forward a relatively new area of work that is connected to my values of building and bridging, often in challenging circumstances. The trend has been that those hiring me are “excited” about the diverse skills and knowledge that I bring, but the tasks that I am asked to perform come with no resources and there is a lack of political will and often ideological opposition to address the needs of and invest in solutions impacting Communities of Color. I have felt isolated, lonely, and marginalized because I am one of the few in my work area boldly trying to move action-oriented social justice and equity work. I have also worked for executive Leaders of Color expecting that they will change the marginal status of Communities of Color, but the whiteness of institutions is too powerful and all-encompassing, and they themselves get wrapped up in entrusting those that embody and perpetuate white supremacy. Therefore, any movement toward positive social change for People of Color enacted by those leaders felt like crumbs for the hungry.

Furthermore, it seems that bureaucracies are not prepared to make changes that benefit Communities of Color in targeted ways because they are operating to benefit most of the population through color-blind interventions (Bell, 1995). My experience has been a constant swim against a tide that is moving in the direction that it was intended to flow. I have come to realize that while change within pre-existing institutions is necessary and incremental, it is not always likely and comes with a lot of resistance. Additionally, People of Color charged to lead change efforts are expected to become a martyr or appease white people. Institutions are wrapped in deep histories of subordination and oppression of Communities of Color, and most have been founded under the purposeful neglect of Black and Brown people.

Besides, there are very few People of Color at the head of these long-standing institutions, and they do not constitute a critical mass within these organizations to be able to move changes that transform the livelihood of Communities of Color. Even in critical mass, Staff of Color still must operate within the constraints of systems and structures that were created well before their time and therefore are calcified into the core of the institution. Finally, there is the expression, “not all skin folk are kin folk,” which is to say, not all People of Color share similar goals, experiences, or collective consciousness about social injustices and the need for radical change. Nevertheless, the more I swam against the tide (nearly drowning), I thought of what would it be like to ride a new and different tide that flows intently in the direction of justice, and a new vision that centers People of Color’s knowing and being in the world?

A Different Tide: FUBU-About Us

Nothing happens in the “real” world unless it first happens in the images in our heads ... I seek new images of identity, new beliefs about ourselves, our humanity and worth no longer in question. (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 109)

My friends describe me as someone who is very intentional. As I look back on my story, I realize my intentionality is driven by my life experience and conscious decision to use intentionality as one of the ways I can lead a purposeful, mission-driven life. There is no question that my epistemology, research interests, and practice are informed by my identities as a Latina, first-generation to be born in this country from Salvadoran immigrant parents, multi-lingual and multi-cultural, child of the 80s, and product of public K–12 education from a predominantly working poor Black and Brown context. It is informed by my lived experiences and the experiences of people who are part of my community.

These lived and community-centered experiences lit a fire in my belly to find a new flow that was built *for us by us* and was intently *about us*, where People of Color could grab hold of their agency and power to create, inform, drive, and transform people, places, and things. As a child of the 80s, *for us by us* was inspired by FUBU (For Us By Us), a hip-hop clothing brand created by Black men set to create their own mark in the fashion industry by uplifting and centering hip-hop culture. I also learned from community leader and Boston native Michael Curry, while working on my dissertation proposal, that before FUBU, there was an Afrocentric hub of leaders in Roxbury, MA that organized themselves unapologetically around the concepts of *for us by us and about us*. More recently, these concepts were revived by a local Boston City Councilor, Julia Mejia—the council’s first Afro-Latina. Borrowing from the disability rights movement of the 1990s, Mejia infused the

slogan “nothing about us without us is for us” as part of her first campaign for office. The slogan was a call for full and direct engagement of those most deeply impacted by policies and practices, in particular people from marginalized communities. The concept of FUBU-*About Us* is deeply personal to me and stems from a standpoint of frustration, trauma, and pain, but also resilience, hope, self-determination, and inspiration.

My dissertation was an exploratory and critical journey hoping to find a model of Latinx FUBU-*About Us* in higher education for the 21st century, understanding that institutions of higher education were created intently as exclusionary enterprises. Latinx FUBU-*About Us* in higher education may be an answer to disrupting the perpetual invisibility and marginality of Latinx people in colleges and universities. A good friend said to me, “C, you are building a manifesto of your life’s work!” I took this to mean that it had been my life that had informed how I got to yearn for FUBU-*About Us*, and my purpose to figure out how and what it took to make it real and work with my community to push FUBU-*About Us* forward in every aspect of our lives.

With my positionality and life experiences stated, I invite the reader to join me in a critical (and desire-centered [Tuck, 2009]) study of FUBU-*About Us* to explore and understand how higher education institutions can, should, and might be constructed for Latinx people. Chapter 1 includes background research on the issues confronting Latinx people in higher education and why there is a need for understanding their experiences from an asset-based approach. The chapter concludes with an overview of the research problem, purpose of the study, and the research questions that I sought to investigate through the study.

Background

U.S. higher education was founded on white supremacy, which centers whiteness³ while historically minoritizing, disregarding, and excluding People of Color, resulting in educational systems that foundationally were not meant to serve their educational needs (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Thelin, 2011; Wilder, 2014). Put another way, U.S. higher education was not created *for us* (People of Color), *by us* (People of Color), and *about us* (People of Color). The earliest institutions were modeled after European colleges to educate wealthy white men (and later white women) and were entrenched in the trade of enslaved people, many of them built from the labor of people subjected to slavery (Thelin, 2011; Wilder, 2014). The academy constructed a scientific and academic basis to justify a human hierarchy in which People of Color were considered less than and, therefore, suppressed (Wilder, 2014). Even when initiating higher education for Indigenous people, African people formerly subjected to slavery, and their descendants, white higher education actors carried the goals of repressing, training, subjugating, and eventually assimilating People of Color until they were rid of their knowledge, culture, and identities (Wilder, 2013; Wright, 1991). The corrupt origins of U.S. higher education instilled a legacy of Eurocentric, white supremacist constructs that have made it nearly impossible for Students of Color to genuinely engage and benefit from the transformational journey that an education often promises (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2015).

³ Cabrera et al. (2017) defines whiteness as “a normative structure in society that marginalizes People of Color while privileging white people ... with material benefits from this normative whiteness and People of Color lose” (p. 18).

Higher education institutions have also not made the paradigmatic changes necessary to honor and sustain the diverse cultural, linguistic, and systematic needs of Latinx students (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2011; Solórzano et al., 2005; Yosso, 2005). For Latinx students, the social construction of race is complicated as many Latinx people, particularly immigrants, tie their identities to their country of origin (Núñez, 2014). Additionally, Latinx people are the product of colonial miscegenation, representing multiple racial constructs, and a diversity of physical, national, linguistic, generational, historical, and U.S. citizenship status characteristics (Núñez, 2014; Rinderle & Montoya, 2008). Their identities are complex and interconnected, crossing the boundaries of just race alone; yet, they have been forced to conform to U.S. standards of single racialization despite the fact that research suggests Latinx people are an ethnic group (Núñez, 2014; Rinderle & Montoya, 2008). Researchers have characterized their higher education struggle as being catapulted by the civil rights movement and their need to increase visibility, political power, and legitimacy; followed by decades of searching for resources, self-determination, autonomy, and recognition (MacDonald et al., 2007).

Evidence suggests that many colleges and universities continue to impose white normative cultures, values, and standards that strip Latinx people and People of Color from their identities, further impacting their success (Bernal, 2002; Jones et al., 2002). Cabrera et al. (2017) describe campuses as promoting whiteness through social and environmental norms, whereby Students of Color learn very quickly that not all physical, cultural, and linguistic spaces are open to them. Several studies have found that the privileging of whiteness leaves Latinx students feeling like outsiders and foreigners on their campuses, especially if they hold strong cultural identities (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Jones et al.,

2002). Whiteness also promotes the ideas of assimilation as a means for countering the outsider phenomenon and as a strategy for Students of Color to be successful (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Furthermore, studies show that the degree of disconnect that Latinx people experience between the institutions' norms and their own beliefs, values, cultures, and sense of self may also lead to feelings of discomfort and negative perceptions of the university environment, which can hinder their persistence (Gloria et al., 2005; Jones et al., 2002).

Higher education institutions create challenges for Latinx students, resulting in disparities along the continuum from entry, retention, and transfer rates (from 2-year to 4-year institutions), to completion pathways (Solórzano et al., 2005). Unfortunately, Latinx student success is often reduced to status quo quantitative metrics set by institutions, such as standardized admission exams and GPA rates, rather than strengthening the emphasis on how institutions replicate disparities and lack a focus on how Latinx students resist and are resilient in the face of oppression (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Gloria et al., 2005; Solórzano et al., 2005). Compounding these challenges are the demands for accountability by national organizations, education agencies, and policy makers that seek indicators confirming the quality of higher education as a means for justifying fiscal resources for institutions (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007). Thus, institutions press to substantiate their validity through the use of enrollment numbers, grade point averages, credit hours, and years to completion, among others, as their indicators of success—easily claiming Latinx graduates as success stories without deconstructing the dissatisfactory and oppressive experiences of Latinx students (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007).

Institutions also create challenges for Latinx students, faculty, and staff with regards to discrimination, biases, oppressive campus climates, and forced acculturation because of

organizational systems, cultures, and norms that are deeply rooted in whiteness that misfits Latinx people (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2015; Stanley, 2006; Steele, 2018). Studies affirm that experiences of discrimination, bias incidents, microaggressions, and racialization adversely affect institutions' ability to recruit, retain, and establish a sense of belonging for Latinx people (Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2015; Núñez, 2009; Stanley, 2006). These experiences cause significant detrimental psychological impacts for many Latinx people such as stress and depression, especially at predominantly white institutions (PWIs; Arbona & Jimenez, 2014; Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2015). Latinx faculty and staff, in particular, confront organizational systems that hinder and block their career advancement starting at the point of the initial job interview, through the tenure and promotion process and beyond, and are also segregated within the ranks of the racial hierarchy of the organization (Bernal & Villalpando, 2010; Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Ray, 2019). They also experience invisibility on their campuses, lack support, and thus quickly develop navigational skills to manage white normative structures and culture, just like Latinx students (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Stanley, 2006; Steele, 2018).

Not only have Latinx people been neglected and excluded, but they are also the fastest-growing population in the U.S., making their continued marginalization in higher education deeply problematic. Their growth is contributing to a demographic shift that is moving the U.S. toward becoming a majority nation of People of Color, whereby People of Color will represent more than 50% of the population by 2060 (Frey, 2018). Latinx people will impact this shift with increases of 138% through this same time period, moving from 16.3% (over 50 million) of the population to representing 29% (119 million) of the total

population in four decades (Granberry & Mattos, 2019). Latinx people are also the most youthful group in the country with over 60% aged 35 or younger (with an average age of 20), and over 80% of these young adults are U.S.-born citizens (Lopez et al., 2018). School-aged Latinx children already represent 25% of the national K–12 population and will contribute to the growth in the college-age population (Lopez et al., 2018). In 2018, undergraduate student enrollment in the U.S. included 16.6 million students, of whom 36% (or 3.5 million) were Latinx (Hussar et al., 2020).

Mirroring Latinx people’s growth in the U.S. population are their increases in college enrollment, which is up by 148% since 2000 (Lopez et al., 2018). This enrollment growth is accompanied by the increasing number of federally designated Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), which are characterized by 25% or more Latinx undergraduate students enrolled full-time (Hussar et al., 2020; Medina & Posadas, 2012). Over 330 institutions have become HSIs since the mid-1990s with continued growth on a yearly basis by 30 institutions since 2009. HSIs now total 539 institutions, with over 350 emerging HSIs (Latinx full-time undergraduate enrollment between 15-25%) in 2018-2019 (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities [HACU], 2015, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). While enrollments for Latinx students are growing, the increases have been uneven across sectors. Nearly half of Latinx students attend community colleges, where they are less likely to complete their degrees (HACU, 2015; Solórzano et al., 2005).

Higher education institutions have enacted a range of policies, practices, and reforms to improve outcomes for Latinx students, but these initiatives insufficiently address the multidimensional and intersecting identities of Latinx people (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Solórzano et al., 2005). Furthermore, institutions rarely consult the expertise of Latinx people

when looking for solutions to improve their educational experiences and outcomes. Institutions have not built the language and actions necessary to attend critically to racism and whiteness or to establish mechanisms for accountability toward tackling structural inequities (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015). Instead, the most popular approach is to promote multiculturalism and diversity, which has made no radical change to the status quo (Cabrera et al., 2017; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, 2016). In contrast to practices that reinforce the status quo, Latinx scholars have employed counter storytelling as a way of understanding, reclaiming, and legitimizing the cultural resources and multidimensional knowledge from Latinx people and Communities of Color (Bernal & Villalpando, 2010; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) define counter stories as “a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society) [and] a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (p. 32). Through counter stories, scholars have exposed how institutions uphold “racialized double standards that are firmly embedded in the whiteness of the academy and facilitate an apartheid of knowledge,” whereby institutions impose certain standards and procedures that they deem “neutral, meritocratic, and objective” while devaluing and neglecting the cultural resources and knowledge of Latinx people (Bernal & Villalpando, 2010, p. 176). Additionally, institutional cultures follow dominant epistemologies that depict Latinx people as inadequate and deem their scholarship as biased and non-rigorous (Bernal & Villalpando, 2010).

Too often solutions in higher education are focused on master narratives that blame the individual and promote deficit-based discourses that render the needs and knowledge assets of Latinx people invisible, rather than advance systemic changes to deconstruct and

reconstruct institutions for educational justice and equity (Bernal & Villalpando, 2010; Cabrera et al., 2017; Yosso, 2005). These deficit-based discourses use cultural differences of Latinx people as a way to minimize the role of racism and racial inequities, creating false narratives that students and families do not value education, and that they are responsible for their educational “failures” (Cabrera et al., 2017; Yosso, 2005). Deficit discourses are enhanced by the undisputed language that has been normalized in education to describe Latinx students, such as that they are “incapable of learning,” “not college material,” “speaking with accents,” “high risk,” “disadvantaged,” “remedial,” or “underprepared” (Rendón et al., 2014, p. 7). Institutional policies and practices are informed and executed through deficit frameworks that are heightened by the current national climate around anti-Blackness, anti-immigration, and xenophobia (Dancy et al., 2018; Santellano, 2019; Solórzano et al., 2005). Furthermore, institutions have been slow to recognize and act upon the relevance of race/ethnicity and confront racism in higher education (Solórzano et al., 2005).

Deficit-based paradigms about Latinx people have overshadowed the public discourse on Latinx people’s strengths and asset-based frameworks (Rendón et al., 2014; Yosso, 2005). The strength-based approaches identified by Latinx people are insufficiently recognized and rarely explored in depth, limiting the effectiveness of institutions in addressing the needs of Latinx students, faculty, and staff. This lack of strength-based focus disregards the beliefs, values, knowledges, experiences, and cultural proficiencies that Latinx people and People of Color bring to educational spaces and could be propelled toward educational transformation. Some of the assets that Latinx people bring include, but are not limited to aspirational,

navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital – developed under exceedingly oppressive contexts (Yosso, 2005).

Latinx communities have distilled many of the practices that can successfully engage these assets to promote the advancement of Latinx students and the Latinx community at large (Carales & López, 2020; Rendón et al., 2014). Yet, the discussion on serving the needs of People of Color continues to miss these examples as they would be inconsistent with the master narratives and systematic inequities grounded in oppressing People of Color. Promoting a strengths-based research and practice agenda *for, by, and about* Latinx people can lead toward more liberatory higher education frameworks that resist the antithetical nature of deficit-based orientations which seek to voice for Latinx people who they are and how they must operate to be successful. Furthermore, for the few institutions that are defining for themselves how they will operate toward more strengths-based, People of Color identity-centered approaches, illuminating these strategies might release institutions from the trap of deficit thinking that pigeonholes Latinx communities.

Institutions that choose to define for themselves how they center Latinx people, their values, beliefs, and practices, and how they contribute to Latinx communities (which includes racial/ethnic and other diverse individual and social identities, neighborhoods and physical spaces, groups and associations) are likely to reflect their Latinx-centering through their organizational identity, culture, and praxis (Garcia, 2018; Garcia, Núñez, & Sansone, 2019). Organizational identity is a means for understanding how organizations (in this case, higher education institutions) define who they are and what they stand for through features that are considered central, distinct, and continuous (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Theory suggests that organizational identity is constructed by organizational members, thus

organizational culture (shared beliefs, values, assumptions, and artifacts) is an interrelated concept that, together with identity, can help understand how people define and enact who they are (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Hatch & Schultz, 1997; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). Praxis, therefore, becomes the active process of manifesting organizational identity and culture through the institution's practices, structures, systems, and ways of being with, for, by, and about Latinx communities. Therefore, organizational identity, culture, and praxis are major factors in shaping Latinx-centered institutions, which cannot be ignored if Latinx communities are to achieve transformation and liberation from normative realities (those hegemonic, white supremacist systems, deficit-discourses and orientations, and philosophies embedded in whiteness).

Research Problem and Purpose Statement

As Latinx people continue to rise in numbers and in post-secondary attendance, institutions of higher education cannot continue to ignore their educational needs and the opportunities to recognize and honor the assets that they bring. The deeply racialized and white normative contexts of colleges and universities make Latinx people's existence in these spaces significantly challenging. Yet, Latinx people have developed several strengths in the face of adversity, racism, and marginalization, and have created counterspaces as places of resistance and continuity of their home communities (Yosso, 2005). Counterspaces are those "sites where deficit notions of People of Color can be challenged and where a positive collegiate racial climate can be established and maintained" (Solórzano et al., 2000, p. 70). To continue providing a status quo education entrenched in an oppressive history that persists and promulgates through institutional structures and practices is highly problematic because it negates the strengths Latinx people have developed in the face of adversity, racism, and

marginalization (Yosso, 2005). Thus, transformative alternatives that are *for us by us about us*—focused on Latinx people’s strengths and ingenuity—need to be studied and understood.

Higher education institutions’ organizational identities, cultures, and praxis have overwhelmingly failed to honor the values, culture, and knowledge assets of Latinx communities, and thereby have limited advances in educational justice and equity that could be achieved through Latinx-centered forms of higher education. Without an in-depth deconstruction and reconstruction of the Latinx higher education experience – one that resists whiteness as normative and includes People of Color as holders and creators of knowledge (Bernal, 2002), institutions cannot expect those minoritized and rendered invisible to succeed. However, the literature is limited in comprehensively describing alternatives to normative higher education institutions, particularly those that have been founded by Latinx communities. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to explore how organizational identity, culture, and praxis at higher education institutions founded by Latinx communities reflected Latinx-centered approaches that built upon and promoted the assets (knowledge, values, culture, and experiences) of Latinx People.

Research Questions

The overarching research question for this study was as follows: How do higher education institutions founded by Latinx communities build upon, promote, and center Latinx assets through organizational identity, culture, and praxis? The sub-questions for this study were as follows:

1. What Latinx assets do institutions founded by Latinx communities promote and center?

2. How do institutions founded by Latinx communities institutionalize and build upon these assets as part of their organizational identity, culture, and praxis?
3. In what ways do Latinx-founded institutions and Latinx communities contribute to and support each other?
4. How and to what extent are Latinx-founded institutions building counterspaces to normative realities in higher education?

Significance

This study has practical, policy-related, and research significance. In terms of practice and policy, policymakers and officials at the state and federal levels create policies and initiatives and they oversee appropriations that impact outcomes for Latinx communities. Institutional executive leaders respond to these policy and funding environments and are increasingly subjected to quantitative accountability measures for student success. These leaders are also responsible for creating and overseeing institutional policies and practices. Latinx people are attending all institutional types and, thus, public officials and institutional leaders must consider how their policies and practices are impacting Latinx people's outcomes, including a focus on whether their institutions value the assets that Latinx people bring to campus. Examining ways to leverage Latinx people's assets has significance for institutional leaders as well as for faculty and staff hired to support the academic missions and student support structures of their institutions.

In addition, the study's focus on institutions founded by Latinx communities and grounded in asset-based frameworks that promote Latinx people's success will also be of significance to national associations such as the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU), the Alliance of Hispanic-Serving Institution Educators (AHSIE), the

Association of Public Land-Grant Universities (APLU), and Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities (CUMU)—of which the last two have increased their policy and institutional membership conversations around equity and urban, place-based missions.

Finally, the study will also be of interest to researchers looking to deepen their understanding of how institutional identities, cultures, and praxis can be (re)constructed in ways that are specific to Latinx people, informed by Latinx scholars and other Scholars of Color. The extant literature demonstrates a gap in understanding how to serve and ensure the success of Latinx students from the perspective of Latinx people's self-determination and agency in constructing organizations that are *for* and *by* them, much like the ways in which Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) and some Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were constructed. The literature on Latinx higher education is limited to examining Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) that were historically not created with this specific purpose. Therefore, my study sought to contribute to this body of work with the goal of lifting up Latinx people-specific practices that advance Latinx communities.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Constructing Latinx-centered higher education involves understanding organizational identity, culture, and praxis, which might contribute toward Latinx people’s educational success, while also enlisting the expertise of those with Latinx people’s lived and professional experiences. Given the background and research problem of the study, the literature review intently identifies asset- and solutions-based tools for institutional transformation.

First, a review of the foundation, mission, and organizational practices of Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) and other Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) that were founded to serve and support strengths-based practices for People of Color is critical to understanding how increases of Brown and Black student populations might impact institutional practices and outcomes. This review examines considerations for constructing institutions specifically for Latinx people, with particular emphasis on the use of asset-based approaches. With the exception of a few Latinx-founded institutions—HSIs were not constructed with a specific commitment to Latinx people and only achieved this status in 1992 through an amendment to the Higher Education Act (Gasman et al., 2015). Yet, their Latinx student enrollment numbers are significant and growing; therefore, it is important to examine how they are not just enrolling but might also serve Latinx people in asset-focused ways. Similarly, lessons can be

drawn from examining the strengths-based practices of MSIs. Understanding the institutional work of the various kinds of MSIs might also inspire shared experiences and offer ideas that can be adapted for a Latinx-specific context.

Second, in order to construct institutions for Latinx people, I would be remiss not to acknowledge the theory and praxis created and applied by critical scholars who also seek visibility for issues confronted by Latinx people. bell hooks (1994) describes theorizing as a healing process that allows for discovery and sensemaking of all the lived experiences, of the pain, critical reflection and self-analysis of these experiences. Scholars of Color have translated experiences into deep reflexive theory, making this a body of work necessary to analyze on its own, given the complex thought processes and critiques engaged towards liberation. hooks (1994) posits, “when our lived experiences of theorizing [are] fundamentally linked to processes of self-recovery, of collective liberation, no gap exists between theory and practice” (p. 61). Many Scholars of Color have embraced these theories and used them to explain, analyze, and draw connections with Latinx-centered approaches (Castillo, 2020; Guzmán et al., 2018; Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017; Rendón et al., 2014). Thus, as scholars write about how higher education institutions underserve and suppress Students of Color, it is also important to lift up bodies of work that describe the ways in which educators and students are countering oppressive systems through asset-based sustaining praxis (Carales & López, 2020; Pérez & Taylor, 2016; Rendón et al., 2014; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). Accordingly, this part of the literature review intends to appreciate and gather insights on theory and praxis frameworks, intentionally presented as separate literature areas to center the distinct strengths of theory and praxis, that might help shift the paradigm towards a Latinx-centered higher education institutional formation.

Finally, it is critical to examine how higher education institutions might shape their structures and practices in ways that advance Latinx communities, while addressing the issue of inclusion of the knowledge assets of Latinx people and People of Color towards uncovering these institutional approaches. Critical Race Theory (CRT) and LatCrit scholars, in particular, have established the importance of “naming one’s own reality” or “voice” as a “way to communicate the experience and realities of the oppressed, a first step on the road to justice,” asserting that “the voice of People of Color is required for a complete analysis of the educational system” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 58). Similarly, cultural anthropologists (Morris et al., 1999) refer to the “insider” or emic perspective, which offers insights relating to cultural influences, allowing insiders (in this case Latinx people) to describe cultural phenomena in their own terms and reclaim their voice. To lift up and center the knowledge, experiences, and voice of Latinx people, this literature review focuses primarily, with some exceptions in the first literature area, on scholarship by Latinx people and other Scholars of Color to explore how they discuss institutional characteristics and asset-based practices for serving People of Color.

Accordingly, the following review is organized by three literature areas: (1) Minority-Serving and Hispanic-Serving Institutions: Organizational Identities and Asset-Centered Approaches, (2) Racial Equity and Social Justice-Based Theoretical Frameworks, and (3) Praxis: Latinx People’s Success and Asset-Based Practices. Each area includes several subthemes drawn from the literature that help better understand how scholars have addressed the need for institutional structures and practices that center the values, cultures, and assets of Latinx people and People of Color.

Minority-Serving Institutions and Hispanic-Serving Institutions: Organizational Identities and Asset-Centered Approaches

This literature area explores how institutions can meet the unique and varied experiences of Latinx people and People of Color and leverage strengths-based approaches that counter traditions of marginalization and the decentering of their experiences. While most institutions are ingrained in whiteness and therefore cater to white people, select Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) were foundationally designed in ways to intentionally support People of Color. There are also MSIs that have experienced demographic shifts that have pushed them to either adopt or consider their organizational identity as one that serves Communities of Color. Albert and Whetten (1985) defined organizational identity as “those features of an organization that in the eyes of its members are *central* to the organization’ character or ‘self-image’, make the organization *distinctive* from other similar organizations, and are viewed as having *continuity* over time” (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 125). Accordingly, higher education institutions are likely to organize themselves based upon their organizational identity, and that identity might serve as an indicator for determining whether institutional systems, values, and cultures reflect diverse communities. Furthermore, an organizational identity lens might also help us understand whether organizational members in colleges and universities believe that serving People of Color through asset-based practices reflects a central, distinctive, and enduring characteristic of their institution.

As this literature review is focused on Latinx people and Communities of Color, this section of the review links organizational characteristics of MSIs with asset-based practices that create positive experiences for People of Color. This literature area is predominantly conceptual and descriptive in nature with some empirical analysis as the themes develop.

This area is organized in three sections: MSIs' origins and distinctive contexts, MSIs that are linking organizational identity with policies and practices, and finally, a review of literature that examines the extent to which HSIs are oriented toward serving the Latinx community.

MSIs: Origins and Distinctive Contexts

MSIs are a vital part of the higher education industry, enrolling 28% of undergraduate students (or 4.8 million) across 700 institutions in the U.S. (Espinosa et al., 2018).

Researchers project that People of Color will represent nearly half of all enrollments by 2025, indicating a growth of MSIs and, relatedly, their need to focus on strategies for success for Students of Color (Espinosa et al., 2018; Hussar & Bailey, 2017). It is important to understand that not all MSIs were created equal, and that their institutional origins influence the characteristics, values, and thus practices that set them apart from both PWIs and each other (Espinosa et al., 2017). Following is a brief description of MSIs and the various types.

There are five distinct MSI types listed in order of when each first emerged: HBCUs (1830s), TCUs (1968), HSIs (1992), Asian American Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISI; 2005), and Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs; 2008; Espinosa et al., 2018; Gasman et al., 2015; Li & Carroll, 2007). Legislated by Congress as part of Title III of the Higher Education Act of 1965, the term MSI is a federal recognition categorizing institutions as “minority-serving” based on their status as either legislatively created to serve a high proportion of a racial “minority” population or having a significant percentage of “minority” students enrolled full-time (Li & Carroll, 2007).

Historically Legislated MSIs

The emergence of many MSIs began as a response to the inequities in access and opportunity for People of Color who have been historically, legally, and socially excluded

from PWIs (Gasman et al., 2015; Gasman et al., 2017). HBCUs were the first of the MSIs to be recognized for their explicit mission to educate Black Americans (Espinosa et al., 2017). Many HBCUs were established post-Civil War per the Freedman's Bureau, as well as by mostly white churches and white philanthropists to deliver rudimentary skills and religious instruction to Black people emancipated from slavery (Albritton, 2012; Gasman et al., 2015; Thelin, 2011). Scholars denote the significance of HBCUs for those formerly enslaved or descendants of slavery as it extended their fight for social justice and freedom, becoming a nexus for political activism (Mbajekwe, 2006).

Indigenous communities have also endured a troubling history of subjugation and, under the self-determination movement of the 1960s, pursued a restructuring of higher education for tribal people, starting with the establishment of Navajo Community College (now Diné College) by the Navajo Nation in 1968 (Espinosa et al., 2017; Fox, 2006). As a result of appeals by Indigenous communities for higher education access and opportunity, Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) became the second type of MSI to be recognized by legislation through the Tribally Controlled College or University Assistance Act of 1978 (Fox, 2006). Essentially, TCUs were *founded by* Indigenous people *for* Indigenous people as part of their ongoing fight for sovereignty (Martin, 2005). HBCUs and TCUs set the stage for institutions with deliberate origins and missions to serve Black and Indigenous communities. The MSIs that would follow stem originally from established PWIs.

MSIs Federally Designated by Student Enrollment

As noted previously, HBCUs and TCUs were established by law and therefore are restricted in their ability to designate more institutions without acts of Congress (Li & Carroll, 2007). In contrast, HSIs, AANAPISIs, and PBIs are federal designations that qualify

institutions for federal funding based on the full-time enrollment of sizeable populations of Latinx (minimum of 25%), Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander (at least 10%), and Black students (over 40% at institutions with at least 1,000 undergraduates), respectively (Espinosa et al., 2018; Flores & Park, 2015). In addition, 50% of Latinx, AANAPISI or Black students at these institutions must also receive federal financial aid or be Pell Grant eligible (Espinosa et al., 2018; Gasman et al., 2015).

Scholars have found that the differences in experiences of People of Color across MSIs are linked to their different organizational contexts and origins (Flores & Park, 2015; Nelson Laird et al., 2007). Their findings suggest a variation in the experiences of Black students at HBCUs and Latinx people at HSIs due to organizational cultures and practices that enable more positive educational experiences at HBCUs that may only be emerging or possibly non-existent at HSIs (Nelson Laird et al., 2007). With HBCUs enrolling nearly 16% of Black students and HSIs over 40% of Latinx students, the institutional values and practices of HBCUs might provide an understanding of the kinds of organizational systems and structures that could support Latinx people's success (Flores & Park, 2015). The same kind of learning from TCUs and Latinx- founded institutions might also be true and important to consider.

MSIs Linking Organizational Identity with Policies and Practices

While historically legislated MSIs have confronted challenging histories of religious missionaries and white philanthropic imposition, as well as federal and state-level battles and victories, many of them have focused on intentionally cultivating organizational identities that match the cultural identities and aspirations of the communities they serve (Gasman et al., 2015; Martin, 2005; Nelson Laird et al., 2007). The differences between MSIs that were

intentionally built to serve their Students of Color versus those designated on the basis of enrollment alone are evidenced in studies on student outcomes and institutional practices (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Flores & Park, 2015; Nelson Laird et al., 2007). Some of the more promising models of MSIs that link their institutional values, cultures, and missions with policies and practices are found in the literature regarding HBCUs and TCUs. There are also a few key examples of institutions founded by Latinx communities in order to emphasize the strengths and varied needs that Latinx people bring to institutions of higher education. The following section will review the organizational contexts of HBCUs, TCUs, and select Latinx-founded institutions that are allowing for strengths-based practices to occur. These contexts link ethnic/cultural and organizational identities and integrate these linkages within institutional practices.

Learning from HBCUs

The literature indicates that HBCUs have a history of valuing education as an instrument for tackling racial and other inequities in society and serving as a conduit to eliminating systemic barriers ubiquitous in the Black community and fighting for equality and justice (Albritton, 2012; Bracey, 2017; Crewe, 2017). Although students of all racial, ethnic and gender identities attend and are welcomed at HBCUs, scholars note that they have continued to center their identity in a philosophy of racial uplift and community empowerment (Albritton, 2012; Crewe, 2017), which is “the idea that educated Blacks are responsible for the welfare of the majority of the race” and thus their distinctive mission is to be “centers for intellectual knowledge aimed at strengthening the Black community” (Crewe, 2017, p. 361). Jackson and Nunn (2003, as cited in Harris, 2012) provide a further analysis of this distinctive mission:

The missions of HBCUs are (1) education [sic] opportunity and access, (2) perpetuation of the black culture, and (3) search for synergy that focuses on the interdisciplinary intellectual and training and skill development for future employment and race advancement. (p. 23)

Albritton (2012) suggests that HBCUs have embodied the “mission critical” task and values of uplifting Black people and removing barriers through the ways that they offer continuing support to ensure that Black students have the opportunity to succeed in college despite systemic barriers. Additionally, scholars have characterized HBCUs as nurturing and embracing of Black students, ensuring that their environments are spaces of mutual aid and acceptance (Albritton, 2012; Crewe, 2017). At the same time, they are known for their commitment to critically interrogating the Black collegiate experience and to confronting social and political issues impacting Black people (Albritton, 2012; Bracey, 2017). The literature shows that HBCUs hold an ethos of promoting the perspective that Black people are equal to white people and their PWIs, noting the value of education as an instrument of liberation from pervasive legitimated discrimination and oppression (Albritton, 2012; Bracey, 2017).

The result of instituting these values is that many HBCUs have become centers for the ongoing study and sustainability of Black history and culture (Albritton, 2012; Bracey, 2017). Their organizational values are also put to practice via admissions policies intended to widen the door for Black students who would otherwise not have the opportunity to attend higher education (Crewe, 2017). Crewe (2017) posits that the characteristics of HBCUs have led to advances in practices such as the “sociocultural and Black Perspective” out of Howard

University, which inextricably tie cultural appreciation with the ways individuals and communities are valued and engaged.

The literature also uncovers various analyses of mission statements as a signal of organizational values and culture (Albritton, 2012; Crewe, 2017; Harris, 2012). For example, Harris (2012) found that more than half of the nearly 90 HBCU missions examined had language that expressed values around communal education environments, validating the expressions of mutual commitment, shared heritage, and relational investments that are attributed to HBCUs. Similarly, studies have found that the language of mission statements affirms the belief in HBCUs' role as engines of change against racism and barriers that compromise the wellbeing of Black people, as well as expressed the need and importance in being engaged in the community (Albritton, 2012; Crewe, 2017). This belief is in line with the longstanding sense of HBCUs being cultural centers that further the strength of the Black community (Albritton, 2012; Crewe, 2017).

Learning from TCUs

The literature on TCUs provides a model for linking institutional mission, policies and practices that are centered on Indigenous principles and asset-based frameworks (Crazy Bull, 2012; Crazy Bull et al., 2020; DeLong et al., 2016). The mission of TCUs is to “rebuild, reinforce and explore traditional tribal cultures, using designed curricula and institutional settings [and to] address Western models of learning by providing traditional disciplinary courses that are transferable to four-year institutions” (American Indian Higher Education Consortium and the Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999, as cited in Bryan, 2019, p. 52). Crazy Bull et al. (2020) submit a contemporary view of the TCU mission, which is to both provide “support for revitalization of culture and identity and support for individual and

tribal self-determination” (p. 24), building from the vision of the founders who sought to ensure that Indigenous people accessed a higher education that also acknowledged the significant value of sustaining tribal knowledge, cultures, and traditions.

Celebrating heritage, valuing traditional customs, and erecting cultural symbols are hallmarks of the organizational identity of TCUs (Cunningham & Leegwater, 2010). The literature describes how TCUs are known to prioritize integrating faculty, staff, students, families and communities within the institution to create more fluidity in organizational structures; recognize the integral role of spirituality in developing the whole person; enlist elders as guides, educators, advisors and consultants in and out of institutions of higher education; craft institutional architecture and symbols as a means of belonging; and uphold the connection to the land as an identity marker and origin story which informs their relationship to others (Crazy Bull, 2012; DeLong et al., 2016). TCUs are also characterized by the way in which they integrate tribal philosophy and practices, Indigenous values, tribal languages, and tribal history into the way they enact learning (Bryan, 2019). They are also grounded in affirming the worldview of their tribal teachings rather than the worldview of mainstream society—this includes emphasizing that issues confronted by Indigenous people exist in a tension between multiple systems (Bryan, 2019; Crazy Bull, 2012).

Furthermore, TCUs have a culture of gathering and building from the knowledge of their people and centering place-based, tribally-specific education (Crazy Bull, 2012). In an essay about the assets of Tribal knowledge, Deloria Jr. (1993) posits that TCUs must “aggressively assert themselves and become the primary symbols of authority on tribal culture and traditions so that their certification is accepted by non-Indian scholars and institutions the world over” (p. 4). The sentiment of asserting one’s organizational identity

and contributions seems to resonate across the work of scholars writing about historically founded institutions created as meccas for Black and Indigenous people.

Latinx-Founded Institutions

While there was limited published research on the existence of institutions that were founded by Latinx people for Latinx communities in the U.S. mainland, there were a few historically Latinx-founded institutions included within the vast network of HSIs. These literatures are not referenced here and throughout the study to protect the identity of study collaborators. Since the literature review seeks to examine institutions specifically for Latinx people, it is important to recognize the existence of five institutions found through publications and web research, as they may provide a window on how organizational identities can be constructed to recognize and value the strengths of Latinx people.

A review of the sources I found in publications and on Web sites, again, not named here to protect the identity of the institutions included in my study, revealed that historically Latinx-founded institutions, hereafter referred to as “HLFIs,” share a few characteristics that speak to their values and missions. In my analysis, HLFIs were created to (1) meet the needs of ethnic communities within the Latinx diaspora situated in place-based contexts, e.g., serving the needs of Latinx people in specific urban neighborhood contexts, (2) increase access and opportunities in higher education that translate into economic sustainability for students, their families, and communities, (3) provide bilingual and multicultural higher education opportunities and culturally sustaining⁴ pedagogical practices, and (4) serve as a

⁴ I am borrowing culturally sustaining as a concept and practice by Paris (2012) which serves as an alternative to frequently used terms such as culturally appropriate, culturally responsive, and culturally relevant. Paris (2012) argues that culturally sustaining practices and pedagogies require “more than responsive of or relevant to the cultural experiences and practices of young people—it requires that they support young people in sustaining

community development catalyst for underserved communities. Early HLFIs emerged out of the civil rights movement as a response to community activists' calls for accountability for the education of Puerto Rican, Latinx, and Black communities. More recently established institutions grew out of Latinx faith-based communities' self-determination and desire to build community-controlled institutions that enable Latinx people to live, work, learn and grow in predominantly Latinx neighborhoods overshadowed by poverty and crime.

HLFIs enact their Latinx organizational identities by embedding language, culture, and traditions as part of their institutional practices, in addition to being predominantly Latinx people within the student body and across organizational roles (e.g., faculty, staff, administrators; Garcia, 2018; Santiago, 1996; Torres, 2001). Studies also suggest that HLFIs are unique and may not be comparable with HSIIs that are non-HLFIs (Garcia, 2018). For example, the presence of ethnic studies programs, as well as services for minoritized students, may signal that an HSI supports its Latinx students. A case study by Garcia (2018) revealed that an HFI in Puerto Rico did not have programs and services for minoritized students or any ethnic studies programs because, as an HFI, it engaged Latinx students “within and beyond the classroom” and serving these students was “normalized” (p. 130). Furthermore, Garcia found that the educational environment at this HFI was “humanizing and culturally validating” (p. 130) and may differ from U.S. mainland HSIIs.

the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence. Culturally sustaining pedagogy, then, has as its explicit goal supporting multilingualism and multiculturalism in practice and perspective for students and teachers. That is, culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (p. 95).

Hispanic-Serving Institutions' (HSIs) "Servingness" and Latinx Identity

While HBCUs, TCUs, and HLFIs were created with organizational identities that connect to specific communities, the overwhelming majority of HSIs were not founded *by* or *for* Latinx people. Given their prior histories and in some cases current statuses as PWIs, these institutions may be grappling with issues around their servingness and organizational identities vis-à-vis Latinx people. Thus, it is fitting to examine HSIs in more depth to understand how they may have adopted organizational characteristics that promote Latinx people servingness and related asset-based practices.

The literature on HSIs acknowledges the potential of these institutions but demonstrates that many of them fall short on establishing supportive cultural programs, policies, and practices specific to Latinx students (Corral et al., 2015). Since many HSIs were created and continue to operate as PWIs, the organizational identity and cultures of these institutions may not encourage systems and structures that validate and reinforce Latinx people's identity and success (Garcia, 2018; Nelson Laird et al., 2007). Nonetheless, the literature suggests that there are some important HSI organizational contexts that can lead to promising, strengths-based frameworks (Dayton et al., 2004; Garcia, 2016; Santiago, 2008). To that end, this section focuses on literature related to what is considered "servingness" in the HSI context, and what scholars consider to be necessary in constructing a Latinx organizational identity that, in turn, promotes asset-based frameworks.

Defining "Servingness" in the HSI Context

Perhaps one of the most comprehensive analyses of what defines servingness in the HSI context comes from Garcia, Núñez, and Sansone's (2019) systematic review of 148 publications to conceptualize a multi-dimensional framework. The findings of this study

uncovered four themes used by researchers in trying to define servingness. These themes suggest servingness is about serving Latinx students and do not necessarily include serving the Latinx community as part of the definition of servingness. The themes include:

1. *student-centered outcomes*, including both academic (e.g., enrollment, completion, GPA) and non-academic (e.g., “academic self-concept, civic engagement, social agency, racial/ethnic identity salience, and leadership development”; p. 760);
2. *student and non-student experiences*, e.g., social interactions, campus climate;
3. *internal organizational dimensions* or those aspects that are within the institution’s control and able to be altered, e.g., institutional policies, practices, culturally relevant academic programs, and decision-making processes;
4. *external influences*, e.g., federal and state-level policies, external organizational actors that impact the capacity of HSIs to serve.

Many of the practices that scholars have uncovered in analyzing definitions of servingness at HSIs emphasize student-centered outcomes and experiences (Corral et al., 2015; Garcia, 2017; Garcia, Núñez, & Sansone, 2019; Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015; Santiago, 2008), rather than structural and external conditions (Garcia, Núñez, & Sansone, 2019). For example, Santiago (2008) studied 12 HSIs and found several academic programs enacted by institutions to bolster the success of students (e.g., developmental education, advising, cohort-based support initiatives, and mentoring programs), with several institutions using student data to describe outcomes toward servingness. Similarly, Garcia (2017) conducted a case study of a liberal arts HSI, which included interviews with 88 faculty, staff, and students and found servingness was defined across multiple indicators, including student employment

upon graduation, student experience with the campus climate and support programs, with graduation and graduate enrollment as the most important metrics used toward servingness. Campus climate and values around community engagement have also been found as important links to an institution's servingness (Garcia, 2017; Santiago, 2008).

Finally, Garcia, Núñez, and Sansone's (2019) analysis of the literature pushed for an anti-deficit approach to defining servingness that goes beyond outcomes and culture, but also recognizes the complex, multifaceted dimensions of HSIs, including HSIs' diversity of students (racial/ethnic, linguistic, socio-economic status), resources, sectors, state-level and regional contexts, and organizational actors and leadership. The diversity of institutional types and missions can also further complicate the ability to conceptualize a generalizable understanding of servingness (Garcia, Núñez, & Sansone, 2019; Núñez et al., 2016).

From Designation to Constructing a Latinx Organizational Identity

Institutions that receive the HSI designation might equate their new federal status with the funding available to HSIs rather than welcoming the necessary changes to their organizational identity and practice (Carter & Patterson, 2019). While the literature suggests that understanding HSIs' Latinx-serving identity is complex and should not be simplified by whether they are enrolling or serving Latinx students, there is a recognition that "enhancing and sustaining the culture and education of [Latinx people] is part of the central, distinct and enduring elements of a [Latinx]-serving organizational identity" (Garcia, 2016, p. 136). The aforementioned analysis indicates that there are ways that HSIs can create asset-based Latinx organizational identities, perhaps as close to the ways that HBCUs and TCUs developed strengths-based values, principles and approaches *by and for* People of Color. Garcia (2017) argues that "for an organization to have a Latinx serving identity, it should have high

productivity (in regard to legitimized outcomes) and provide a culture that enhances the experience of Latinx students” (p. 122).

However, multiple studies examining the role of the HSI designation in moving campuses toward constructing Latinx organizational identities show a variation in their ability to move toward a Latinx-serving identity (Carter & Patterson, 2019; Garcia, Ramirez, et al., 2019; Martinez, 2015). In some cases, the designation may not have an impact on an institution’s identity at all. A qualitative case study of a midwestern 2-year college that had been a PWI for most of its history until 2008, when it reached 25% Latinx student enrollment and institutional leaders applied for the designation, found that the designation had no impact on who they were despite the institution’s enrollment of 40% Latinx people at the time of the study (Carter & Patterson, 2019). The researchers found the study participants, including senior administrators and staff, had difficulty articulating what it meant to be Hispanic-serving. They did not use the language of HSI or MSI to describe their institution, many were unaware of their status and, overall, there was a belief in serving “all students,” therefore assuming they were also serving Latinx people who had been part of the campus fabric for several years. The efforts by institutional leaders to build awareness of the new status appeared to be missing.

There are also numerous studies by Gina A. Garcia that attempt to make sense of how HSI organizational actors define organizational identity for their institutions (Garcia, 2017, 2018; Garcia, Núñez, & Sansone, 2019; Garcia, Ramirez, et al., 2019). Garcia’s (2017) single-case study resulted in the development of the Typology of HSI Organizational Identities. The framework for the typology examines HSI organizational identity formation along two axes, including (1) established success metrics, e.g., Latinx student outcomes and

(2) ingrained beliefs and values, e.g., how organizational culture influences Latinx student outcomes. Thus, Garcia's typology considers the importance of both outcomes and culture. The typology was not intended to be a ranking system, but rather to honor the distinct approaches to organizational identity formation enacted by HSIs (Garcia, 2018). The typology includes:

1. *Latinx-enrolling*—constructed by members to mean that the institution simply enrolls a minimum of 25% Latinx students but does not produce an equitable number of legitimized outcomes for Latinx students and does not have an organizational culture for supporting Latinx people on campus;
2. *Latinx-producing*—constructed based on the institution enrolling the minimum 25% Latinx students and producing a significant (if not equitable) number of legitimized outcomes for Latinx students, despite the lack of a culture for supporting Latinx people;
3. *Latinx-enhancing*—constructed as an organizational identity based on enrolling a minimum 25% Latinx students and enacting a culture that enhances the educational experience of Latinx students but not producing an equitable number of outcomes for Latinx students;
4. *Latinx-serving*—may be constructed by members at an institution that enrolls the minimum 25% Latinx students, produces an equitable number of legitimized outcomes, and enacts a culture that is educationally enhancing and welcoming. (Garcia, 2017, pp. 121S–122S)

Despite not being created to grade institutions by their Latinx-servingness, it seems inevitable to consider the Latinx-serving identity to be the ideal marker for what HSIs should

aspire to be if that is not already their organizational identity. However, Garcia (2018) critiques her typology by suggesting that it may not apply to historical HSIs (that is, institutions founded by and for Latinx people) because, since their founding, they likely normalized and empowered Latinx identity into their institutional beliefs, values, and practices. Her typology specifically seeks to make sense of how, in general, non-historical, federally designated HSIs are serving Latinx students along measures that are unique to their context.

To summarize, the literature area on Minority-Serving and Hispanic-Serving Institutions' organizational contexts, identities, and asset-centered approaches reviewed the origins and distinct MSI types, and examined what could be learned from institutions whose organizational identities and practices intentionally serve Students of Color (Gasman et al., 2015; Li & Carroll, 2007). Since this literature review is interested in constructing institutions specifically for Latinx people, with particular emphasis on the use of asset-based approaches, this section of the review looked at HBCUs, TCUs, and the few existing historically Latinx-founded institutions to understand how their organizational identities connect to asset-based approaches for serving Black, Indigenous and Latinx students (Albritton, 2012; Corral et al., 2015; DeLong et al., 2016). Since HSIs enroll a significant proportion of Latinx students, HSI definitions of servingness and an organizational typology for Latinx servingness were examined to understand the links to Latinx-centered organizational identities and asset-based institutional practices (Garcia, 2017, 2018; Garcia, Núñez, & Sansone, 2019).

Racial Equity and Social Justice-Based Theoretical Frameworks

The second literature area examines racial equity and social justice-based theoretical frameworks built upon the knowledge, assets, and experiences of People of Color. As a body of literature, these theories introduce concepts that are essential in understanding how Scholars of Color are conceptualizing the issues and educational experiences specific to People of Color. Yosso (2005) posits that racism has centered some knowledges (namely white, Eurocentric, and middle-upper class), and that theories created with these epistemologies innately devalue and disempower voices left in the margins. At the same time, Scholars of Color have envisioned theory as a form of transformative resistance and have created multiple theories to help address the requisite educational paradigmatic shifts needed to ensure equity and justice for Students of Color (Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso, 2005).

Critical theories to be examined that are intended to understand, validate, and uplift the experiences of Latinx people include Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995); LatCrit Theory (Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001); Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005); Funds of Knowledge (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011); and Validation Theory (Linares & Muñoz, 2011; Rendón, 1994). Together, these theories provide a toolbox of approaches toward looking at how institutions can engender Latinx-empowering identities and support the success of Latinx students. Each of these liberatory frameworks builds from one another and resists the antithetical nature of deficit-based orientations that seek to voice for Latinx people who they are and how Latinx people must operate to be successful.

Critical Race Theory and LatCrit Theory

Education researchers have used Critical Race Theory (CRT) and subsequently LatCrit Theory as frameworks for understanding the educational inequities faced in the nation by People of Color, arguing that race and racism are ingrained in our educational systems “legally, culturally, and even psychologically” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 52; see also Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; Yosso, 2005). CRT interrogates the discourse around equality, neutrality, and liberal ideologies, offering an equity-based emancipatory framework that demands the deconstruction of systems of oppression and construction of systems of liberation (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Stemming from critical legal studies by activist lawyers and legal Scholars of Color, such as Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman and Richard Delgado, CRT developed in the 1970s intently centralizing race, racism, and the lived experiences of People of Color. Importantly, CRT is also grounded in a dedication to anti-racism beyond civil rights, affirmative action, integration and other liberal channels for addressing race issues (Bell, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). CRT scholars generally believe in anti-subordination and resistance toward institutions created by and perpetuating white power, as well as the structures that further socially constructed hierarchies (Bell, 1995). This belief is further conceptualized through a framework of CRT foundational tenets:

1. *Racism is Endemic*—a permanent and engrained phenomenon treated as ordinary;
2. *Interest Convergence*—as racism furthers the interests of white people there can be no racial progress unless white people benefit;

3. *Whiteness as Property*—affirms the hierarchal relationship and racial stratification between white people and Black people subscribing a material value to whiteness and claims a set of privileges over People of Color;
4. *Intersectionality and Anti-Essentialism*—the oppression that is experienced with multiple, overlapping identities;
5. *Critique of Liberalism and Dominant Ideologies*—challenging colorblindness and ideas of a post-racial society while privileging the voices of People of Color through counter story telling. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Harris, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001)

CRT extends into subgroup-based theories or branches, such as Latinx/a/o CRT referred to as LatCrit to broaden the two-dimensional, Black-white discourse (Yosso, 2005). Like CRT, LatCrit comes out of critical legal studies as a response to the invisibility of Latinx people (Valdes, 2005). LatCrit Theory adds an analytical dimension to CRT by exposing the multidimensional and intersecting identities of Latinx people, including linguistic, racial, class, geographic, ability, seniority, and immigration status diversity; and by attempting to connect theory, practice, teaching, scholarship, academy, and the community (Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Valdes, 2005). LatCrit is a belief and systematic approach to the synchronicity of multiple identities and their continual interactions, such that Latinx people are of multidimensional diversities that are always relating (Bernal, 2002; Valdes 2005). Thus, LatCrit validates critical raced-gendered epistemologies affirming Latinx students and people as holders and creators of knowledge (Bernal, 2002). Furthermore, LatCrit invites de-centering identities and instilling a culture of criticality and self-criticality as an act of anti-subordination (Valdes, 2005).

Also unique to educational LatCrit theory is the focus on grounding its anti-essentialist and activist values, practices, and objectives in community-building and critical coalitions – linking theory to practice through transdisciplinary social justice work (Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Valdes, 2005). The emphasis on community-building and coalitions is a recognition of the need for long-term sustained, mutually shared and reciprocal processes that value care and foster inter-group solidarity (Valdes, 2005).

Scholars have translated the application of CRT and LatCrit in education to analyze the ways in which the U.S. education system is based on the juncture between race and property and perpetuates inequity (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Particularly, within the field of education, these theories center the ways in which (1) racism is ingrained in schools through the structurally and culturally sanctioned subordination of People of Color; (2) school desegregation efforts have benefited white people rather than the achievement of Black students and other Students of Color; and (3) stereotypic, false narratives and meritocracy have dominated discourse on Students of Color (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). At the same time, LatCrit recognizes that “educational institutions operate in contradictory ways with their potential to oppress and marginalize co-existing with their potential to emancipate and empower” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 479). To this end, CRT and LatCrit scholars have applied these theories as a way to center experiential knowledge and transdisciplinary perspectives in education, pushing for pedagogical approaches that seek to transform dominant racial positions in the classroom and other educational structures (Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001).

Together, CRT and LatCrit might offer a lens for analyzing the formation of higher education organizational identities and practices. These theories suggest that liberal ideology

(professing color blindness, tolerance, “equal opportunity”) is rampant in higher education and gets in the way of seeing institutional and structural racism because it is seeped into institutions’ identity, policies, processes, and practices (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015). Structural racism is so ingrained in the organization’s identity and praxis that they become normal and unrecognizable to white people (Cabrera et al., 2017; Dowd & Bensimon, 2015). Dowd and Bensimon (2015) describe this normality as a form of historical amnesia which fails to recognize higher education’s role in the racialization of education. For example, higher education’s college enrollment- and completion-focused agenda masks inequity as an “achievement gap” instead of naming the issues of white privilege and racism; bypassing accountability to address inequities caused by racism and racialized educational institutions (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015). CRT and LatCrit can help unmask higher education’s dominant narratives and embedded institutional racism and provide conceptual tools for constructing Latinx-centered organizational identities.

Community Cultural Wealth and Funds of Knowledge

The experiences of Latinx people are at the foreground of LatCrit, as well as empirically-based theories such as Community Cultural Wealth (CCW; Yosso, 2005) and Funds of Knowledge (FOK; Moll et al., 1992; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011). Both theories refute racialized assumptions and dominant narratives of Latinx deficiencies. Instead, they center Latinx people as holders of knowledge and accumulated social and cultural wealth that they have banked through their life experiences and bring to institutions of higher education (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011; Yosso, 2005). These multiple forms of wealth contribute to their resistance to marginality and help empower their trajectories.

The CCW framework is considered foundational in researching and furthering more representative accounts of the experiences of Latinx college students (Carales & López, 2020). The CCW framework proposes a communal definition of wealth (or accumulated assets) that individuals use to progress themselves and their communities, and to survive and resist institutional and inter-personal oppression experienced in education (Pérez & Taylor, 2016; Yosso, 2005). Recognizing that culture can take on many forms, Yosso (2005) examines the notion of culture through the sets of “behaviors and values that are learned, shared, and exhibited by a group of people” (p. 75). In the case of Students of Color, Yosso (2005) considers culture to be “frequently represented symbolically through language and can encompass identities around immigration status, gender, phenotype, sexuality and region, as well as race and ethnicity” (p. 76). Therefore, CCW recognizes six forms of cultural wealth as a CRT-rooted approach toward acknowledging the strengths of Communities of Color, and to serve social and racial justice causes. The interrelated forms of capital nurture and empower students and include: aspirational (hopes beyond the circumstances), linguistic (communication style and language), familial (sense of community, culture, intuition nurtured by family/familia), social (networks and community resources), navigational (maneuvering skills), and resistant capital (cultural knowledge of racist structures and motivation to transform them; Yosso, 2005). Yosso (2005) posits, “these various forms of capital are not mutually exclusive or static, but rather are dynamic processes that build on one another as part of community cultural wealth” (p. 77).

CCW has also been informed by Funds of Knowledge (FOK) with its focus on Latinx familial capital and the ways that students draw from communal wisdom (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011; Yosso, 2005). FOK originally developed in reference to working-class Mexican

families living in the U.S.–Mexico border area but has since been used to describe the totality of experiences of the cultural structuring of the household that Latinx students employ for their survival (Moll et al., 1992; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011). Scholars have observed the extensive knowledge accumulated through labor occupations and transborder transactions of many border-land Mexican households that required such funds as legal assistance, procurement of goods and services, information about assistance programs and job opportunities (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011). Rios-Aguilar et al. (2011) noted that these funds:

are not only the repertoire of information and knowledge found among clusters of households, but the ‘currency of exchange’ among such household arrangements, ... [whereby] households interact within circles of kinship and friendship, children are ‘participant-observers’ of the exchange of goods, services, and symbolic capital which are part of each household’s functioning. (pp. 165–166)

Furthermore, FOK identifies the interrelated relationship between households’ resources and school practices, and how these connect to other issues such as social class, beliefs, and power (Moll et al., 1992; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011).

In addition to the social, cultural, and linguistic capital described above in Yosso’s (2005) theory, FOK also includes human (having to do with relationships and intergenerational connections) and symbolic capital (related to the functioning of the household). Together, these “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills [are] essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (Moll et al., 1992, p. 133). Finally, FOK seeks to push the boundary on unilateral conversations about Latinx people’s culture and its attributes by emphasizing the “strategic

knowledge and related activities essential in households' functioning" that should be strategically exercised by educators and institutions (Moll et al., 1992, p. 139).

CCW and FOK provide conceptual frameworks which institutions of higher education could use to analyze their organizational identities, values, and practices concerning Latinx students. These theories can shape the ways in which institutions can create structures informed by the diverse knowledge assets of Latinx people so that they are embedded in organizational cultures and identity. Scholars consider that studying Latinx people from a capital standpoint can offer better self-examination by institutions about how Latinx people's educational opportunity is realized (or not) and might also inform a more nuanced awareness of the ways that they are designing pedagogy, programs, policies, initiatives, and bridging school-family relations (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011).

Validation Theory

Validation Theory is another empirically based theory that can be used as a way to recognize the assets put forward by CCW and FOK. Rendón (1994) created Validation Theory to highlight the work that higher education organizational actors must perform to authentically support Students of Color by endorsing the assets that they bring with them to institutions. The theory is centered on faculty and staff enabling, confirming, and developing supportive processes that nurture academic and personal development (Linares & Muñoz, 2011; Rendón, 1994). The theory suggests that students benefit most when they feel affirmed by others and sets the following six features for validation to unfold:

1. Actors enable, confirm, and support academic and interpersonal development;
2. Students feel worthy, capable, recognized, and accepted;
3. Validation is a prerequisite to student growth;

4. Validation occurs in and out of the classroom and is actively supported by multiple actors (e.g., faculty, advisors and staff, family, friends and classmates);
5. Validation is a process whereby the more validation, the better-off the experience;
6. Validation is most effective when implemented early on in the college experience and through completion. (Rendón, 1994)

An extension of the theory is Neo-Critical Validation Theory (Gildersleeve, 2011), which focuses on the self-efficacy of students created through external validation that the original theory presupposes. Neo-critical validation suggests that students can also activate forms of validation, “recognizing a political dimension in students’ wholeness,” which includes “power” and “agency” and the critical social analysis of their experiences (Gildersleeve, 2011, p. 89). The theory suggests that Latinx students’ ability to reflect and explore the political dimensions of their experiences can create an iterative process, whereby students draw validating connections between social issues and their familial and cultural contexts (Gildersleeve, 2011).

Institutions can provide validating experiences for Latinx communities through intentional authentication of Latinx people’s assets and the socio-cultural contexts that are embedded in their lived experiences. Through Validation Theory, institutions might also bridge the analysis of CCW and FOK asset-based theoretical frameworks toward a praxis of constructing higher education that is for Latinx people and supports Communities of Color more holistically.

In summary, the review of racial equity and social justice-based theoretical frameworks included a brief overview of critical race theories (CRT and LatCrit) and theories focused on assets of Latinx people and People of Color in education (CCW, FOK

and Validation). CRT and LatCrit can help us understand the endemic and systemic nature of racism that impact the experiences of People of Color in education (Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Together, they provide a lens for distilling oppressive structures and practices while explaining the complex, multi-dimensional features of Latinx identity, which must be considered to systematically transform higher education. Similarly, CCW, FOK, and Validation theories encourage a multi-faceted approach to lifting Latinx people as holders of numerous assets obtained through their lived experiences and identity-based contexts (Rendón, 1994; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011; Yosso, 2005). The theories collectively suggest that by validating and applying these assets into praxis, Latinx students can harness their full potential and institutions can begin to replace deficit orientations that limit their ability to fully serve Latinx people.

Praxis: Latinx People's Success and Asset-Based Practices

The first literature review area examined how the organizational identities of Minority Serving Institutions can connect with the educational goals and values of People of Color, and the second literature review area focused on theoretical perspectives developed by Scholars of Color with the explicit purpose of dismantling oppressive systems and liberating the full potential of People of Color. To extend upon these discussions, the third literature area relates to the problem of institutions' lack of inquiry into the knowledge assets of People of Color and the prevailing deficit-based perspectives, contrasted with the need for more asset-based discourses to counter dominant narratives. Scholars of Color have identified practices (distinct from but, at times, linked to the abovementioned theories) that are helping advance the strengths, aspirations, and potential of Latinx people in higher education (Castillo, 2020; Guzmán et al., 2018; Pérez, 2017; Villalpando, 2003).

This asset-based literature covers empirical and conceptual scholarship where the unit of analysis is often focused on students, with limited published work on practices for lifting up Latinx staff and faculty (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Lopez, 2004; Luedke, 2017). Albeit, while the literature on practices encompasses micro-level interventions (e.g., programs, interpersonal and personally employed resources), it offers generative insights that could be considered for organizational practices at the meso level, countering dominant deficit-based perspectives. Importantly, this literature presents the assets of Latinx people from two perspectives. On the one hand, it concerns those assets that Latinx people bring to higher education that contribute to their success and, on the other hand, it depicts asset-based practices focused on shifting the paradigm to ensure Latinx people's success in higher education. The ensuing sections describe both perspectives.

Latinx People's Assets Contributing to Success

To initiate a review about assets contributing to Latinx people's success in higher education, it is important to situate an understanding of how success has been defined. Policymakers and educational administrators need to account for educational quality, and as a result, they have often promulgated a definition of success centered on quantitative academic assessment outcomes, namely graduation rates (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007). This status quo definition of success provides little regard for the social, cultural, and personal sacrifices that Latinx students endure on their road to post-secondary attainment (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007). The asset-based literature posits the need to re-center and redefine success as the ways in which Latinx students are resilient in their pathway through college (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Pérez & Taylor, 2016; Rendón et al., 2014).

Castellanos and Gloria (2007) propose a framework for redefining Latinx student collegiate success centered around psychological, social and cultural dimensions, as well as focusing on the “microsuccesses” of their varied experiences. According to Castellanos and Gloria (2007), microsuccesses constitute smaller, intermediary steps that lead to persistence and overall success, such as the actions that occur on an hourly to monthly basis (e.g., conversations with family members, studying with other Latinx students, participating in monthly community projects that focus on Latinx issues). Furthermore, by focusing on microsuccesses, they suggest students’ whole selves can be engaged in the educational process, and when coupled with asset-based, culturally-specific approaches, they can lead toward positive outcomes for Latinx students.

Importantly, these publications affirm this literature review’s framing around asset-based frameworks to understand how Latinx students are successful in higher education. Some of the reasons for their success are rooted in their *familismo*, which includes the nuclear family and extended relationships, as well as an active collective consciousness and resistance, which include giving back to community, connecting across difference, and creating unity (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Lopez, 2006; Rendón et al., 2014).

Familia/Family

The literature reveals a principal theme around the significance of *familia*/family or *familismo* as a deployable means for Latinx student success (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Lopez, 2006; Pérez, 2017; Pérez & Taylor, 2016; Rendón et al., 2014; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). According to Lopez (2006):

Familismo represents the beliefs and attitudes that operate within the family system. Intertwined with *familismo* are the values of respect (*respeto*) and trust (*confianza*).

Family provides reciprocity or mutual support and is viewed as one of the foundational structures of the [Latinx] culture. Parents are highly valued and respected. The needs and concerns of the family supersede the needs of any individual family member; conversely, family members are expected to support each other when there is a problem and to resolve the situation as a family unit.

Research on Latinx students suggests that the notion of family takes on many forms, as the values, agency, and skills learned through nuclear families also extend to students' relatedness to peers, community members, and other supportive adults or mentors (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Pérez & Taylor, 2016; Rendón et al., 2014).

At the nuclear family level, research has shown that regardless of the educational or income level of the household, Latinx students obtained a significant level of academic determination because of their families (Pérez & Taylor, 2016). For example, Pérez and Taylor (2016) conducted a study of ten Latino men achievers and looked at the personal attributes that contributed toward their success at PWIs. The researchers found that in wealthier and more educated households, the expectations around attending college were central to nurturing Latinx student educational aspirations (Pérez & Taylor, 2016). Likewise, in lower-income households, and households where parents were less educated, the desire to take advantage of opportunities not afforded to their parents fueled these aspirations (Pérez & Taylor, 2016). The research revealed that students' academic determination was often dependent on this familial capital; thus, students worked to maintain these connections while in college, especially when encountering adversity (Pérez, 2017). Furthermore, multiple studies have found that parents instilled the value of education, and students gained their

aspirational capital through this familial capital (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Pérez & Taylor, 2016).

Additionally, scholars have found that the nuclear family is central to obtaining linguistic capital in the form of bilingualism (Rendón et al., 2014), as well as stories of success and consistent encouragement to counteract negative messages received in college (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Pérez & Taylor, 2016). Rendón et al.'s (2014) qualitative research involving 47 Latinx student knowledge essays, focus groups, and in-depth interviews with six students confirmed that students attributed the linguistic capital gained from family as an important skill that allowed them to communicate and form relationships, regardless of potential accents that they might have had. Research also substantiates the particular role of Latina mothers as nurturing affirmers through linguistic capital of sharing knowledge or *conocimientos* (Pérez, 2017; Ramirez et al., 2019; Rendón et al., 2014).

Beyond the nuclear family, existing literature has provided evidence that students translate their value for family, and the skills obtained in being part of a family, to their extended relationships. For example, the development of peer support networks, participation in relationship-centered learning environments, and connecting with mentors become extended family in the college context (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Pérez, 2017; Pérez & Taylor, 2016; Rendón et al., 2014; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). Several research studies have uncovered that peer networks are essential to students as they learn and develop additional significant assets from these interactions and foster a sense of belonging through *hermandad*/siblinghood (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Pérez, 2017; Rendón et al., 2014). Interactions with peer networks also serve as a source of personal discovery and space for political engagement (Rendón et al., 2014), which may speak to the notion of developing

self-efficacy and agency through supportive familial-type relationships that neo-critical validation theory purports (Gildersleeve, 2011). Likewise, participation in ethnic centers or student support programs provides an additional space for interpersonal relationship building that validates and expands their skillsets (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Pérez, 2017).

Finally, Pérez and Taylor's (2016) study revealed that few Latinx students counted on mentoring relationships with educators or staff, but those students who did illuminated the importance of nurturing and sustaining relationships. Castellanos and Gloria's (2007) theoretical framework posits that educational actors can function within *familismo* by way of the "system of *compadizcgo*, or co-parentage of children within families and communities as *padrinos* (godfathers) or *madrinas* (godmothers), the responsibility to help take care and provide direction (e.g., emotionally, physically, spiritually, or financially)" (p. 386).

Unfortunately, an analysis by Zalaquett and Lopez (2006) of 13 Latinx undergraduate student narrative stories uncovered evidence of Latinx students receiving mostly informal types of mentoring through family and community members, with few mentors being teachers and school counselors. Pérez's (2017) phenomenological study of more than 20 Latino men at two universities found that less than one quarter of the men in the study had experienced meaningful relationships with faculty or staff. Those who did, found faculty mentors as a source of navigational and social capital. A similar study of Latino men found students wound up heavily relying on peer networks as a source of multiple forms of capital, including familial, social, and navigational (Pérez & Taylor, 2016). Overall, studies suggest that Latinx students' translation of familial capital can lead to some informal mentoring relationships that are influential in helping these students pursue academic success (Pérez, 2017; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006).

Something Bigger—Collective Consciousness and Resistance

Familismo also contributes toward a collectivist mentality of doing beyond just the sense of self, and organizing and doing with others (Lopez, 2006; Pérez & Taylor, 2016). Studies suggest that employing values around public service, and giving back to the community and family through educational attainment are ways in which Latinx students succeed in higher education (Pérez, 2017; Pérez & Taylor, 2016). Families also influence how students define success through the lens of developing skills and knowledge in order to serve people and causes greater than themselves (Pérez & Taylor, 2016). Pérez (2017) found that students entered college with aspirational goals to achieve better for themselves, their families and communities, but these educational goals were not clearly articulated. At the same time, upon reflecting on their personal challenges and those they faced at PWIs, these challenges also helped Latinx students solidify their goals while in college as they sought to overcome them (Pérez, 2017).

Multiple studies have shown that Latinx students' academic determination is also fueled by the desire to be involved with the broader community—this sense of caring and being responsible for the community is part of *familismo* (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Pérez, 2017). As such, research has demonstrated that Latinx students have a high propensity for leadership by participating in student organizations, even though many of them might be first-generation to college and thus juggling social, academic, and personal obligations (Pérez, 2017).

The aforementioned academic determination and collectivist orientation derived from *familismo* is supported by Rendón et al.'s (2014) *ventajas*, which are based on their finding of four new assets possessed by Latinx students that build on the CCW framework. Through

their research, the authors uncovered that Latinx students shared a sense of *ganas*, a self-determination and confidence, that came with recognizing and embracing sacrifice and overcoming hardships. The second was a shared ethnic consciousness, which involved cultural pride, personal accomplishment, and ethnic unity and solidarity, further engendering a desire to give back. This concept is substantiated by research demonstrating that Latinx students create ways to draw upon and sustain their forms of wealth through actively seeking and participating in cultural organizations and centers, “finding mirrors” through shared identities with other peers (Pérez & Taylor, 2016, p. 11). Furthermore, a longitudinal study of 370 students at nine institutions focused on campus climate found that Latinx students had higher participation in diversity co-curricular activities, especially when they had been critical of the racial dynamics on their campus (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005). Arguably, ethnic and collective consciousness is a form of resistance.

The two final *ventajas* include spirituality/faith obtained through familial and community capital and pluriversality. Rendón et al. (2014) describe both of these as linked to a sense of purpose and view of the world that is centered on humanitarianism and positivity. Castellanos and Gloria (2007) posit that *espiritualidad*/spirituality is essential to inter- and intra-personal connections. The final *ventaja* is pluriversality, the ability to shift between multiple, diverse worlds, “to move in and out of these different spaces and intellectual/social understandings and to engage successfully in all of them” (Rendón et al., 2014, p. 21). Although the different spaces and understandings can include physical and intellectual spaces (such as school and household), conceptually, pluriversality might be linked to *familismo*. The engagement of family systems can take on many forms and create multi-dimensional spaces navigated by students—whether *familia* are blood-related and/or created. These

multiple forms of *familismo* are an additional kind of diverse set of worlds. Consequently, pluriversality is also found to contribute toward giving students essential skills, including open-mindedness for difference, uncertainty, and conflict (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Rendón et al., 2014).

A complementary study by Matos (2015), which analyzed interviews with 24 Latinx students at three institutions and focused on cultural wealth, uncovered the concept of “finishing” as a connector to many of the abovementioned concepts—in particular, family and aspirational capital or *ganas*. According to the study findings, for Latinx students, completing a college degree was more than achieving a diploma. As Matos (2015) noted:

Rather, to “finish” is to complete what their parents started by coming to the U.S. in search of a better life for their children. To “finish” is to rectify all of the wrongs that their parents endured and as one participant stated herself, parents want you to finish so that they see you “fulfilled.” By taking steps to stay in school and try their best despite obstacles, students are ensuring that goals are fulfilled, as per their parents’ wishes, but they also get to fulfill and exceed their parents’ dreams. (pp. 447–448)

Finally, Yosso (2005) asserts that Latinx students “engage in specific actions to culturally nourish and replenish themselves in response to marginalizing campus climates” (p. 676) by forming collective consciousness as a form of resistance and creating counterspaces that emulate their homes and home communities. This collective consciousness, beyond what may be perceived as only cultural pride, was found to propel a determination to build toward the advancement of Latinx students and supported their success in higher education (Rendón et al., 2014).

A New Paradigm for Education

The theories and practices proposed by Scholars of Color counter deficit discourses and challenge the existing normative, exclusionary standards of education. In order to confront the problem of higher education's lack of understanding of how to create educational equity through Latinx-centered structures and practices, the research seems to call for a different paradigm. To envision a new paradigm for education is to acknowledge that the current status quo is not working for Latinx communities. To this end, the literature suggests two important themes that move from understanding assets of Latinx students to praxis that could shift the paradigm for Latinx students to ensure their success. The first is translating their familial capital, knowledge, skills and experiences into academic families (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Pérez & Taylor, 2016; Rendón et al., 2014), and the second refers to transforming educational methods and practices toward more liberatory models (Rendón, 2009; Saavedra & Saavedra, 2007).

Academic Families

The emphasis of familial assets in the research suggests the need for campuses to help students transfer and translate the rich resources gained from families into their education (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Pérez & Taylor, 2016; Rendón et al., 2014). Castellanos and Gloria's (2007) research proposed the importance of Latinx students maintaining their academic drive through building family-like systems, or "academic families," whereby Latinx students form sibling-like families through their peer relationships, and adults serve as an "academic parent" or *padrino/madrina*/godparents. Across the literature, the practice of creating academic families was found to support the translation of skills, values, and

affirmations learned through the family system (Pérez, 2017; Pérez & Taylor, 2016; Rendón et al., 2014).

While there has been little published literature on the notion of building academic families, specifically, the focus on peer networks and mentoring builds on the tenet of relationship-centered practices that are closely aligned with *familismo*. Zalaquett and Lopez (2006) examined essays of 13 Latinx student achievers, which revealed that when there were mentoring relationships with adults at the university, they served as guides, advisors, and moral supporters – often helping students with the institution’s values, culture, customs, and resources, which bears semblance to the role of families. Santiago (2018) produced a compilation of over 20 initiatives across the U.S. that they noted as successful at improving Latinx student success in higher education. They reported that most programs that they deemed as effective built upon *familismo* through peer mentoring and faculty mentoring initiatives that allowed students to have dedicated, identity-based spaces to foster sense of belonging and extended family. Multiple studies suggest that these kinds of spaces and relationships are validating for Latinx students (Pérez, 2017; Rendón et al., 2014; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). Furthermore, Castellanos and Gloria (2007) posit that “specific to Latinx students, effective mentorship encompasses the personal and professional of academic progress while integrating *cultura/culture* (e.g., *familia*, values, practices, beliefs)” (p. 390), a possible indication that establishing academic families is inextricably linked to cultural and familial capital.

Liberatory Pedagogy

The literature’s emphasis on incorporating Latinx people’s social and cultural capital ultimately speaks to the need for change in the methods and practices employed with Latinx

students. The literature revealed that Latinx students' sense of belonging increased by taking courses that emphasize diversity, suggesting that curriculum might have a direct and indirect influence on Latinx college students' sense of belonging in the context of marginalizing campus environments (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005). However, if the focus is to bring Latinx students out from the margins and to the forefront as central creators and protagonists, then teaching and learning processes are important to deconstruct and reconstruct for Latinx students to feel wholly represented (Bernal, 2002; Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Rendón, 2009; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001).

A self-study employed by Latina faculty on their own practices with Latinx students discussed turning challenges faced by Latinx students into opportunities by maximizing their own culture, language, and experiences to connect and help students navigate and overcome barriers (Saavedra & Saavedra, 2007). The authors found that what worked was enacting a practice of care through teacher communication style such as teacher immediacy, affirmation, use of storytelling, positive non-verbal communications, and tapping into students' kinesthetic learning. They also found that sharing of personal learning experiences of the instructors, as well as being accessible and responsive, created goodwill with students. Lastly, Latina faculty used consulting as a form of empowerment for Latinx students through engaging them in classroom procedures, interaction, and ideas about the course materials and creating bi-directional co-created spaces that resembled a facilitative partnership with the student (Saavedra & Saavedra, 2007).

These findings appear to be in line with scholars' theoretical call for changing practices to include funds of knowledge, validation, and community cultural capital (Rendón, 1994; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011; Yosso, 2005). Accordingly, Rendón (2009) proposes a

sentipensante (sensing/thinking) pedagogy that mirrors some of these other theories, and is based on “wholeness, harmony, social justice, and liberation” (p. 132). Rendón (2009) developed this framework from personal inquiry and experiences employing this method in her own teaching and learning practices, as well as through an analysis of educator narratives.

Sentipensante pedagogy has three central goals for creating a more liberatory pedagogy, the first of which is disrupting and transforming the entrenched belief system around teaching and learning (Rendón, 2009). Other scholars have discussed this as creating cultural congruity (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007), and it has been found to elevate both relational values and validation of Latinx students (Saavedra & Saavedra, 2007). The second goal is cultivating well-rounded individuals who are able to work with diverse information and theoretical perspectives (Rendón, 2009), the kind of pluriversality found in multiple studies that Latinx students uniquely possess because of their multiple diversities (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Núñez, 2014; Rendón et al., 2014). The last goal is instilling commitment to “sustain life, human rights, preserve nature, world harmony...social awareness and social change” in and out of the classroom (Rendón, 2009, p. 136). The literature suggests that Latinx students already arrive in higher education with this sense of cultural consciousness and community orientation (Pérez, 2017; Pérez & Taylor, 2016; Rendón et al., 2014), which a *sentipensante* pedagogy could validate further while providing tools to propel these forms of capital into action.

To summarize, the literature review on Latinx people’s success and asset-based practices sought to deepen inquiry into the knowledge assets of People of Color and counter prevailing deficit-based perspectives. The review of scholarship by Latinx people and People

of Color revealed different self-definitions and frameworks for understanding what success looks like for Latinx students, namely focusing on microsucceeds (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007). Perhaps one of the most significant findings is the notion of *familia*/family as an overarching theme that weaves through nearly every aspect of Latinx students' educational processes (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Pérez, 2017; Rendón et al., 2014). *Familia* influences students' determination to persist, collectivist orientations, and resistance to challenges set before them.

Finally, multiple empirical studies built upon previous theoretical work on validation, funds of knowledge, and community cultural wealth, uncovering several new forms of capital such as *espiritualidad*/spirituality, pluriversality, and the concept of finishing (Matos, 2015; Rendón et al., 2014). Scholars also connected cultural assets to praxis suggesting the translation of family wealth into academic families (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007), while taking together and employing all the described assets to change the paradigm of education for Latinx students toward more liberatory praxis (Rendón, 2009; Saavedra & Saavedra, 2007).

Considering what was learned through the literature, what would it look like if we took the theoretical knowledge and assets described by Latinx scholars and applied them at the organizational level? Based on the literature, I propose a theory-based vision for how higher education institutions' should center Latinx people through the organization's identity, culture, and praxis. Chapter 3 borrows from the theories and praxis described by Latinx Scholars in the literature review to build a conceptual framework for the study of what *should be*. The chapter also discusses three organizational concepts: identity, culture, and praxis and brings them together with Latinx scholarship in the conceptual framework. The

organizational concepts also help toward organizing a conceptual guide for the study to understand what centering Latinx people looks like *in real-time* at institutions founded by Latinx communities.

CHAPTER 3

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND GUIDE

The literature review explored how Scholars of Color are reimagining and researching how institutions of higher education are or might be constructed for Students of Color with a specific focus on Latinx students—building asset-based institutional models that are *for us* (Latinx people), *by us* (Latinx scholars, practitioners, and community members)—*about us* (Latinx people). Many of the asset-based theories and research of Latinx scholars have led to the creation of asset-based practices that can support and validate Latinx students (Castillo, 2020; Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017; Rendón et al., 2014).

Some institutions may be employing Latinx-identified asset-based practices; however, if these approaches are implemented in an organizational context that continues to devalue and delegitimize Latinx people, then these practices are likely to become band-aid solutions that do not create significant change for Latinx people. In this scenario, Latinx people will continue to experience oppression. Ray (2019) posits that institutions operate through racial hierarchies that disproportionately marginalize and under-resource People of Color and race-related work, reinforcing the connection between racial schemas and resources. Hegemonic norms and cultures thus redirect resources away from Latinx-centered emancipatory practices, rendering the practices invisible and/or ineffective. The resulting add-on solutions often count on the unsustainable energy and credibility of individuals (often

People of Color) and eventually fade away (Gorski, 2019; Luedke, 2017). Asset-based practices, therefore, cannot flourish in institutions that are rooted in whiteness and white supremacy, thus the organizational context matters.

This chapter seeks to identify the connections between organizational contexts and the anti-deficit work of Latinx Scholars. The chapter is organized in three parts. Part 1 is a primer on Organizational Identity and Culture theories and organizational praxis, and their connection to this study, which is focused on Latinx FUBU-*About Us*. Part 2 is a “CriT walk”—a conceptual and practical approach grounded in critical race scholarship—of the conceptual framework, which provides the lens through which this study was conducted (Hughes & Giles, 2010). The conceptual framework brings together Lat Crit, CCW, and Validation theory as described in the literature review with Organizational Identity, Culture, and Praxis theories to frame *what should be*—a Latinx FUBU-*About Us* for higher education institutions. A visual representation of the inter-related concepts is provided to demonstrate the ways that Latinx people have suggested institutions can move away from normative realities that center whiteness and white supremacy. While the conceptual framework provides indicators that demonstrate the ways in which Latinx-centered organizational identity, culture, and praxis should manifest based on the literature (Bernal, 2002; Linares & Muñoz, 2011; Rendón et al., 2014; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005), my research revealed additional and/or different indicators of how Latinx-centeredness manifests within existing Latinx-founded institutions. Therefore, Part 3 describes a conceptual guide with a more open visual representation that served as a broad tool for organizing the research design for the study, without mentioning specific indicators.

These indicators were filled in through data collection and analysis, as presented in Chapter 9 of this dissertation.

Part 1: Primer on Organizational Identity, Culture, and Praxis

The following primer provides definitions for organizational identity, culture, and praxis and discusses each of these theoretical concepts in relation to my study. The concept of FUBU-*About Us* is described with more information about its origins and ties to the organizational concepts presented. The section ends with a discussion of how FUBU-*About Us* also represents an act of resistance and affirmation of Latinx people and People of Color in higher education.

Organizational Identity and Organizational Culture

Organizations are often depicted as race-neutral administrative structures with little attention to the role they play in the social construction of race and race relations (Ray, 2019). Ray (2019) posits that organizational theory has traditionally treated “organizational formation, hierarchies, and processes as race-neutral and operationalized race as a personal identity,” rather than “constituting and constituted by racial processes that may shape both the policies of the racial state and individual prejudice” (pp. 26–27). With higher education institutions constituting various processes that shape the experiences of Latinx people, it is important to understand how institutions as organizations choose to express their values around People of Color. If the organization fundamentally values the humanity and experiences of Latinx people, then Latinx asset-based strategies are not treated as add-ons. Instead, Latinx asset-based strategies are likely to receive support and will be viewed as fundamental to the identity of these organizations. Organizational identity refers to the characteristics that organizational members believe are central, distinctive, and enduring

about their organization (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Thus, a Latinx-centered organizational identity would be one that embraces, validates, and builds upon Latinx people's assets, and views this work as central to the organization's mission.

Unfortunately, only limited research has been published on the ways in which the organizational identities of higher education institutions are reflective of Latinx cultural values, knowledge, and assets principles (Garcia, 2018; Garcia, Núñez, & Sansone, 2019). Institutions where asset-based strategies are fundamental to institutional identity might include some Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), and a few historically Latinx-founded institutions that have found a way to resist white normative systems that typically delegitimize People of Color (Gasman et al., 2015). Institutions founded by People of Color may be characterized by organizational identities and organizational cultures that reflect the values and cultures of Communities of Color and, therefore, are shaped by asset-based practices (Albritton, 2012; Crazy Bull, 2012; Crazy Bull et al., 2020; Crewe, 2017).

Organizational culture can be broadly defined as the unspoken shared assumptions, beliefs, and values conveyed through an organization's practices and artifacts (features that are visible, verbal, and tangible) that provide the context for meaning making (Hatch & Schultz, 1997; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). Scholars of organizational theory assert that organizational identity must be theorized relative to organizational culture, as these concepts are often used to define one another, and whereby organizations form their identities in relation to culture (Hatch & Schultz, 1997, 2002). Therefore, a Latinx-centered organizational identity would be built in relation to shared beliefs and values around the

centering of Latinx knowledge, experiences, and assets, and these shared understandings would manifest in the institution's practices.

Organizational Praxis

Praxis is a Greek term that is commonly understood as “action” or “doing” and is often interchangeably used with the word “practice” (Bernstein, 2011, pp. xiii-xiv). The notion of organizational members taking actions toward their desired organizational status or future can be viewed as a form of organizational praxis (Bradbury & Mainemelis, 2001). Organizational praxis has been philosophized by various scholars to mean an “intentional practice,” “reflection on action for emancipation,” and “the free and creative reconstruction of social arrangements” (Bradbury & Mainemelis, 2001, p. 340). In education, Freire (1996) is well known for discussing praxis as “reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed,” by the people themselves who have been often marginalized by oppressive structures (p. 25). Freire (1996) posits that educational praxis is about human experience and relating education as an ongoing activity where “education is thus constantly remade in the praxis. In order to be, it must become” (p. 65). For the purpose of this study, praxis refers to the ways that organizations bring their organizational identities and cultures into action. I am defining praxis as the way organizations act through the use of language, enact policies and structures, and institute various practices. Organizational praxis can include curriculum, faculty development, general education requirements, building capacity for liberatory education, and the distribution and enactment of power (or hierarchies) by different actors within the organization, among other examples.

The literature suggests that asset-based praxis is often implemented in organizational contexts that still adhere to hegemonic norms and values (Castillo, 2020; Pérez & Taylor,

2016; Sommer & Cuellar, 2020). When the organizational context continues to privilege whiteness and reinforce the status quo, the implementation of asset-based praxis may be severely hindered. To understand how the organizational context impacts these practices, researchers need to use organization-level constructs, such as organizational identity and culture, as these related concepts help illustrate what is deemed important by organizations and how they then manifest this importance through praxis. For example, an analysis of organizational concepts could reveal whether the organizational identity (central, distinctive, and enduring characteristics), and the organizational culture (values, beliefs, and artifacts) of a higher education institution have been constructed *for, by, and about* Latinx people and thus would validate the asset-based practices. Thus, in order to better understand how higher education institutions can be fundamentally constructed *for* Latinx people *by and about* Latinx communities, an organization-level construct that looks at identity, culture, and praxis is needed.

FUBU-About Us and Organizational Concepts

The notion of institutions that are *for, by, and about* Latinx people is a kind of organizational identity, culture, and praxis conceptually borrowed from the hip-hop fashion line FUBU (For Us, By Us) created by Black entrepreneurs Daymond John, Arlton E. Brown, J. Alexander Martin, and Keith C. in the 1990s. FUBU was an intentional strategy by John et al. to construct an identity for the company that produced the fashion line, while also incorporating the identity of the fashion line into their organization. In an interview with *Business Insider*, John shared:

So, the name For Us By Us has always been an acronym for “us.” “Us” has always been a culture and not a color. And the reason why is there was a boot company that

made a comment, saying, “We don’t sell our boots to drug dealers,” in The New York Times, I think. Or Wall Street Journal. And it had already pissed me off because I was so busy buying Tommy Hilfiger, Ralph Lauren. I was buying ski jackets that cost \$1,200. I said, “Who’s ever going to respect and value the people that love the brand?” So I created FUBU, For Us By Us... [FUBU] was made by a generation and a color of people that started a movement of something called hip-hop. (Feloni & Richards, 2018)

John’s aspiration was to build a brand that would validate and raise up a culture and share it with the world through disrupting the status quo, a set of values that guide FUBU’s organizational identity, culture, and praxis. Starting with \$40, FUBU became a multi-million-dollar enterprise that influenced the market worldwide, with people of all backgrounds purchasing and wearing the apparel (Feloni & Richards, 2018).

As an organizational construct, FUBU-*About Us* in higher education for Latinx people represents institutions whose identities and cultures fundamentally raise asset-based, culturally sustaining, and validating core values, beliefs, and practices that are specific and intentional. Like the fashion line, Latinx FUBU-*About Us* institutions can begin to influence the ways that the higher education sector educates, serves, and works with Latinx people and Communities of Color. Ergo, the concept of FUBU-*About Us* is powerful in considering the experiences of Latinx people and other marginalized populations. Since the dominant society leaves little regard for the wealth of experiences that strengthen the world around us, why not make FUBU-*About Us* possible in the educational context and at the organizational level?

It is important to state that in this study, FUBU-*About Us* is both a set of concepts and an approach, an act of resistance and affirmation of Latinx people and People of Color. The

approach has been embedded throughout this study, including through the representation of scholarship by People of Color as the predominant source of knowledge. However, the organizational concepts identified for this framework, organizational identity, culture, and praxis, were not developed by People of Color. The field of organizational studies has been dominated by white scholars with few examples where Scholars of Color are developing frameworks to address how organizational identities and cultures reflect whiteness or instead validate the identities of People of Color (Ray, 2019).

While the previously described organizational theories were not created by Scholars of Color, some Scholars of Color have used them to examine how organizational identities and cultures may reflect an orientation toward serving Communities of Color. As cited in the literature review, Garcia (2018), for example, studied the organizational identities of HSIs to determine the extent to which these identities support and validate Latinx people. Nevertheless, the following conceptual framework seeks to bridge organizational concepts with frameworks previously highlighted by Latinx Scholars—considering those specific identities and cultures that are interwoven with the principles of the theories and praxis developed by Latinx scholars.

Part 2: Conceptual Framework for Higher Education Institutions: *What Should Be*

There is dignity in the work of creating a space for ourselves, the kind of space that has been systematically denied to us. (Tuck, 2018, p. 165)

You do not have to allow yourself to be claimed into a Eurocentric lineage [of theory]. Rather, the genealogy of (y)our theory lies in the breaks as theorized by Black and Indigenous intellectuals.... To theorize in the break is to improvise theory in the rupture from the genealogy of the (often European) founding fathers. It is to

think, sing, write, and embody theory in the elsewhere, in the sovereign, in the Black.

(la paperson, 2017, p. 19)

Latinx Scholars have theorized a myriad of ways that education can confront and construct more equitable and validating experiences for marginalized people. It is as if a blueprint of what Latinx people want, care, and hope for has already been theorized and empirically studied. Linked within the organizational context, the work of Latinx scholars can provide a lens for what higher education institutions *for, by, about* Latinx communities *should* look like. What should be, is hoped for, and dreamed is far from the deficit and damage-based narratives that plague U.S. education and society writ-large (Tuck, 2009).

Tuck (2009) posits that often research and theories related to Communities of Color operate from a deficit- and damage-centered framing focusing on the pain and suffering of communities as if they are defeated and broken. While the realities of white supremacy and whiteness have caused significant pain and trauma for Communities of Color, Tuck puts forth an invitation to speak out of the margins and instead from a desire-centered framing. Desire-centered framing contextualizes the experience of the margins while “understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives” and lifts up the wisdom and hope of disenfranchised communities (Tuck, 2009, p. 416). The goal of a Latinx FUBU-*About Us* conceptual framework for higher education institutions is to recognize the complexities of the Latinx experience and build from a place of hope in what is possible. I start with desire-centered framing and hope because the work of imagining (and, in some cases, empirically testing) *what should be* has already been laid out by Latinx scholars and is brought together through this framework. At the same time, there is a recognition that a Latinx FUBU-*About Us* conceptual framework lives within the existing normative realities

(white supremacist, dominant systems) and, therefore, it is not a utopian framework for something that exists outside of the constraints of the normative. Instead, the conceptual framework takes the higher education system that we know and its existing machinery (systems and structures) and transforms it through resistance toward liberation as “the third university” (la paperson, 2017).

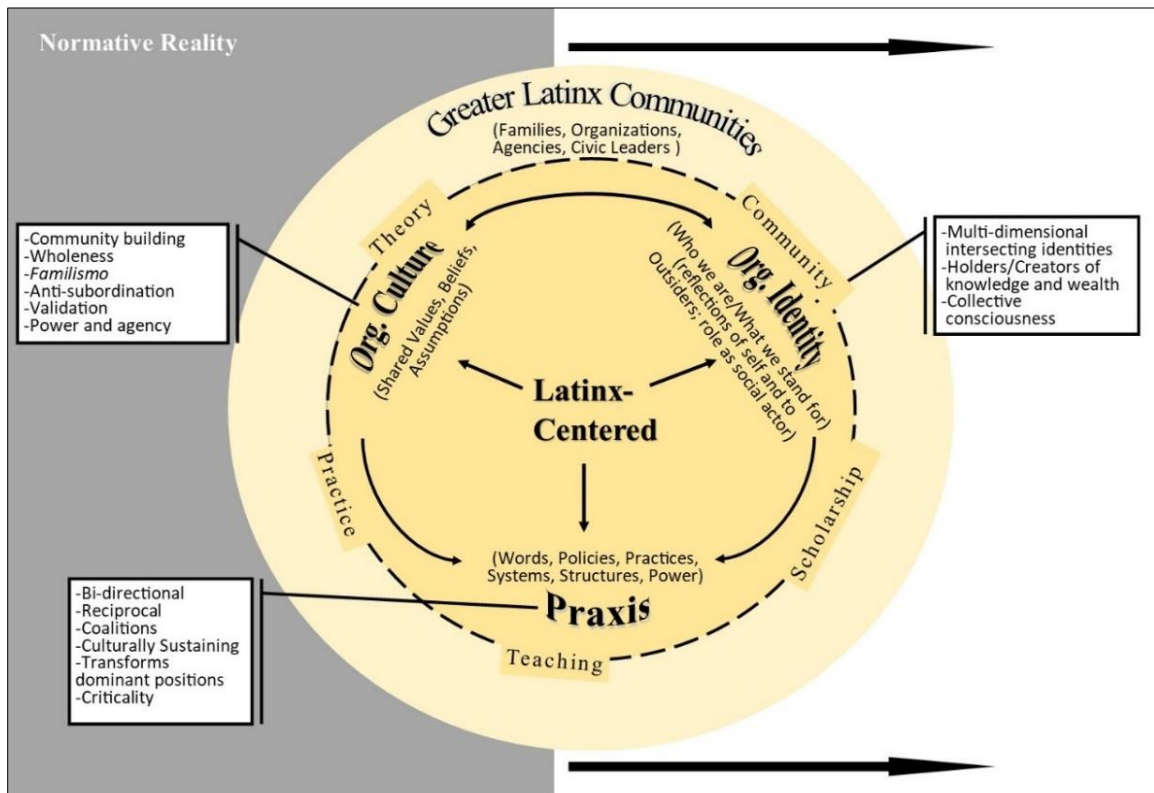
la paperson (2017) offers the concept of the third university, which they state is not concerned with *decolonizing the university* as it is with building a *decolonizing university*, recognizing that any project of institutional transformation must take into account the material conditions and constructs that render the university (p. 53). la paperson (2017) suggests a decolonizing university equips its people “toward the applied practice of decolonization” (p. 36), defined as “the rematriation of land, the regeneration of relations, and the forwarding of Indigenous and Black and queer futures—a process that requires countering what power seems to be up to” (p. xv). In this spirit, a Latinx FUBU-*About Us* conceptual framework similarly carries an intentionality to mobilize the existing knowledge and praxis of Latinx people toward building off one-another’s powers.

To bring all of these Latinx people’s “powers” together with organizational concepts, I am employing a “CriT-walk” of the conceptual framework. Hughes and Giles’ (2010) CriT walking connects critical race scholarship as a theoretical and methodological approach to deconstructing and analyzing systemic inequities in higher education and for countering the status quo, which is part of what the conceptual framework seeks to achieve. As a conceptual and practice-based approach, CriT walking focuses on process, whereby CriT walkers “strategically think and talk through various institutional norms, policies, and procedures to re-interpret and reconnect our understanding of the intersections of race, racism, power, and

praxis” challenging normative values (Hughes & Giles, 2010, p. 48). Thus, what follows is an explanation of the various connections, processes, and indicators that would lift up asset-based Latinx-centeredness. Included is a visual representation of how linking key concepts from theories by Scholars of Color with organizational identity, culture, and praxis concepts can inform a Latinx FUBU-About Us theoretical framework for higher education institutions (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Latinx FUBU-About Us Conceptual Framework for Higher Education Institutions



CriT Walk: Latinx FUBU-*About Us as It Should Be*

LatCrit, Community Cultural Wealth (CCW), Funds of Knowledge (FOK), and Validation Theories, as described in the literature review, offer several different critical concepts (or powers) that could be integrated with an organizational lens to theorize a Latinx-centered higher education institution that is *for, by, about* Latinx people (Bernal, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Linares & Muñoz, 2011; Moll et al., 1992; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso, 2005). The institution is depicted as the darker yellow inner circle in the visual depiction of the conceptual framework. LatCrit is prevalently featured in the conceptual framework as it helps explain how higher education and its structures, policies, and practices affect People of Color, especially in the Latinx community (Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). LatCrit builds from the major tenets of CRT (racism, interest convergence, and experiential knowledge), but uniquely captures the Latinx diaspora of identity and language (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). Furthermore, LatCrit centers the experiences of Latinx people as an anti-deficit (or asset-based) lens that attempts to link theory with praxis and the academy (teaching and scholarship) with the community, represented by the words “Theory, Community, Scholarship, Teaching, Practice” that surround the dotted circle within the figure.

Some of the key concepts drawn from LatCrit for this framework are the focus on multi-dimensional intersecting identities of Latinx people, Latinx people as “holders and creators of knowledge,” criticality, community building and coalitions, reciprocity, transforming dominant racial positions in the classroom and in educational structures, and anti-subordination of People of Color. CCW and FOK, through their multidimensional conceptualization of wealth, bring an asset-based, cultural understanding of Latinx people

(Moll et al., 1992; Yosso, 2005). These theories intersect with Validation Theory and the concepts of power and agency that are prevalent in Neo-Critical Validation Theory (Gildersleeve, 2011; Linares & Muñoz, 2011; Rendón, 1994). Additionally, the framework also draws from other critical concepts emerging from the literature, including culturally sustaining practices, and a focus on wholeness and collective consciousness, which engage communities and families and move away from individualism, and the central value of *familismo* among Latinx people (Paris, 2012; Rendón, 2009; Rendón et al., 2014).

These concepts are depicted within the white boxes of Figure 1 as indicators of Latinx-centering manifested through organizational identity, culture, and praxis. Importantly, the key element of the conceptual framework appears in the center—“Latinx-centered.” It informs everything (as the outward arrows indicate). What fundamentally makes a Latinx FUBU-*About Us* is the focus on Latinx-centering. The Latinx-centered nature of a FUBU-*About Us* drives what makes its identity “central, distinctive, and continuous” (Albert & Whetten, 1985, p. 265). Latinx-centering also informs the institution’s culture and praxis, and the institution itself is embedded, reflective, and part of the greater Latinx community (families, community organizations, agencies, leaders, etc.). The greater Latinx community is depicted in Figure 1 by a lighter yellow outer circle, whereby the institution (darker yellow circle) is embedded within and part of the community.

The literature revealed that many Latinx-founded institutions were the result of neighborhood organizing and Latinx community-led community development efforts, so the communities inside and outside of the institution may be interconnected beyond physical boundaries and essential to understanding the institution’s identity formation (Gioia et al., 2013). In Figure 1, the dotted line around the institution represents the fluidity and

interconnectedness of the institution-community relationship and its permeable boundaries. Therefore, a Latinx-centered higher education institution would follow a LatCrit paradigm whereby theory, practice, teaching, scholarship, and community are interconnected (Bernal, 2002; Valdes, 2005). Thus, “Latinx-centered” with the arrows pointing outward to the three institutional dimensions of culture, identity, and praxis, and the outer circle of the greater Latinx community should move the institution toward a desired reality—away from normative realities. Following is an in-depth explanation of how Latinx-centeredness *should* manifest through organizational identity, culture, and praxis.

Organizational Identity

When Latinx-centering informs the organization’s identity, defined as those core goals and values that are central, distinctive, and enduring (or “who we are and what we stand for,” and the role that organizations play as social actors within a community), then the organizational identity would reflect the concepts depicted in the related white box, as more specific reflections of a Latinx-centered organizational identity. Namely, the organizational identity would represent Latinx people’s multidimensional diversities and ways of holding and creating knowledge and forms of wealth as described by LatCrit, CCW, and FOK (Bernal, 2002; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011; Yosso, 2005). “Who we are and what we stand for” is also based on a collective consciousness about who benefits and for what purposes education is pursued beyond normative standards of individualism, enforcing the institution’s role as a social actor in the society and broader environment (hooks, 1994; Rendón et al., 2014; Whetten & Mackey, 2002). Organizational identity theory suggests that organizations acting as social actors use their identity to position the organization within social contexts (Gioia et al., 2010; Whetten & Mackey, 2002). For example, a Latinx-centered higher

education institution identity claim signals who in society the institution aspires to serve; in this case, people identified as Latinx.

Organizational Culture

A Latinx-centered organizational culture would embody values, beliefs, and artifacts representative of community-building and *familismo* described in both theory and praxis represented in the related white box in Figure 1 (Rendón et al., 2014; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005). LatCrit's anti-subordination of dominant narratives and systems would be a value and a practice; and values around wholeness, validation of lived experiences and their connections across multiple contexts (social, cultural, political) would be valued as suggested by Validation and Neo-Critical Validation Theories (Bernal, 2002; Gildersleeve, 2011). The organization's culture would also follow the belief in the emancipatory power of education toward the empowerment of Latinx people, and that Latinx people hold power and agency to transform educational settings, as offered by LatCrit, Neo-Critical Validation Theory, and CCW (Gildersleeve, 2011; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The institution's symbols (physical spaces/architecture, images, documents and artifacts) would also reflect Latinx beliefs and values (Albert & Whetten, 1985).

Organizational Praxis

LatCrit and praxis by Latinx Scholars would suggest that Latinx-centered praxis or "actions" (the active use of words/language, actions, policies, structures, practices, and the distribution and enactment of power) would reflect bi-directional, reciprocal approaches, and critical coalitions that connect theory to practice through transdisciplinary social justice and equity work, and foster inter-group solidarity and care as demonstrated in the related white box in Figure 1 (Bernal, 2002; Rendón, 2009; Valdes, 2005). Praxis would employ criticality

and seek to transform dominant positions as described by LatCrit, enabling praxis to also become culturally sustaining rather than just relevant (Bernal, 2002; Paris, 2012). Figure 1 depicts the integration of these theoretical concepts.

Finally, as demonstrated in Figure 1 above, Latinx FUBU-*About Us* exists within what I am calling “normative realities,” which refers to the structures, practices, and systems of white supremacy and normalized whiteness. la paperson (2017) reminds their readers that “within the colonizing university also exists a decolonizing education ... [and] the bit of machinery that make up a decolonizing university are driven by decolonial desires, with decolonizing dreamers who are subversively part of the machinery and part machine themselves” (p. xiii). Conceptually, by centering Latinx people, a Latinx FUBU-*About Us* framework resists the perpetuation of normative systems and structures that further socially constructed hierarchies (Bell, 1995). A Latinx FUBU-*About Us* conceptual framework actively seeks to move away from the normative reality, reorganizing and subverting “against the master code” of higher education institutional schemas and “rewiring...to its own intentions,” represented by the two big arrows outside of the circle in Figure 1 (la paperson, 2017, p. 55).

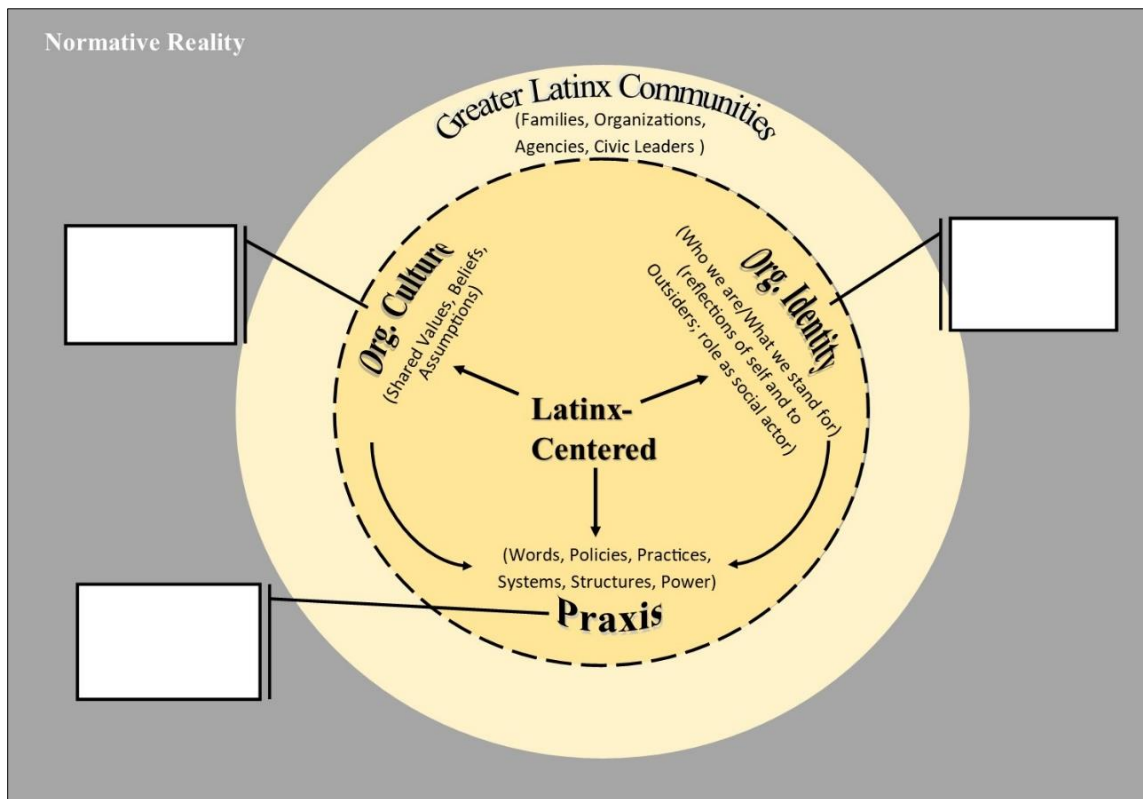
Part 3: Conceptual Guide for the Study: *What Is?*

Whereas the integration of organizational theories and theories by Latinx Scholars provided the conceptual framework incorporating examples of expressions of Latinx-centered organizational identity, culture, and praxis, this conceptual guide served as a practical tool created for shaping the research design, data collection, and data analysis more broadly. The conceptual guide drew explicitly from the theories in the conceptual framework (*what should be*), relying on specific concepts from the theories that might be apparent at the

Latinx-founded higher education institutions included in my research. Specifically, the study looked at the ways that Latinx-centering was manifested through organizational identity (that which is central, distinctive, enduring), organizational culture (values, beliefs, assumptions), and praxis (institutional actions) at the institutions in this study (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Bradbury & Mainemelis, 2001; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006; Whetten, 2006). Importantly, while these indicators may align with the ones presented in the conceptual framework, I expected that other indicators would also arise through the research process. It was also possible that not all indicators in the conceptual framework would be present in my research. Figure 2 displays the conceptual guide.

Figure 2

Conceptual Guide for Latinx FUBU-About Us Study



The drawing for the conceptual framework, therefore, includes blank boxes that were previously informed by what Latinx scholars suggested should be, and instead allows for the study of the institutions to reveal what it looked like in the real-world, in real-time, within existing normative realities. In contrast to Figure 1, which depicts movement away from normative realities, the conceptual guide in Figure 2 did not assume that this study would reveal institutions that were moving away from normative realities. Instead, the conceptual guide sought to understand in what ways these institutions might function as counterspaces to normative realities—“sites where deficit notions of People of Color can be challenged” (Solórzano et al., 2000, p. 70).

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

This chapter includes a restatement of the purpose of the study and associated research questions, as well as the study design, data collection methods, and analysis. The use of collective/multisite case study is described, along with important considerations for employing this technique to this study. Finally, the chapter closes with a discussion of trustworthiness and the limitations of the study, with final reflections on my role as the researcher as it relates to FUBU-*About Us* in higher education.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

This study explored how organizational identity, culture, and praxis at higher education institutions founded by Latinx communities reflected Latinx-centered approaches that built upon and promoted the assets (knowledge, values, culture, and experiences) of Latinx People. The overarching research question guiding this study was as follows: How do higher education institutions founded by Latinx communities build upon, promote, and center Latinx assets through organizational identity, culture, and praxis? The sub-questions for this study were as follows:

1. What Latinx assets do institutions founded by Latinx communities promote and center?

2. How do institutions founded by Latinx communities institutionalize and build upon these assets as part of their organizational identity, culture, and praxis?
3. In what ways do Latinx-founded institutions and communities contribute to and support each other?
4. How and to what extent are Latinx-founded institutions building counterspaces to normative realities in higher education?

Research Design

The following section provides an overview of the research approach for the study through a discussion of the use of qualitative research and case study methodology. The study's interpretive instrumental collective/multisite case study approach is described (Merriam, 1998b; Stake, 1995). Sampling procedures for site and participant selection are outlined, including criterion and snowball sampling strategies, followed by a description of the data collection methods employed: interviews, focus groups, observation, document collection, and physical artifacts (Mertens, 2014; Yin, 2017). Data collection instruments and protocols are available in the Appendix. Also discussed in this chapter are data analysis techniques, such as cross-case synthesis and constant comparative method, two-step coding from grounded theory (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2013), and a third cycle of coding that emerged through the process. Finally, a description of how the study met trustworthiness standards of qualitative research and some of the limitations of the research design and overall study are provided (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Rationale for Qualitative Research Approach

My study sought to understand contextual, relational, and experiential factors for how institutions founded by Latinx communities center Latinx people as a FUBU-*About Us* model

of higher education. This study lent itself to a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is designed to provide a thorough account of particular programs, practices, or situations by situating the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, attempting to make sense of phenomena (Merriam, 2002; Mertens, 2014). In qualitative research, phenomena are seen as socially constructed by people, centering how they interact with the world, with the belief that there are multiple constructions and interpretations of reality that are dependent on time and context (Merriam, 2002; Mertens, 2014). Qualitative inquiry asks how, what, where, when, and why questions to help build deeper understanding of phenomena. In addition, it requires the use of a broad set of data types, including interviews, document analysis, observation, archives, and artifacts, which lead to deeply descriptive interpretations of what has been learned (Merriam, 2002). Thus, the task of the qualitative researcher is to take their observations and “intuitive understandings” (Merriam, 2002, p. 5) from field work and inductively build toward themes, typologies, concepts, and theory.

Furthermore, important in qualitative research are the philosophical assumptions that drive researchers’ selection of methodology. Researchers practice several interpretive paradigms to attend to their assumptions, such as positivist or postpositivist, constructivist, critical, and postmodern (Merriam, 2002). These paradigms guide researcher assumptions about “the nature of reality (ontology), how they know what is known (epistemology), the inclusion of their values (axiology), the nature of their emerging research (methodology), and their writing structures” (Creswell et al., 2007, p. 238). The three paradigms often found in educational research include: positivist (where education/schooling is the object of study), interpretivist (education is a process and schooling is a lived experience), and critical

(education as a “social institution designed for social and cultural reproduction and transformation”; Merriam, 1998b, p. 4). The purpose of this study, its research questions, and conceptual framework are unapologetically about People of Color and reject centering whiteness or white supremacy or comparing FUBU-*About Us* models to institutions constructed upon normative standards. It also sought to move away from deficit thinking with regards to Communities of Color, as the normative standards of higher education reflect this is a legacy of whiteness. Instead, the study aimed to render the voices, knowledges, and experiences of People of Color as truths to be revealed, validated, and ratified. Therefore, the philosophical assumptions driving the study were based on a constructionist/interpretivist view deeply influenced by critical, transformative paradigms (Merriam, 1998b; Mertens, 2014).

Case Study Methodology

Researchers use qualitative case study methodology in order to deepen understanding of an individual case or situation and its significance for the people involved (Merriam, 1998b). Merriam (1998b) suggests that case study is interested in “process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation,” and the insights gained from a case study “can directly influence policy, practice, and future research” (p. 9). While there are fewer resources available to describe case study design as there are for other qualitative methods and there is less of a prescriptive definition of what constitutes a case study, a number of general characteristics have been described in the literature (Merriam, 1998b; Stake, 1995).

First, case study is based on the analysis of a “bounded system,” coined by educational ethnographer Louis Smith, such as a single person, a group of people,

community, program, event, a process, or an organization (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017; Merriam, 1998b; Stake, 1995). Here the “case” is of central importance. For this study, I am using Smith’s definition to define the case as the organization—the Latinx-founded institution of higher education. Second, case study is deeply descriptive as it focuses on making sense of various sources of information (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Notably, case study does not assert any specific system for collecting or analyzing data; rather, it draws from all methods (Merriam, 1998b). For example, my study sought to examine the Latinx-founded institution using interviews, documents, observations, artifacts, and archives. Third, case study research examines a contemporary phenomenon in relation to its natural or “real world” context, so the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context may not be obvious (Yin, 2017). For example, my study looked to understand the Latinx-founded institution in relation to Latinx-communities, its local community context, and the relationships and experiences of various actors, as well as to its organizational identity, culture, and praxis.

Case Study Types

There are several different types of case studies, some of which may overlap and each may call for different sampling strategies (Merriam, 1998b; Mertens, 2014; Stake, 1995). This case study on Latinx-founded institutions and their Latinx FUBU-*About Us* contexts employed an interpretive instrumental collective/multisite case study design. Below is a brief description of each kind of case study approach: interpretive, instrumental, and collective case study.

- *Interpretive*, also descriptive, case studies are employed as a means for constructing conceptual frameworks or typologies, or testing theoretical

assumptions (Merriam, 1998b). In this case, “[the] researcher gathers as much information about the problem as possible with the intent of analyzing, interpreting, or theorizing about a phenomenon” (Merriam, 1998b, p. 38).

- *Instrumental* case studies seek to realize more than understanding of the case itself, but rather gain insights that could help understand other cases as well (Mertens, 2014; Stake, 1995). The “enhanced understanding of the particular issue [case] ... is of secondary importance to a greater insight into the theoretical explanation that underpins the issue” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017, p. 38).
- *Collective* case studies are also referred to as “cross case, multicase/multiple case, multisite or comparative case studies,” as they comprise of collecting and analyzing data from several cases/sites (Merriam, 1998b, p. 40). The design for this study is a collective case study approach, which is referred to hereafter as collective/multisite case study.

The three case study types together helped build a comprehensive approach to conducting research for this study. With limited published research and anecdotal knowledge in the field about institutions of higher education that were founded by Latinx communities, my study sought to construct a real-world, as well as conceptual understanding of what a FUBU-*About Us* institution might look like (*interpretive*). There was also a desire to grow knowledge about how institutions might center Latinx people’s assets more intentionally through organizational practices (*instrumental*). Through the selection of multiple institutions, a cross-case analysis process strengthened the insights learned about what constitutes a FUBU-*About Us* (Latinx-centered) institution (*collective/multi-site*).

Sampling Procedures

Mertens (2014) posits, “sampling activities begin with an identification of groups, settings, and individuals where (and for whom) the processes being studied are most likely to occur” (p. 336). She also considers that researchers who operate within a transformative paradigm—which she described as individuals who prioritize social justice, empowerment, criticality, and strengths-based values in their research approaches—are most likely to enact sampling decisions based on conscious representation of individuals and cases that have been underrepresented in research (Mertens, 2014). Given the Latinx-centered core features of my study, the sampling procedures were intentionally crafted to lift-up understudied people, places, events, ideas, and issues. Following is a description of the sampling process for the sites and participants for the study, which were in line with purposive selection procedures for qualitative research.

Site Selection

I was specifically interested in institutions of higher education founded by Latinx communities in the U.S. mainland (defined as the 50 states and the District of Columbia). This study excluded institutions founded on the island of Puerto Rico due to its unique colonial and political histories with Spain and the United States; situating the island as a predominantly Spanish-speaking and relatively homogenous population of Puerto Rican Latinx people where institutions may be culturally engaging college students differently than the U.S. mainland (Collazo et al., 2010; Garcia, 2018). At the time of this study, there were few Latinx-founded institutions open across the U.S. mainland of which I uncovered five located in the Midwest, South, and Northeast U.S. An intensity-criterion sampling strategy was used in the site selection, which refers to rich cases where the phenomena of interest are

strongly represented (intensity) and where the researcher sets specific conditions for choosing the site (criterion; Mertens, 2014). Here, the phenomena of interest were institutions that were foundationally Latinx-centered (for, by, about Latinx people). The criteria for the site selection included:

- Degree-granting institutions of higher education founded by Latinx individuals on the U.S. mainland;
- Institutions founded because of community activism/mobilization toward Latinx-specific, culturally sustaining higher education;
- Institutions with missions that name Latinx people as the primary target/beneficiary;
- Institutions currently enrolling predominantly Latinx students; and
- Institutions situated in diverse urban communities with a high proportion of Latinx residents.

I found the sites through web research, published news stories, and scholarly articles, as well as outreach to an informant referred to me by a faculty member at my institution. I also verified the enrollment of the sites by examining data from their offices of institutional research available on the web. The selection of the sites was ultimately determined by my ability to make a connection and garner the appropriate support from institutional leaders. I was able to secure two institutions for a collective multisite case study. Both institutions have been assigned pseudonyms to protect the identity of study participants, per Institutional Review Board protocol. Thus, any published scholarship about the institutions referenced in this study has also been omitted to protect their identities. Additionally, since the names of the colleges held profound meaning to their communities and informed their organizational

identity and culture, I chose pseudonyms with meanings that attempted to match aspects of their identity. Following is a description of the institutional sample, including *Ágape College of Waterstone University*, North Core City and *Cacique Community College of the Metro Uni System*, City of South Metropolis.

Ágape College of Waterstone University (established in 2000). A private faith-based associates-level branch campus, *Ágape College of Waterstone University* is located in the Core Park neighborhood in North Core City. *Ágape* was one of the most recent Latinx-founded institutions in the country at the time of this study. *Ágape* emerged as a community educational, social, and economic development strategy to empower residents to build more prosperous futures for their families and community. The pseudonym *Ágape* is the Spanish translation for the Greek word *agápē* which refers to the love of God for humans, and humans' love of God. In Christianity, *ágape* is considered the highest and purest form of love that is sacrificial, self-less, and transcendent (Petruzzello, 2023). I chose this pseudonym because of the college's faith-based origins, profound commitment to service, and unapologetic belief in Latinx people and people from marginalized urban communities.

The founding of the college stemmed from organizing efforts of the Pastores Assembly of Core City, which established a faith-based nonprofit in the late 1980s called *Ágape Inc.*, motivated by a Biblical decree to “serve the least of these” by advancing educational and social-economic mobility of Latinx people through advocacy and programmatic interventions. According to a 2017 scholarly article not referenced here to protect the identity of the institution, *Ágape* began with clergy who came together in a church basement to pray for wisdom and guidance to enact change in the community. The article

discussed the civil rights issues they faced at that time and how they saw education as a vehicle to empower people in the community toward economic stability.

Meetings in the mid-1990s with several colleges led to a partnership between Waterstone University and Ágape Inc. to establish a junior college in 2000 called Ágape Higher Education Hub (UPHEH), uniquely focused on serving Latinx student language needs. A few years later, UPHEH was renamed to Ágape College and became an accredited branch of Waterstone University. According to their website, Ágape College described its mission as a Christian institution with an explicit focus on serving “Hispanic” and local communities. Their mission named goals such as impacting the lives of people in the community through increased knowledge, skills, and confidence. The mission also discussed three pillars (faith, reason, and justice) that would guide their academic programs. Finally, among some of the learning goals stated in the mission, they were direct in discussing how they attempt to honor the values and contributions of Latinx cultures with a holistic approach of supporting individuals, families, and the community.

According to a 2021 American Community Survey, the College was situated in a zip code encompassing roughly three miles with a total population of around 55,000 residents, a median household income of approximately \$27,000, and over 40% of people living below the poverty line. The neighborhoods surrounding the college were characterized by a diversity of low-income households and immigrant populations. Nearly 42% of residents living in the college’s zip code were Latinx and nearly 51% of residents were Black.

According to Waterstone University’s Office of Institutional Research (OIR), Ágape enrolled 160 students (103 full-time; 57 part-time) in Fall of 2021, with over 83% being women-identified students, and with 51% Latinx, 16% Black, 2% white, 1% Asian, and 27%

students of unknown race/ethnicity. The college was led by a team of administrators that reported to a college council consisting of Ágape Inc. and Waterstone University executive leaders including the presidents of both entities, the provost and chief of finance for Waterstone, and a vice president, counsel, and director for Ágape. The college had a direct reporting relationship to its founders at Ágape Inc. who had been there since the college was started.

Metro Uni Cacique Community College (established in 1968). Originally named after a 19th-century Puerto Rican educator, writer, and patriot, Cacique Community College is a public associates-level institution, a part of the Metro Uni public higher education system. Its pseudonym Cacique is a Spanish-colonial term for an Indigenous chief or king; its origins derive from the Taino Arawak word *kassikóan* which means “to inhabit or have a home” (Fadul López, 2020). I chose this pseudonym because it seemed to match the Puerto Rican roots, strength of leadership and tenacity, and sense of home that the college espoused for campus and community members.

According to published scholarship not referenced here to protect the identity of the institution, Cacique emerged in 1968 at a time when Black and Puerto Rican activists were pressuring Metro Uni to address gaps in higher education access and supports for Students of Color in the city. Despite abysmal numbers of Puerto Rican residents accessing Metro Uni at the time, the literature suggests that of those attending college, many were enrolled in Metro Uni. The establishment of Cacique came parallel with an open-admissions policy across all Metro Uni institutions. Cacique was meant to address the city’s healthcare workforce needs and the demand by Communities of Color for increased access. Its establishment came in

direct alignment with Metro Uni's master plan, which sought both these objectives while supporting partnerships with medical institutions in the city.

According to the published literature, despite the activism of the Puerto Rican community sparking the founding of the institution, the early proposal for organizing the college did not address the specific learning needs of Puerto Ricans, nor the distinct ethnic, cultural, and linguistic attributes that could have shaped the new institution (even as the proposal was authored by a Puerto Rican person). Instead, the proposal provided a liberal arts and medical arts "learning matrix" as the learning model for the college. The literature suggests that other Metro Uni colleges, including one in the Metropolis, were setting up Puerto Rican studies departments while the new Cacique campus planning was underway, and yet, Cacique's early plans did not include this focus. Ultimately, the plans for the college garnered significant support from political figures, philanthropy, and the system's administration, with a significant grant from a major foundation to get the early vision off the ground, with the focus on how to serve Latinx people more specifically occurring over time.

Scholars have noted that while the college experienced turbulent times in the mid-1970s due to fiscal crisis in the city, its deep history of community, faculty, and student organizing coalitions kept Cacique alive. What started as a college in an old tire factory in the South Metropolis became a campus of several buildings spread out across the city. According to their website, their written mission addressed its place, the South Metropolis (and like communities), and purpose of educating people historically excluded from higher education. The mission also described a focus on the development of academic, hard, and soft skills to increase the social and economic mobility and knowledge development of students. Their mission made references to serving students from diverse backgrounds,

specifically mentioning “Hispanics” and “African Americans.” Their mission also expressed values such as life-long learning, connections to the local community, and language access via instruction for English language learners and Spanish-English bilingual education.

A 2022 institutional overview report produced by Cacique’s Office of Institutional Research (OIR) demonstrated enrollment for Fall 2021 was more than 5,400 students, including associate-level and certificate programs. The most recent published demographic breakdown from OIR was for Spring 2021. During this term, enrollment was more than 5,400 and their student population mostly identified as Hispanic (58.4%) or Black (26.1%), with the third largest being “other” (9.7%), followed by Asian and Pacific Islanders (3.3%). Their data also showed that students primarily resided in the Metropolis (over 43.5%), downtown (nearly 10%) and other neighboring boroughs, and were an average age of 26. Based on 2020 U.S. Census data, the Metropolis population was over 1.47 million, of which approximately 34% were foreign-born people, 56% self-identified as Hispanic or Latino, 44% identified as Black or African American, 9% identified as white, 5% identified as Asian, and 3% identified as Native American. The City of Metropolis was also home to people making a median income of about \$44,000, and 26% of the population lived in poverty.

Participant Sampling

Participants for individual interviews were selected by using criterion sampling, followed by snowball sampling – a technique whereby key informants recommend additional participants for the study (Mertens, 2014). Specifically, as an outsider and novice to the institutions, it was important for me to take the following steps in initiating the recruitment of participants:

1. Finding a key individual/informant who could serve as a liaison and help identify other key individuals based on established participant criteria. This person's role or job title was different across the institutions. For example, at Ágape College, the informant was one of the founders based on his continued deep ties to the institution as an administrator at Ágape Inc. At Cacique, it was the president's designee—their chief of staff.
2. Triangulating information from the key informant with a review of document sources to identify individuals of importance to the study that fulfilled the established criteria.

To ensure the study's credibility and reduce the potential for bias in participant recruitment, the role of the informant in the study was documented. In both cases, there was a dialogic process for identifying participants, including discussing potential individuals suggested by the informant and people uncovered through my research. In some cases, the informant assisted with initial introductions to facilitate connections with key individuals. I also initiated communications to individuals on my own and followed leads offered by the informant and study participants.

The criteria for participant interviews sought to maximize variation in the sample using the following parameters:

- Participants who self-identified as Latinx.
- Individuals representing different Latinx ethnicities, depending upon local context and availability.
- Different Roles:

- Founders (1–4 people)—people identified through document review and the informant as the original founder(s) or founding members (people who were around during the founding years or who assisted the founder(s) with establishing the college) of the institution.
- Staff (4–6 people)—people responsible for the delivery of academic, student, and campus life; for example, people with campus leadership roles in advising, student affairs, academic affairs, enrollment management, career services (roles looked different across institutions).
- Faculty (3–4 people)—with maximum variation across disciplines depending upon availability.
- Community partners (3–4 people)—individuals from the neighborhood, local organizations, and civic leaders connected to the institution.
- Students (5–7 people)—students who had taken 4 or more classes at the institution (the interest was in intensity of experiences at the institution).

Snowball sampling was employed when additional participants were needed.

Participants were invited to refer other colleagues or community members who surfaced through the data collection and analysis process. The referral strategy confirmed the importance of interviewing individuals who emerged through conversations with the informant. It also yielded Latinx community allies who did not self-identify as Latinx people. Thus, there were 2–3 individuals at each institution who identified as Black or white who participated in an interview because of the criticality of the role that they played at the institution or in the community, and/or the extent to which their roles helped uplift Latinx-centeredness.

Once the study was underway, a dialogic relationship developed with participants through the interview process that changed my perspective on their role in the study. The exchange of ideas led me to adopt some of their terminology in my study and they also seemed to take ownership of the title of my study, adopting it as their language throughout the course of our conversations. Our knowledges seemed to be coming together as we learned from one another through dialogue. Their contributions and the time that some of them took to share resources, such as weblinks and artifacts for this study led me to consider them as more than participants, but also collaborators. Thus, moving forward, the study refers to individuals who engaged in conversations with me via “interviews” and “focus groups” as collaborators.

Data Collection Methods

To gain a comprehensive understanding of Latinx-founded institutions and how they were centering Latinx people’s assets toward FUBU-*About Us*, multiple methods of data collection were employed. Following is a description of the different instruments used for the study, including semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and informal pláticas [talks] (Fierros & Bernal, 2016), as well as observations, document collection, and physical artifacts (Yin, 2017).

Interviews, Focus Groups, and Informal Pláticas

Stake (1995) posits that case study research is about describing and building interpretations of multiple views of the case, making the interview a primary instrument for constructing “multiple realities.” Therefore, my study focused on one-on-one interviews with individuals representing multiple roles, including founders, staff, and community partners. Interviews were semistructured, whereby “the interview is guided by a list of questions or

issues to be explored ... [and the] format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic” (Merriam, 1998b, p. 74). Interviewees were identified through document reviews, by the informant, and through snowball sampling. Interviewees were recruited through emails sent by me and in some cases facilitated by the informant. Interviewees were invited to refer other potential collaborators that fit the criteria for the study.

Over a length of 60–90 minutes, some of the general interview topics explored included: (a) the values and mission of the institution and the ways that these manifested within the organization; (b) the relationship between the university and the community and how they supported one another and the institution’s proclaimed values; (c) the ways interviewees defined who was being served and how; and (d) the factors they considered important in being able to build asset-based Latinx-centered institutions.

At each institution, I conducted one 90-minute focus group for students and faculty, respectively. To accommodate their availability and maximize participation, focus groups were offered for students and faculty on two different occasions. At *Ágape*, there were seven students in one focus group, and three faculty in one focus group with a fourth whom I interviewed individually due to scheduling conflicts. At *Cacique*, there were three students in one focus group and two students in another focus group, and two faculty in one focus group and a third faculty member interviewed individually due to scheduling conflicts. Focus group collaborators were engaged through semi-structured questions that covered key topics while allowing for flexibility of group-initiated issues. Focus groups are “designed to elicit more of the participants’ points of view than would be evidenced in more researcher-dominated interviewing” and allow for understanding of how people interpret, resolve, and build

consensus around issues (Mertens, 2014, p. 405). The group discussion with students sought to elicit their experiences attending a Latinx-founded institution. General topics included: (a) what they perceived to be the values and mission of the institution and how they were conveyed, (b) whether and how their experiences as Latinx students resonated with the institution as a whole, (c) what they perceived to be the relationship of the institution with the community, and (d) what they considered to be important in establishing Latinx-centered higher education institutions. The faculty focus group covered the same general topics as the individual interviews with additional attention to: (a) how the values and mission of the institution were reflected in teaching and learning, (b) what kinds of knowledges and experiences they perceived were valued in implementing teaching and learning, and (c) their perspective on what new faculty to the college would need to know about teaching at a Latinx-centered institution.

Interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed maintaining confidentiality of collaborators (when possible) by using pseudonyms. There were collaborators whose roles were known to the public and where confidentiality would be more difficult to maintain, such as for presidents and founders of the institutions. I discussed the risk of confidentiality with these collaborators and how I sought to co-create an approach that worked best for them in seeking to include their voices in the study.

Students were recruited based on the specific context of the colleges and the channels identified for distributing a flyer and message about the study. Since the study occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic when institutions were transitioning from online learning to in-person, direct student access was not always viable through student clubs and organizations. In *Ágape's* case, they did not have any operating student clubs or a traditional

structure for student affairs. Thus, recruitment occurred through (1) asking interview and faculty focus group collaborators to share the study opportunity with students they served; (2) asking to join meetings of advisors and academic affairs staff to inform them about the study and solicit their support with outreach to students; I also used this as a way to gauge their interest for individual interviews; and (3) asking key informants to share the opportunity with students. Snowball sampling was employed by suggesting that interested students share the opportunity with other students. Study collaborators' demographic data gathered through a survey created using Qualtrics, accessed through University of Massachusetts Boston, are available in Tables 1 and 2; the survey instrument is available in Appendix E.

Finally, the study also borrowed elements of *plática* [talks] methodology to employ Latinx-centered communication approaches during the semi-structured interviews and focus groups, but mostly during on-site campus visits as a form of engaging with campus and community members. According to Fierros and Bernal (2016), *plática* is a Chicana/Latina Feminist methodology that focuses on relationality and reciprocity as a cultural context to engaging in research with Latinx communities. They offer the importance of *plática* in building “*confianza y respeto*” [trust and respect], creating spaces to theorize together with Latinx people, and exchange cultural knowledge. While I did not employ every principle or step to *plática* methodology, my informal *pláticas* were inspired by the five principles uncovered by Fierros and Bernal (2016), including (1) “the research draws upon Chicana/Latina feminist theory”; (2) “it has “a relational principle that honors participants as co-constructors of knowledge”; (3) it “makes connections between everyday lived experiences and the research”; (4) it “provides a potential space for healing”; and (5) it “relies on relations of reciprocity and vulnerability and researcher reflexivity” (pp. 109–115).

I engaged in informal pláticas with various collaborators, which involved organic translanguaging (referring to coming in and out of English and Spanish) and sharing of experiences, anecdotes, and personal stories, which helped build connection, trust, and relatability as we delved into knowledge sharing. Our pláticas also helped uncover data and contextual factors that served with the triangulation of findings.

Table 1

Ágape College Study Collaborators' Demographics

Role	Name	Age	Race	Ethnicity	Gender	Length of Time	College Alumn	Generation Status (For Students)
Staff	Francisco	52	White or European	Bolivia	Man	6–9 years	No	
	Gemma	51	Other	Argentina	Woman	3–5 years	No	
	Hannah	45	Black or African American	---	Woman	3–5 years	No	
	Elena	55	White or European	Puerto Rico, Costa Rica	Woman	10–15 years	No	
Faculty	Ivan	67	Other	Puerto Rico	Man	10–15 years	Yes	
	Sarita	35	Indígena/a/x or Pueblos Indígena/o/x (from Latin America/ Caribbean)	Puerto Rico	Woman	Less than 1 year	Yes	
	Rob	34	Other	Puerto Rico	Man	3-5 years	Yes	
	Pablo	30	Indígena/a/x or Pueblos Indígena/o/x (from Latin America/ Caribbean)	Puerto Rico	Man	3-5 years	Yes	
Students	Belinda	33	Indígena/a/x or Pueblos Indígena/o/x (from Latin America/ Caribbean)	Dominican Republic	Woman			1st generation (born in Latin America or the Caribbean and came to the U.S. for college)
	Ulises	19	Indígena/a/x or Pueblos Indígena/o/x (from Latin America/ Caribbean)	Ecuador	Man			1.5 generation (born in Latin America or the Caribbean and came to the U.S. mainland as a young child)
	Alex	20	White or European	---	Man			2nd generation (born and

Role	Name	Age	Race	Ethnicity	Gender	Length of Time	College Alumn	Generation Status (For Students)
								raised here in the U.S. mainland)
	Elías	23	Indígena/a/x or Pueblos Indígena/o/x (from Latin America/ Caribbean)	Puerto Rico	Man			1.5 generation (born in Latin America or the Caribbean and came to the U.S. mainland as a young child)
	Nayda	28	Indígena/a/x or Pueblos Indígena/o/x (from Latin America/ Caribbean)	Dominican Republic	Woman			1st generation (born in Latin America or the Caribbean and came to the U.S. for college)
	Andy	26	Black or African American	United States	Man			1st generation (born in Latin America or the Caribbean and came to the U.S. for college)
	Tito	21	White or European	United States	Man			3rd generation (parents were born and raised here in the U.S. mainland)
Community	Matías	54	Indígena/a/x or Pueblos Indígena/o/x (from Latin America/ Caribbean)	Puerto Rico	Man	10–15 years	No	
	Nelson	60	Other	Puerto Rico	Man	More than 16 years	No	
	Larry	58	White or European	United States	Man	More than 16 years	No	
	Olinda	70	White or European	Cuba, Spain	Woman	More than 16 years	No	
Founders	Alvaro	-	Other	Puerto Rican	Man	More than 16 years	No	
	Benjamín	60	White or European, Black or African American Indígena/a/x or Pueblos Indígena/o/x (from Latin America/ Caribbean)	Mainland U.S. born from Puerto Rico	Man	More than 16 years	No	
	Paul	---	White or European	United States	Man	More than 16 years	No	
	Carl	65	Black or African American	-	Man	10–15 years	No	

Table 2*Cacique Community College Study Collaborators' Demographics*

Role	Name	Age	Race	Ethnicity	Gender	Length of Time	College Alumn	Generation Status (For Students)
Staff	Elsa	---	Other	Dominican Republic	Woman	---	No	
	Josiane	51	Black or African American	Puerto Rico	Woman	10–15 years	No	
	Greg	39	White or European	Unknown	Man	6–9 years	No	
	Fatima	41	Other	Dominican American	Woman	More than 16 years	No	
	Inez	---	Other	---	Woman	More than 16 years	Yes	
	Mario	46	White or European	Argentina	Man	10–5 years	No	
Faculty	Luis	50	White or European	Cuba	Man	10-15 years	No	
	Manuel	52	Black or African American	Cuba	Man	More than 16 years	No	
	Joan	74	Black or African American	United States	Woman	More than 16 years	No	
Students	Eddie	52	Other	Puerto Rico	Man			2nd generation (you were born and raised here in the U.S. mainland)
	Cesar	31	---	Puerto Rico	Man			2nd generation (you were born and raised here in the U.S. mainland)
	Ana	42	Black or African American	Dominican Republic	Woman			1st generation (you were born in Latin America or the Caribbean and came to the U.S. for college)
	Joli	35	Black or African American	Puerto Rico	Woman			1st generation (you were born in Latin America or the Caribbean and came to the U.S. for college)
	Chris	52	Other	Puerto Rico	Man			3rd generation (your parents were born and raised here in the U.S. mainland)
Community	Ernesto	69	European/Indígena/African	Puerto Rico	Man	6–9 years	No	
	Santiago	69	Other	Puerto Rico	Man	More than 16 years		

Role	Name	Age	Race	Ethnicity	Gender	Length of Time	College Alumn	Generation Status (For Students)
	Romero	---	Other	Puerto Rico	Non-binary / third gender	More than 16 years	No	
Founders	Brian		White or European	Cuba	Man	More than 16 years	No	
	Rosa	70	Other	Puerto Rico	Woman	More than 16 years	No	
	Alma	88		Puerto Rico	Woman	More than 16 years	No	

Observation

Since this case study examined a “real world” setting of the case (the institution and its surrounding community), direct formal and informal observation helped in evaluating the manifestation of particular behaviors, interactions or processes over time (Yin, 2017).

Common forms of observation include observation of physical settings/physical environment, participants (who come to the institution, roles, and characteristics), activities and interactions (norms and rules of interaction, what is happening at the institution, how people and activities interconnect; Merriam, 1998b, p. 97). For my study, the observations that I focused on were: observations of classrooms, public events with a variety of foci, meetings (planning and executive leadership meetings), central convening spaces on the campus to understand further the way the institution and actors demonstrated Latinx-centeredness, and the surrounding neighborhood. Informally, Yin (2017) suggests that observations are made throughout fieldwork, such as noting “the condition of the immediate environment or of workspaces may suggest something about the culture of the organization” during interviews, meetings, and daily activities, or paying attention to the interactions of focus group collaborators (p. 122).

Document Collection

Yin (2017) states that document collection is used in case study to support and verify evidence from other sources and can lead to inferences and additional questions to study in the case. Documents may serve in place of those activities that the researcher is unable to directly observe and often include public records and personal documents (Merriam, 1998b; Stake, 1995). Thus, the documents that were collected for the study included mission statements, formal studies available about the institutions, administrative documents such as campus proposals and plans (strategic documents), academic documents such as course catalogues, student handbooks, and faculty contracts, web content (intended for external audiences), program-related flyers and brochures, and articles appearing in community newspapers and/or campus magazines about the institution's identity and who they serve (Yin, 2017). For the study, it was helpful to understand the contextual factors of people and communities served through demographic data about students obtained through institutional research reports and fact books, as well as the characteristics of the neighborhood/location in which the institutions were situated through U.S. Census American Community Survey data. Ágape did not have historical archives, while Cacique had it situated within their library system. Nonetheless, a range of textual data on the founding of the institution, memoranda, speeches, and historical newsletters were obtained.

Physical Artifacts

Yin (2017) suggests that physical or cultural artifacts can be an important part of a study. Physical artifacts created in organizational and other contexts can reveal shared values, beliefs, and feelings, and convey important meaning (Yanow, 2006). Artifacts (or human creations) such as art and photographs, and the built space were important data in

understanding how FUBU-*About Us* (Latinx-centeredness) was conveyed through the organization’s identity, culture, and praxis (Yanow, 2006).

While there were a lot of data collected for this study, the primary data used for the study’s analysis and findings were drawn from interviews and focus groups. The data from documents, observations, and artifacts were used more selectively to supplement findings drawn from collaborators. A summary of the instruments and data collected and analyzed can be found in Table 3.

Table 3

Summary of the Instruments and Data Collected and Analyzed

Instrument	Data Collected	Data Analyzed	
		Ágape	Cacique
Interviews and Focus Groups	semistructured (audio-recorded and transcribed)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 15 individual interviews (4 founders, 4 staff, 1 faculty, 4 community partners) 1 student focus group (7 students) 1 faculty focus group (3 faculty) 23 total collaborators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12 individual interviews (1 founder, 6 staff, 1 faculty, 3 community partners) 2 individual interviews requested be interviewed as a pair (2 founding members) 2 student focus groups (5 students) 1 faculty focus group (2 faculty) 20 total collaborators
Direct Observation	classrooms, events, meetings, and central convening spaces, surrounding neighborhood; general fieldwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Event #1: "What's Your Story" Media Tech Workshop Date 3/15/22; Mode: Virtual Event #2: “Open House & FAFSA Workshop session” Date: 3/23/22; Mode: Virtual Meeting #1: College Council Meeting [executive/leadership] Date: 6/15/22; Mode: Virtual Classroom #1: Computer Literacy; Date: 4/12/22; Mode: Virtual Classroom #2: Social Psychology Course; Date: 4/21/22; Mode: In-Person Classroom #3: English Language Course [Level 1] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Event #1: Accreditation Forum; Date: 3/24/22; Mode: Virtual Event #2: Closing Oral Report Gathering with the Accreditation Visiting Team Members; Date: 4/6/22; Mode: Virtual Event #3: Center for the Arts, College Repertory Company; Date: 5/22/22; Mode: In-person Meeting #1: College-wide Senate meeting; Date: 5/19/22; Mode: Virtual Campus Site Visit and Neighborhood Date: 5/3-4/22

Instrument	Data Collected	Data Analyzed	
		Ágape	Cacique
		Date: 4/21/22; Mode: In-Person • Campus Site Visit: Ágape College, Inc. and Charter Schools, Waterstone University, and Neighborhood; Date/Time: 4/20-21/22	
Document Collection	mission statements, web content, formal studies, proposals and plans, course booklets and student handbooks, historical texts, news/magazine articles, program booklets and flyers, demographic data	1. Mission Statement 2. Memorandum of Understanding between College and Waterstone University (2004, 2005) 3. Correspondence and Statement of Accreditation Status (2005) 4. Correspondence, Waterstone University on College Name Change (2005) 5. College building grand opening agenda and speech (2007) 6. Ágape College Organizational Chart (2020) 7. Ágape Inc. Organizational Chart (2021) 8. Ágape Opportunity community Model (2022) 9. Core Park Neighborhood Strategic Plan (2022) 10. Faculty Covenant [contract] (2021, fall) 11. Institutional Research Data Report (2021-2022) 12. Student handbook (2021-2022) 13. Published research article (2017) 14. College website	1. Mission statement 2. Founding College Proposal (1968) 3. Strategic Plan 2017-2022 (2022) 4. Academic Catalogue (2022) 5. Annual Report (2020-2021) 6. Accreditation Self-Study (2022) 7. Report “The Cacique Value” (2020) 8. Institutional Research Data Reports (2021, 2022) and 1 staff survey (2019) 9. Published research articles by Latinx scholars (1977, 1996, 2003, 2016) 10. published online article by college archivist (n.d.) 11. College website and Digital Archive
Physical Artifacts	Visual art, photographs, and built space	Viewed during site visits, and took photos of my own as part of data collection	Viewed during site visits and online archive of founding years, and took photos of my own as part of data collection

Finally, worth highlighting is the dynamic nature of data collection in case study research. Each of the above data collection methods built from one another, helped ascertain evidence, and created additional areas of inquiry where I revisited different methods to

further make sense of findings. This dynamism and multi-dimensional strategy for data collection and analysis is one of the strengths of case study research and helps convey the dynamic relationship between phenomena and their real-life contexts (Yin, 2017).

Data Analysis

One of the strategies for analysis of multiple case studies involves a cross-case synthesis or case-based approach in which the “goal is to retain the integrity of the entire case and then to compare or synthesize within-case patterns across the cases” (Yin, 2017, p. 196). In this form of analysis, the researcher first identifies within-case patterns. For example, in my study, the case was the Latinx-founded institution. Within-case patterns included determining how Latinx-centeredness manifested within organizational culture, identity, and praxis and the ways that different actors contributed to the phenomenon of FUBU-*About Us* Latinx-centeredness within the individual institution. The analytical strategy included some preliminary findings about the identified within-case patterns and was followed by an examination across cases to see whether there was a replicative relationship or new processes or strategies uncovered (Yin, 2017). In cross-case synthesis, it is important to note that no case (or institution of higher education) is identical; therefore, a sensitivity to differences, particularly to differences that might impact the synthesis of findings, is required (Yin, 2017). Since the analysis depended on interpretation, the goal was to understand the lessons from each Latinx-founded institution and draw some analytic generalizations (Yin, 2017).

A second strategy employed for data analysis was the constant comparative method, a process used within grounded theory but commonly used across other qualitative approaches (Glaser, 1965). In the constant comparative method, there is a continuous comparison of incidents with each other, and units of data (from a word to an entire collection of

documents) are sorted and grouped into categories based on commonality (Glaser, 1965; Mertens, 2014). Two-step coding is used in grounded theory to assist researchers with data reduction during the analysis phase (Merriam, 1998b, p. 179). Saldaña (2021) writes:

In qualitative data analysis, a code is a researcher-generated construct that symbolizes and thus attributes interpreted meaning to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern detection, categorization, theory building, and other analytic processes... an interpretive act... a code can sometimes summarize, distill, or condense data, not simply reduce them, [where coding occurs during and after the data collection process]. (p. 4)

Two-step coding entails initial coding and focused coding. During the initial coding phase (also referred to as open coding), data are compared by “read[ing] and analyz[ing] the data word by word, line by line, paragraph by paragraph, or incident by incident, and might use more than one of these strategies” (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2013, p. 158). Since I was working with a voluminous amount of data -- which included 33 interviews and focus groups worth more than 50 hours of interview time -- I decided to employ “macro-coding” or “lumper” coding to help efficiently arrive at the essence of participant responses as they related to my conceptual framework and research questions (Saldana, 2021, p.33-35). The goal initially was to stay close to, but also open to, the data, while constructing precise codes and moving rapidly and cautiously through the data (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2013). In the focused coding phase, the researcher is examining the early-developed codes against more extensive data, “explor[ing] and decid[ing] which codes best capture what they see happening in the data, and raise these codes up to tentative conceptual categories. This process means giving these categories conceptual definitions and assessing relationships

between them” (Mertens, 2014, p. 159; see also Thornberg & Charmaz, 2013). Two-step coding and coding more broadly allowed me to “organize and group similarly coded data into categories or ‘families’ because they share some characteristic—the beginning of a pattern” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 9). The construction of categories and subcategories developed through data analysis is part of the constant comparative method and represents abstractions resulting from the data (Merriam, 1998b). The extensiveness of the data collected required a third cycle of coding to arrive at a final set of themes, which is a key outcome of the coding and categorization process (Saldaña, 2021). The third cycle analysis incorporated subsuming codes and developing broader categories, themes, and subthemes. This process allowed me to start looking beyond within-case patterns, but also delving into cross-case analysis.

Some of the tools that were used to analyze data for the study included maintaining a codebook with short descriptions of each code (Mertens, 2014). Coding was conducted through a combination of focused manual review and NVivo software accessed through University of Massachusetts Boston, used to securely store and analyze data. Data were also secured through the designation of pseudonyms for collaborators and institutions to ensure the protection and confidentiality of human participants.

Trustworthiness

Researchers are subject to standards for evidence and quality in their approaches to inquiry. In qualitative research, “trustworthiness” involves careful documentation of processes for conducting, analyzing, and interpreting data in order to help establish the rigor and trust in the integrity of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mertens, 2014). Lincoln and Guba (1985) designed four criteria for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research design, which include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Following is a brief explanation of each criterion and the observed methods for addressing them, resulting in a description of the application of trustworthiness methods to the study.

- *Credibility* can be described as the confidence in the findings (Amankwaa, 2016). Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose that credibility can be achieved through deep and prolonged involvement of the researcher in the research site while still maintaining enough space from the phenomena of interest to capture observations more accurately. They also consider persistent observation of importance (having to do with length of time and opportunity to encounter different scenarios); triangulation (analyzing data from multiple sources, sites/cases to fact-check and ensure consistency across data sources); member checks (reviewing with participants/stakeholders formally or informally for accuracy); peer debriefing (reviewing with other researchers the findings, analysis, conclusions of the study); negative case analysis (process of uncovering cases that contradict the hypothesis and revising the hypothesis to include the negative cases); and referential adequacy (reserving a portion of data to be analyzed later to assess the validity of findings; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mertens, 2014).
- *Transferability* refers to the demonstrated applicability of the study to other contexts, which is based on the reader making that determination for themselves (Amankwaa, 2016; Mertens, 2014). Readers use the information provided by the researcher to draw similarities, differences, and hence, the transferability of the research to their particular context (Mertens, 2014). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest qualitative researchers employ “thick description,” providing sufficient detail about the context, setting/place, time, situation(s), culture, and people to

assist the reader in making a determination about the transferability of the study. Researcher details might also include their reactions, feelings, and observations, observed attitudes and behaviors of participants, as well as information about the atmosphere and conditions at the time of the study (Amankwaa, 2016).

Researchers may keep journals or other digital or written records to aid in documenting their observations (Amankwaa, 2016).

- *Dependability* refers to the consistency of the research findings and the degree to which the research methods are well documented and replicable by others (Amankwaa, 2016). To increase dependability, Lincoln and Guba (1985) consider inquiry audits to confirm the quality and accuracy of the process. Auditing involves engaging a researcher not associated with the study to examine its process and outcomes and help determine whether the interpretations and findings are consistent with the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
- *Confirmability* suggests that data interpretations are neutral and uninfluenced by researcher bias, and the data “can be tracked to their sources, and the logic that is used to interpret the data [are] made explicit” (Mertens, 2014, p. 284). Here, Lincoln and Guba (1985) offer employing confirmability audit, audit trail, triangulation, and reflexivity as strategies. Confirmability audit refers to the ability to trace the data back to original sources and the audit trail consists of the recorded research steps taken from start to end (Amankwaa, 2016; Mertens, 2014). An audit trail might consist of various kinds of notes (field, methodological, summaries, theoretical, personal, etc.); data reconstruction and synthesis artifacts that demonstrate how connections, themes, and concepts were

structured; and instrument development details (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Finally, Lincoln and Guba (1985) consider reflexivity to be an important way to capture the way the perspective, values, beliefs, values, and interests of the researcher are reflected in the decision-making process and methodological design. They posit that reflexivity can be achieved through dialogue with other researchers, as well as through journaling.

Trustworthiness of the Study

My study was designed to employ multiple strategies to meet trustworthiness standards of qualitative research. Since case study methodology guided the design of the study, credibility was addressed through the triangulation and member checking embedded in the method. For example, the examination of multiple data sources such as documents, interviews, observations, and artifacts helped support a more complete examination of how Latinx-centered FUBU-*About Us* organizational identity, organizational culture, and praxis manifested at Latinx-founded institutions. Member checking with collaborators during the interview through clarifying statements and translating back my interpretations of their responses assisted with the accuracy of interpretations.

Furthermore, case study method requires constant work with various forms of data, whereby the multiple sources inform and raise further inquiries of each other, also a form of trustworthiness. The nature of qualitative research also makes it so that data collection and analysis are happening simultaneously:

allow[ing] the researcher to make adjustments along the way, even to the point of redirecting data collection, and to ‘test’ emerging concepts, themes, and categories

against subsequent data. To wait until all data are collected is to lose the opportunity to gather more reliable and valid data. (Merriam, 2002, p. 14)

Additionally, the study addressed the transferability criteria of trustworthiness through thick description of the case and site context based on study collaborators, document reviews, artifacts, and researcher notes and observations regarding the Latinx-founded institution. Researcher notes were organized to include, in addition to case and site observations, research process notes that reflected on key questions, thoughts, and decisions made throughout the study, and reflexive notes to allow space for contemplation of my own feelings, beliefs, and curiosities. For example, there were analytical notes from the interview and focus group data as well as analytical memos that I had written upon the completion of my data collection. The memos synthesized ideas and patterns that I was noticing from observations, site visits, artifacts, and the various conversations with collaborators, and supported the analysis process. These notes and memos also satisfy the need for researchers to demonstrate dependability (through the documentation of processes) and confirmability (through the audit trail and reflexivity).

Limitations

Like most research studies, there are limitations that must be reflected upon and put forward for consideration. Some of the limitations for this study include institutional capacity, the geographic choice of the study, and representativeness of Latinx diversity. First, regarding institutional capacity, the sites varied in robustness of their institutional systems for data collection and in the access provided to data, which yielded disproportionate data availability across institutions (cases) for different data types. For example, Ágape did not have a formal archive and was in the process of establishing a library for the college (which

is often where institutional archives are housed). Therefore, some documents and artifacts were not readily available at this site, such as the founder's original proposal for the college to Waterstone University and photographs of the founding years. The COVID-19 pandemic also seemed to impact the capacity of colleges to allow for certain observations. For example, I was unable to participate in classroom observations at Cacique but did have the opportunity to do so at Ágape. Thus, the differences in data availability may have had an impact on the cross-case synthesis and analysis process.

Second, the study was limited to institutions that were located in the same U.S. region, where several of its states had experienced more than half of their statewide Latinx population increase in the last decade, and where Latinxs were considered the most diverse in terms of their national origins. However, based on a 2017 study, which has been omitted to protect the identities of the institutions, Latinx people in the region were more likely to be of Caribbean origins (nearly 35% Puerto Rican, over 17% Dominican, over 3% Cuban), whereas other regions of the U.S. were predominantly Mexican/Mexican American. The experiences of Latinx communities in the U.S. region where the institutions were located may not be transferrable to other situations, but still valuable due to the region's growth and diversity, as well as the importance of locally relevant findings.

Third, as stated in the background of this study and related to the limitation of the regional focus of this research, the U.S. Latinx population is a heterogenous population representing multiple nationalities, ethnicities, and citizenship statuses and colonial histories (Núñez, 2014; Rinderle & Montoya, 2008). While Central Americans and South Americans also represented significant parts of the region's Latinx population (over 10% and nearly 16% respectively), and the numbers of Salvadoran, Guatemalan, and Honduran immigrants

had been on the rise (25% increase from 2007-2015), there has been little published research in higher education focused on these populations (Cohn et al., 2015; Massey & Constant, 2017). Yet, this study was limited in its ability to capture this diversity sufficiently, and the representativeness of different Latinx communities will depend on the location of the sites and who they serve in the present, as both sites were originally founded by Puerto Rican people.

Reflections: Role of the Researcher

As a Latina doctoral candidate and scholar-practitioner, it has been a painful process to uncover the oppressive and sadistic nature of white supremacy in the U.S., which will remain unchanged without People of Color reclaiming their narratives and employing their virtue of knowledge and experiences to change the paradigm. Therefore, *FUBU-About Us* higher education models are important to examine, support, and include in the discourse on the success of an emerging majority in the U.S.—primarily Latinx and immigrant people from developing nations. I considered it important for me, as the researcher, to be in relationship with the study (building in time for reflexivity and allowing the study to “speak” to me) and to be relational in my approach with study collaborators (practicing an ethic of care, responsibility, reciprocity, and community orientations). *FUBU-About Us* centers the experiences of those who have been traditionally marginalized, so my approach to the study was in the spirit of resistance to the pre-disposed ways of knowing that come from systems of dominance allowing for the site, its people, context, and discourses to emerge as a valid way of knowing and experiencing higher education.

CHAPTER 5

AN ORGANIZATIONAL STORY FUNDAMENTALLY ABOUT PEOPLE

Esta institución fue creada por hispanos, pero no solo ayuda a los hispanos, ayuda a todo el que quiera ser parte de esto [la cabeza de los estudiantes asienta de acuerdo] y obtener parte de lo que es la universidad y sus valores. Porque se trata de concientizar, se trata de crear una comunidad de nosotros para todo el mundo.

Porque todos vivimos aquí en Core City, entonces se trata de eso, como de hacernos una mejor comunidad.

[This institution was founded by Hispanics, but it doesn't just help Hispanics, it helps whoever wants to be a part of this [students' heads nod in agreement] and partake in the college and its values. Because it's all about raising awareness, it's about creating a community by us for the whole world. Because we all live in Core City, so it's about that, how to make ourselves into a better community.]

—Belinda, Ágape College, student

The two organizational cases in this study had rich founding stories and contexts, as told by college collaborators, and revealed through the review of documents and photographic artifacts. Their stories spoke of origins situated in civil rights, educational justice, and resistance to flawed systems and deficit narratives about the potential and deservingness of urban Latinx communities. Members sought to create institutions that were

for us by us about us, and so, the organizational stories of Ágape College and Cacique Community College are essentially stories about people building institutions for people. Thus, this chapter provides case profiles of the development and contextual factors that informed the colleges' organizational identity, culture, and praxis.

The college narratives drew from and brought together descriptive testimonios [testimonials] offered by collaborators as primary data. A core tenet for carrying forward a study that was *for us by us about us* was the emic perspective to uplift Latinx people's voices and inform the discourse on issues shaping Latinx communities. Thus, the approach focused on collaborators' voices to situate the stories of the colleges, which also mirrored the emic perspective that informed the literature review for this study. Furthermore, the storytelling by collaborators was supplemented by triangulated historical documents to ensure that key details were included. To create a foundational understanding about the colleges, the chapter is organized by presenting individual institutional portraits that cover their founding histories and key contemporary insights on contextual issues they were facing in fulfilling their mission and values. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Ágape College's Story of Faith and Latinx Community Self-Determination in Action

Pastores Assembly Core City, when they meet, that's what they talk about... it's like "I got a bunch of kids and they're not juvenile delinquents, they're good kids, but they're 22-year-olds and they're not" fill in the blank. And so, we created a system by which we try to recruit them and get them in.

—Alvaro, founder

Ágape College is a private faith-based associates-level branch campus of Waterstone University. The founding of the college stemmed from community organizing efforts of a

group of Latinx clergy people called the Pastores Assembly, which still exists today. The Pastores Assembly together, under the leadership of Reverend Alvaro, was established as a faith-based nonprofit in the mid-1980s, called *Ágape Inc.*, which would later become the nonprofit parent organization to *Ágape College*. Their institutional portrait includes the motivating factors influencing founders to start the college, their founding story, as well as contextual issues they were grappling with at the time of this study, such as affordability in light of higher education and considerations for succession planning of their founders.

Motivating Factors for College Founding

I had the distinct honor and privilege to speak with the founder of Pastores Assembly, *Ágape Inc.* and *Ágape College*—Reverend Alvaro—over the course of three separate conversations totaling 4 hours. I also spoke with his brother Benjamín who was a founding member of the three organizations, and Carl and Paul who were founding members of the college. The story of how Alvaro founded the three organizations started when he was recruited by a Puerto Rican theologian at a liberation theology conference to create a Hispanic Studies Program at a Theological Seminary in Core City that was part of Waterstone University. He moved to Core City from another large urban city in 1981 to start the program and, soon after, established relationships with more than 30 Latinx, Spanish-speaking churches in Core City, where he set up “field education sites” for the Seminary. His involvement with the church community was deepened through grants obtained to advance theological education in Latinx communities and quickly became a representative for the church community through these efforts. He shared his accounts of those early years and the activism that spurred the creation of the Pastores Assembly, which provided a backdrop for the establishment of *Ágape Inc.* and the college:

We organized and became a civil rights group. We fought for bilingual teachers, we fought for the establishment of new school buildings, because we had, all our kids were in buildings that were really old, we fought the police because they were beating up Latino kids. Then, when we fought with the police because they were not arresting drug dealers, which was a dichotomous... It was a strange time where they were like, “You were here last week telling us you wanted police protection.” “Yeah, now I'm telling you I need protection from you.” So, we sued Core City on how it was doing foster care work with the American Civil Liberties Union. We were very active and, as such, we became the civil rights group and leaders of the community over maybe a 5-year period. From 1981, I started right away, and it wasn't just me, we had a group of clergy, and it was a really eclectic group of clergy.... Pastores Assembly was founded in 1982 or '83 and that's how we became known.

It was during this time working for the Seminary that Alvaro also began to struggle with Waterstone's executive leadership's decision to use grant funding—obtained by Alvaro for Latinx student programs—for university capital projects. This experience led him to pursue a philosophy and course of action focused on Latinx ownership over institutions to better ensure that the needs of Latinx communities were met. He stated: “In 1986, we create Ágape [Inc.], and Ágape [Inc.] doesn't do anything that doesn't create an institution that it owns. Hence, we own a campus. Hence, we own the schools. Hence, we own job training programs, etc., etc.”

Ágape Inc. was working with the clergy and people in the community to help them secure homes, jobs, and other resources to advance the development of the Latinx community of Core City. In talking with founding members, the close connection to people

from the neighborhood and pastoring at local churches provided an intimate view of the educational gaps that existed in the community. Benjamín recounted a story from when he was leading a Sunday School session at church, whereby church members sat in a circle and would pass the Bible around to read aloud excerpts. He described a young person who was attending a neighborhood high school and the sobering experiences that clergy people were seeing among young people in their congregations. The experience of working with young people in the community led to Ágape Inc.'s educational activism in building K–12 charter schools. He shared, referring to the young high schooler in the neighborhood:

She was excited about the fact that she was gonna graduate from high school. And she was graduating with honors. So, I was like, “Wow, that’s great,” you know which, by the way, was no small feat back in the day. To graduate was the standard when we opened the high school. A 50–60% dropout rate, which was kind of where it was at, if you really looked at the number from inception to conclusion. Right, so this young woman was going to read it, she couldn't read a passage of scripture without help. You know, when you have an experience like that, it tells you that you need to make a difference. It was those types of experiences magnified across the life of the clergy and their congregants that said to us, “we need to be ‘by us, for us,’ and we need to work in that space because it's clear that the majority institutions don't give a damn.” And that was not for lack of advocacy, to be very clear about that.

Benjamín also recalled how the educational gaps that they were seeing with Latinx people being served through Ágape Inc. were clearly preventing the upward mobility that the nonprofit was seeking to address:

Most of them had education-related debt, they never finished, and dropped out of, but never paid. So we had a bunch of Latinos who, I like to say, were sold the fallacy of, “you can go to college”, which was a fallacy because “you didn't give me the tools that I needed to be successful to go to college, and then you give it to me, and when I go buy it,” because that's what we're doing, “I find I gotta drop off because I ain't got what it takes academically. I can't read at the level, I can't write at the level. I can't comprehend some of the conversations that are taking place in the room, not because I'm ignorant, per se, or maybe I do lack knowledge in that sense of the word. It's because after 12 years of American public school education, I can't get a damn degree that actually had an incredible value to it.” Right, so we found a bunch of kids who are having that experience, young adults, who we have to help with mortgages. So, Alvaro was like, “We got to create a solution to this problem.” That's a classic example of the street basically saying to you, “You gotta create a solution.” So, he started thinking about how do we build a college, and he started asking anybody he could about how to do that.

Founding Story: From Full Ownership to a Partnership

Guided by a commitment to Latinx ownership of Latinx institutions and the experience of creating independent charter schools, Alvaro's first approach in the quest to create a college for Latinx people in North Core City was to learn how they could establish an independent college of their own. He described:

I went to the State under Governor X and I asked to speak to the head of higher education, and they laughed at us when they said we wanted a college. Was like, “Come on, Rev.” He laughed. “Why would you want a college?” And I said,

“because our young people don't go to the colleges that exist.” And I got into somewhat of a fight with him, though he's now a great support. He's retired now. He became a supporter of ours, but at that time, he was like, “there's no reason for you to do that.”

In addition to the discouraging lack of support from government officials for the proposed college, there were other hurdles that they confronted when checking with the accrediting body about the requirements for starting a college. Benjamín revealed what they learned from their conversations with the accrediting body:

You needed to have, at minimum, half a million dollars in the bank, about eight full-time faculty, and a number of full-time independent not faculty administrators, plus have been able to provide, and be in operation through a year before you can get the financial aid to [underwrite?] your students. In other words, Black and Brown ain't getting in. If you're not here already before these processes were established. I don't know a lot of Latinos in the barrio [neighborhood] who control half a million wealth, back in the day.... Who could bankroll that kind of thing, and then, underwrite an institution for a whole year before it is actually in a viable space? We didn't have that kind of money so we knew we wouldn't be able to build it. But even that didn't discourage Alvaro.

According to Benjamín, Alvaro's commitment to creating a college led to fundraising for the construction of a building that would house the college and other Ágape Inc. programs.

Benjamín shared:

This is a 250,000 square foot one building and another 70,000 square foot building. It's really more like 265 now because we added some pieces, so we had these two

massive buildings, so we had real estate, that wasn't the issue. The issue is how do you operationalize this vision, and we came to a realization that we needed a partner.

The realities associated with the lack of capital and infrastructure to fulfill accreditation standards forced founders to reconsider their approach to building a college that was fully their own. The founders seemed to understand that the resource constraints they faced were attributed to systemic barriers confronted by Latinx communities. These systemic barriers propelled them toward considering a partnership with a higher education institution to build their college. Benjamín asserted:

Partnerships are important because the reality is the systems are so entrenched, they don't create space. And often, institutions we think are Latino are really institutions that have an ethos, and a culture, and that's what they understand themselves to be, but are affiliated with something other than Latino because, to the point, it is hard to build another Notre Dame, which is for the Irish. Back in the day when they could afford to underwrite and create those places in those spaces. So, eventually, the building of the College produced and went from a realization of the challenge and the difficulty, given the legal accrediting and Department of Education obstacles, to a conversation about a partnership.... We thought, "Well, let's go back to the institutions we know." So, Alvaro will tell the story of having approached two or three Presidents and all of them said no. And one day, a new guy came into town, who became the new President, and he went and talked to him.

Alvaro's decades of contribution to the Core City community and Ágape Inc.'s reputation made it so that politicians and new leaders to the community would often visit Ágape Inc. as part of their public relations work. They were "one of the boxes" that new

presidents of nearby colleges and university needed to check, as put by Alvaro. He described the encounter with a new university president that would help set their vision for the college in motion:

So, the new President of Waterstone was Paul, he came to see me, and he said, “Listen, I want students from this community to come to Waterstone,” and I said to him, “Why would I do that?” And he says to me, “Well, because Waterstone’s a great school.” I said, “Yeah, but you charge more than a kid I can get into Harvard. So, if I get them into Harvard, I’m sending them to Harvard or Michigan or,” and I start mentioning schools, and he says, “well, but they won’t get a Christian education.” And I said to him, “If they’re not Christian enough for my churches to go to Harvard, going to your school is not going to make a difference, right? But the cost...” And he got flustered. He said, “What would you have me do if you were the President of Waterstone?” and I said, “You will start a school here where we control it.” And he says, “Okay write me a white paper. Can you send me a white paper?” And I say, “Yes,” and then after I said yes, I felt like a fool because I felt [pause] it ain’t gonna happen. There’s no way that an institution is going to let us do what I’m saying we want. But I wrote it. I got it back from him.

Alvaro proceeded to explain that the three-page document he received was signed not by Paul but, even more significantly, the chairman of the board, noting: “So that’s when I knew it was for real. He went to his boss and said, ‘Let’s do this.’ We created Ágape Higher Education Hub (UPHEH).” In speaking with founding members, it seemed that the combination of reputation, deep connections to Waterstone University through Alvaro and

Benjamín, and alignment of values with a new leader and institutional partner allowed for UPHEH to come to life as the first iteration of the college.

Paul's perspective on the founding of the college illuminated the values-based connections around justice that provided the backdrop for the partnership. He described himself as an "Anglo university president" leading an institution that was situated in the wealthier suburbs of Core City with strong epistemological claims around the integration of faith, reason, and justice. Yet, Paul felt that it was necessary for these claims to go beyond acts of charity, but rather focus on how the institutions did the work of justice. He explained: "We had to really be in solidarity with people who knew some things we didn't know, could speak in more languages. It was a very mutual kind of mutually beneficial joining of the minds." Once his conversations with Alvaro unfolded, he revealed how it became clear what the injustices faced by Latinx people in North Core City were and the kind of work that Waterstone could do together with Ágape Inc. to solve educational justice issues. Paul stated:

When I started listening to Alvaro about it, the lament was, "we're a community development corporation [CDC]. People usually, women first, were working two and three jobs, come to our CDC hoping to get help buying a house where they can't." Perhaps are in default on a student loan that was taken out to go to the close-by universities. Students would have hit the language barrier their sophomore year and just give it up. So, they were doing the best they could to retire those debts, but there was this, there was this continuing problem gap between ambitions, expectations. The tragedy to me was that those again, usually women, were the smartest people in their class. They were the most linguistically thoughtful and competent. And higher ed of privilege was doing what it always does. If you can't speak English and write English

the way we do, you can't delve into the content of the subjects we teach. Well, that's just bull crap and so, it was important for us to create something new. A community-owned asset where both languages were valued, where multiple cultures were valued, where leadership was from within the community. The structural impediments that I think good critical race theory would teach us were removed.

Paul also discussed that the approach that Waterstone took from the onset was to follow Alvaro and Benjamín's lead as proxies for the Latinx community that they sought to serve. He revealed:

So, "us" and the community simply became interchangeable. There was never any other option we were willing to consider. We weren't going to do the colonial thing from Waterstone to the community, this was going to be a community college in the real sense of, not the legal sense of, public 2-year schools, but in the real sense of serving the people who live around.

Even with the alignment between Waterstone's president and Alvaro, Paul shared that he and the team had to persuade Waterstone's faculty to extend the campus' curriculum to the self-governing, off-site branch. He added that it was a process "fraught with the kind of political intrigue that faculty have." He posited:

We appointed the Dean from within Waterstone. Alvaro thought that was smart off the bat politically and practically. She was able to get the first classes going, get the first teachers hired and active, bilingual teachers. And then, while she was leading that, Alvaro and I were working on accreditation issues and our application to Title III Hispanic-serving programs, or Title IV. It was III and IV to get the funding we

needed. It was all happening at the same time. Lots of synergy, lots of fun, lots of excitement. And it worked really fast.

Carl shared that, at the beginning, the relationship between Ágape Inc. and Waterstone University was more of “an affiliation,” and that there were several rounds of Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) to figure out the accreditation relationship. He recalled:

I think one question we had is could the name of the college be different than Waterstone, because Waterstone was, is and was a degree-granting organization, so how can you have an organization, how can you have a name of anything that's not the degree-granting organization, so we figured out we were Ágape College of Waterstone University, and that became the solution for it.

Through the accreditation relationship, the college partners also sought the designation of a “branch” campus, defined in the accreditation document as:

An institution that is geographically apart and independent of the main campus of the institution. The location is independent if the location offers courses in educational programs leading to degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential; has its own faculty and administrative or supervisory organization; and has its own budgetary and hiring authority.

Alvaro recalled that it was a university administrator that brought forth the idea and helped apply for the branch campus designation. He shared that it took “over a 15-year period, in our first 10 years, we became a branch campus,” and asserted, “and we built it, and we then created autonomies.”

The branch campus status, thus, allowed for some independence from Waterstone and the MOU outlined the various features described in the branch campus definition. Carl and Alvaro revealed that part of their MOU negotiations built in autonomies for the new college, which could be seen in the financing structure and new academic program development. For example, the MOU outlined that the start-up budget, ongoing costs, and program revenues would apply to Ágape College. Only \$100 per semester for full-time students would go to Waterstone to help cover registration costs and administrative services, allowing for most of the money to stay in the community. Additionally, Carl revealed that, early on, they considered provisions for the possibility that Ágape College wanted to become independent in the future, which were visible upon review of the founding MOU. He disclosed:

I think a core feature of negotiations is that at Ágape we've been trying to figure out how to be independent, and so giving up the independence was a struggle for us... We had a number of what I would call 'exit provisions', ... at the time thinking that we would eventually go independent.... we had some multi-steps so that over time Ágape [College] would have a framework for going independent of Waterstone.

Alvaro considered that, in the end, the partnership established with Waterstone allowed for a mutual benefit that continued to pay dividends. He affirmed:

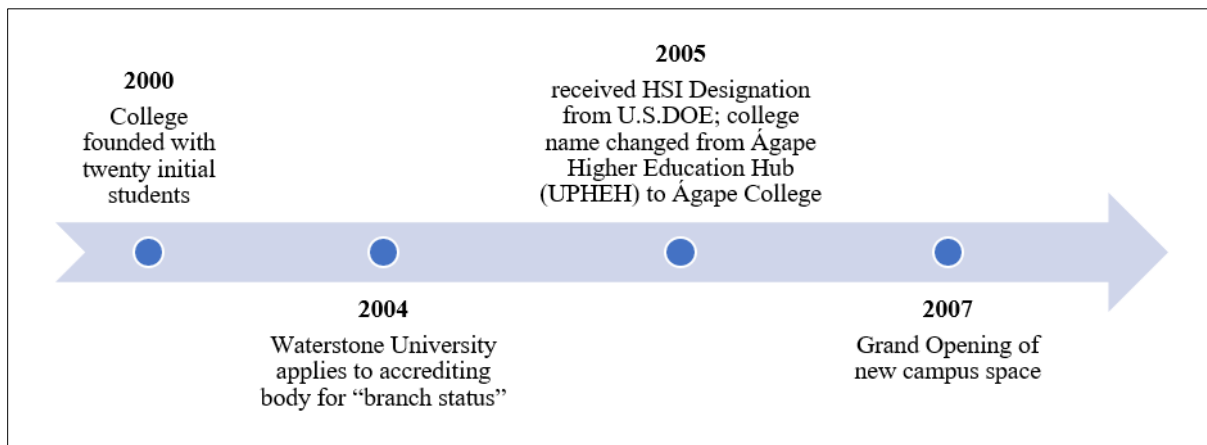
We ended up becoming a blessing to Waterstone in that we were able to bring in more kids from ... Hispanic kids than they ... We have more Latinos here than they have at their campus. And our graduation rate is with Latinos, I believe our graduation rate with Latinos is higher here than they have on their campus, not sure. And our completion rate here is higher than most 2-year schools and more than 50% of our kids go and finish with Waterstone. So, it worked.

Historical Timeline

Based on a review of founding documents such as the accreditation documents, MOU, and member discussions, a summary of key dates in Ágape College’s first decade of history included the following events in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Ágape College Historical Timeline



Contemporary Insights

Among the contemporary issues relevant to the college’s ability to enact their Latinx-centered mission and values, two rose as key to this study. The first was related to their long-term sustainability in light of the “skyrocketing cost of higher education,” as put by Carl. One of Ágape College’s and Inc.’s faith tenets was to “serve the least of these,” which represented the Latinx people in their Core City community—many of whom lived in poverty. According to a 2019 American Community Survey, the median income of the Core Park community was less than \$25,000, compared to about \$43,700 for the city as a whole. Thus, affordability had been a central concern of theirs since their founding.

The issues around affordability for Latinx communities were influenced by external as well as institutional factors. In relation to the external factors, Carl discussed issues with how higher education was financed. In particular, he highlighted the dramatic decreases in Pell Grants over time, forcing students to increase their loan debt and consider more closely their college choices based on money over success metrics. He stated: “I think Ágape College competes with schools like the Community College of Core City, which is publicly funded, but you know the graduation rates of community colleges are very bad, a student might think of a community college: ‘I can go to for free, Ágape College I got to take out \$4,000 or \$5,000 in loans, so that competition is significant.”

Regarding institutional factors, Benjamín provided some context on their original goals around reaching affordability for Latinx people. He stated:

Our goal was originally not to have to charge anything. And when we first opened, you didn't have to pay more than \$500. And then the reality of operating and trying to grow programs, we found ourselves in the same space of scaling costs, and I think we're now up to ... you have to take \$12,000 of debt in over a 2-year window, which we find to be problematic. But, the fact that the value of financial independence, the value of unconstrained lack of burden of money on your heels when you already know, these people are going to get jobs that are lower-paying than their peers in other institutions. So, in a sense that's been something that we kind of quite haven't figured out how to get around. To me, it's a significant question and we're going to continue trying to figure it out.

Collaborators who were founding members described how the college attempted to create a framework whereby students could maximize their Pell Grant with a guaranteed

scholarship from the college to offset the amount of loans students would have to take, yet the model continued to show gaps. Benjamín suggested that, as a private institution, they did not receive subsidies to support students, so their model relied upon tuition revenue and gifts. He described their model in further detail:

We thought initially that we would be able to run an institution that would allow us to max out the financial aid of a student. And we would figure out how we drove our model to that number, well, not really, that model to that number would not be a superior model. So, the way we've compromised that was to decrease our discount and increase tuition. So, we still give a 50 to 54% discount right off the front but, at a certain point, that's a losing game, if the yield isn't sufficient ... You better be very clear about your model and your mix. Now, for us, to mix is a challenge. Why? Because we're in el barrio [the neighborhood]. It's not common that the suburbs are going to want to travel here, so we have a unique challenge. If you're an urban-based institution focused on the Hispanic poor, because remember we treat Hispanics like they're all the same. But if you're an urban-based model committed to expanding the poor, then a higher education is challenging. It's really not meant for the poor. So, you know, not in its cost structures.

Like all colleges in 2021–2022, Ágape College grappled with the shifts in higher education that were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. They experienced a drop in enrollment numbers that created some questions regarding the sustainability of their financial model in light of trying to solve for affordability with a Latinx lens. Alvaro revealed:

During COVID, we took a \$700,000 hit. And we kept the school open, we, the non-school side [Ágape Inc.], financed the hit. So that's our commitment which most

Anglo institutions would not do. They're going to be like, "You lost seven—700, we're not gonna lose 700 [sic]." Now, we made changes, so we don't lose 700 again, but we're barely breaking even, and most institutions would not maintain something that doesn't carry its own.

Despite the challenges, collaborators from the college seemed hopeful for the future of the college and remained committed to their founding mission and values. Benjamín asserted:

We might have to forgo X or Y in order to be able to do Z, but we're committed to the creation, and the sustenance, and the growth of an institution. It isn't just a straight-up business deal for us, it's who we are. So, we're willing to look at that very differently on the questions and margins. If we don't have a margin, when we break even, I think we're really good with that. I think that's the future for us. We'll have to make some difficult choices, we have to grow on enrollment. I think we're getting well postured for that.

The second contemporary insight that emerged from conversations with founding members was the issue of succession planning. Alvaro and Benjamín continued to play significant roles as founders of the college and organizational leaders of *Ágape Inc.* Their roles drew questions for me, as the researcher in this study, about how the Latinx-founded institution could preserve its identity, culture, and praxis upon the transition of its founding leaders. Alvaro spoke about a 5-year plan that he and Benjamín were building together with their colleagues and boards to address succession planning across various roles within the *Ágape* organization. They were exploring opportunities for upward mobility of organizational members from within. He also described institutionalizing *Ágape Inc.*'s links with Pastores Assembly by creating a formal seat for Pastores Assembly on the *Ágape Inc.*

board. Alvaro thought that by creating this formal link, Ágape could preserve the Pastores Assembly's historical ties to the organization. As well, Alvaro discussed building an understanding for future boards about the history of the work, including better documenting all its parts. Ágape Inc. was also working with an external firm to help support the succession planning process. Alvaro continued to have many projects and plans that he hoped to realize for the Latinx and Core City communities, revealing that it would be a few more years until he and Benjamín would transition from staff to supportive founders. He stated with a sense of calm:

In the faith community, I'm not responsible for [what] happens after I leave, I'm accountable for up to the day that I leave. So, I, you know part of me is like maybe we should try this or that, but I'm here now, I know I'm gonna be here for, unless I gotta go, my plan is to be here 5 to 6 years and in that 5 to 6 years I kind of have an idea of what we want.

Ágape College's founding story and contemporary issues revealed the journey of a relatively younger college tied to a long-time Latinx nonprofit faith-based community development organization and partnership with a PWI. Its story stemmed from community organizing efforts from clergy people. Similarly, Cacique Community College's founding story is tied to community activism and the need to address Latinx educational equity issues. Established decades earlier, Cacique Community College's founding and contemporary issues demonstrate a continuous struggle for Latinx student success. Following is Cacique's institutional portrait.

Cacique Community College’s Story of Latinx and Black Peoples’ Fight for Educational Equity

And, you know, it was difficult. It was very difficult. That's the whole thing that you need to instill in whatever you write that this was not something that was given to us.

—Rosa, founding member/community partner/former staff

Cacique Community College is a public associate-level institution which is part of a larger public higher education system in their state, referred to as Metro Uni. Their story stemmed from a civil rights era that raised social consciousness and called for racial justice for entire generations of People of Color in the U.S. Born from the struggle of community activists and educational leaders of the Metropolis, the college’s story is one of consistent struggle and advocacy for educational access and equity for communities historically disenfranchised within their public system of higher education and higher education more broadly.

While I did not have the opportunity to interview their original founders, as many were deceased, I did have the pleasure of talking with Alma, Rosa, and Brian who had relationships with the founders and/or played a role as staff in the early founding years of the college. Thus, the college’s portrait captures the story of their founding as told by collaborators who were founding members—who remained as community partners to the college, as well as a review of historical documents and photos. The institutional portrait includes a preface about the people who influenced the story of the college, the founding story and activist years, as well as contemporary issues relevant to the college’s present and future considerations around their mission.

The People Who Influenced the Story

According to a piece published online by the college's archivist, the mid-1960s Metropolis included Puerto Rican community residents who believed that the educational needs of the South Metropolis were not being met by the Metro Uni public higher education system. Instead, community residents experienced exclusion from the system because of its admissions exams, which seemed to predominantly benefit white middle-class people. However, by 1970, following the activism of Black and Brown students across the city, the Metro Uni system of public higher education began implementing open admissions, increasing opportunity for entry of all residents with a high school diploma. Brian recollected the role of activist students in pushing the system toward the new admissions policy. He stated:

They [Metro Uni] were feeling pressure from students and community members to get on with it. It came down to that there was a student uprising around [an out-of-state university shooting incident] of mainly Puerto Ricans at Metro College and the library was all of a sudden set on fire and that sort of jogged everybody into focusing on the needs of minority students. But that's how the college came about, very much a part of the civil rights movement.

A 2016 scholarly article by a Latina researcher chronicling the founding of the college described aggressive actions taken by students to yield the attention of university and state officials. The actions corresponded with the fire mentioned by Brian, as well as the takeover of Metro Uni campus buildings. The college archivist's published work also cited quotes from past college members that suggested that the founding of the college was a direct response to the new admissions policy. Community members sought to ensure that the policy

would secure equal educational opportunity through the creation of a college in the predominantly Puerto Rican and Black community of South Metropolis.

Brian and Rosa talked about the important connection between the Puerto Rican and Black communities in the pursuit of establishing the college, which seldom came up in conversations with college collaborators. Brian described:

The idea of founding a college in the South Metropolis came from the Puerto Rican community, a group of Puerto Rican community leaders at that time. And they were very much out of the civil rights mode, they were involved in civil rights, they worked with African Americans. They were inspired by African Americans, and they inspired African Americans. So that's where it came out of. And, of course, you know African Americans were migrants to this city and Puerto Ricans were migrants, but we say immigrants, because we consider Puerto Rico to be a nation, as Rosa says. So, the experiences of those two communities were similar and they saw a lot in common.

It seemed that the alliance and inspiration that Puerto Rican people derived from resistance movements led by Black people in the U.S. was a critical source of motivation for establishing a new college. Rosa shared about this context:

It was a community of poor Blacks and Puerto Ricans that came from the South, and that came from Puerto Rico, and then they merged there and wanted their own institutions, you know. That they responded to movements sort of like the Black Panthers, the Young Lords, and Celia [founder], and there were many other Puerto Rican activists who said, "Wait a minute, you know this is a time of the civil rights movement. This is a time where we see that with the movement, the African

Americans are empowering themselves, how can we do the same? How can we form these institutions?”

Corresponding to the archivist’s work, the Metropolis’ context in the 1960s was exacerbated by poverty, drug-related crime, the erosion of housing and abandonment of properties, and “white flight.” It was also a period of international struggle with Puerto Rican people fighting for independence, Dominican people fighting against dictatorship, and many other Latin American countries fighting for social justice. Thus, the people behind the story of Cacique Community College’s founding were entrenched in multiple struggles of the times. They were often revered by collaborators for their ability to survive, persevere, and push forward the creation of a college that would be available for generations of Puerto Rican, Latinx, and South Metropolis residents.

Celia was one of the activist founders of the college cited most often among college collaborators. Alma was her sister, and one of three Puerto Rican women activists well-known for their contributions to the Puerto Rican diaspora and Metropolis community. Alma spoke about bearing witness to Celia’s activism alongside others to get the college founded, as well as to create alternative spaces for Puerto Rican people’s education:

My connection with Cacique started because it was a community effort and my sister, Celia, who had founded United Metropolis Parents in the South Metropolis and other community leaders were very upset because we didn't have a community college. We didn't have a college, period, in this area and we felt that something had to be done. So, as a community, because I can't give credit to one person, it was at least 5–6 people that were involved, started the whole effort to get [the college].... My sister

put a lot of her heart and effort into Cacique, and her name is always remembered by many. Her legacy is there. It's all over.

Alma explained the motivation of Celia and other founders for building a college within the public higher education system over an independent private institution. She stated: “This was a city that was supposed to be for everyone,” thus, the thinking was, “why not have a public college for all ... they [Metro Uni] had the public money, so it made sense.”

The perspective shared by Alma suggested the sense that Puerto Rican and Latinx people from South Metropolis deserved an education that was funded by public sources over having to self-fund the effort. However, it seemed that some tensions existed with Latinx people’s satisfaction with the Metro Uni system, as noted by Brian and Rosa. Brian suggested:

Celia later got disgustada [displeased], like Rosa said, and got involved in [building her own college.] But they saw Metro Uni as the natural vehicle. It was already set up, it had a track record, it had resources, it had, you know, things that would keep the college afloat, you know, and things like that.

In the end, the pressure by community activists like Celia and others, at a time of great socio-economic challenges, racial and ethnic tensions, and a demand for civil rights moved Metro Uni officials to agree to support a new college in South Metropolis.

Collaborators uplifted the role of activist founders, which seemed central to situating the story of the founding of the college.

Founding Story

I had the opportunity to converse with Brian and Rosa together. Brian had been a journalist in his early years and Rosa described him as a historian, which was quickly

apparent from his vivid recollection of historical details. Together, their storytelling of the founding provided a narrative backdrop supported by published academic articles about the college and pieces of renditions offered by other long-time college members. Brian described how the college had been intentionally founded in a disenfranchised community in 1968, upon the approval of the state's board of higher education and opened its first charter class in 1970 with more than 600 students, which was also noted in a historical timeline produced by the college. A year later, the college was officially named after a Puerto Rican historical figure. Brian described:

It was named in 1969 after ... a Puerto Rican educator, patriot, philosopher, and legal scholar of the 19th century. I don't know if you know about him but he's well known and one of the big figures in the independence movements of the Hispanic Caribbean, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. So that's where the name came from, it was the idea of the chairman of the board, at that time, of the board of higher education [states name of chairman]. And he was a scholar himself, so it was appropriate the [sic], and it was a perfect name because Cacique was not only Puerto Rican. He was considered el maestro de las Américas, you know, the teacher of the Americas, because he founded schools everywhere. So, the name was very significant. Yes, Puerto Rican, but Pan American. And so, it served a lot, addressed a lot of things.

Aside from the naming of the college, Rosa shared about the planning efforts that were underway in the years leading to the opening of the institution, noting:

So, they assigned the Chancellor at that time ... he had somebody on his staff for Latino affairs, Burgos. I don't know if you've heard of him. So, Burgos was given the assignment of coming up with a proposal for the structure of the College, and it took

them a good year and a half, but he did a lot of travel. He went to other Latino institutions, and little by little crafted this proposal for a community college. It called for the system's approach to higher education, which was basically a way for you to advance as you learn. The Professor sets up a series of goals, or what is the word? They were like ... It was objectives. So, if you commit it, you completed objective number one successfully, you test it out of that, you could go to two. And like that, until graduation. Modules, right? Also, it was premised on the student learning at her or his pace. Bilingual education had not come up then, although Cacique is known for that, it did not come up for that, I can guess why. You know, it was still a very hot button issue. It still is, but I mean back then, it was.

Upon reviewing the college's founding proposal, I could not find any reference to the module structure suggested by Rosa, though the proposal closed with general reference to being an "experimental and innovative" college that would respond to local needs through "special facilities, flexible admissions policy, scheduling and programming, and use of proficiency examinations."

Another feature of the founding proposal was the intense focus on healthcare. While the plans made no reference to racial/ethnic groups like Puerto Rican, "Hispanic," or African American people or linguistic needs of Spanish-language speakers, Brian asserted that the Puerto Rican community informed its focus on healthcare. He noted:

The Puerto Rican community there identified healthcare as one of the major issues facing the community. I mean, it had the highest mortality rate of stillborn, tuberculosis. All those things were sky high. And so, they identified healthcare as a

priority. And so, Cacique included, when it opened, it included allied health programs, nursing, dental hygiene, radiologic technology.

Furthermore, the focus on healthcare led the college to appoint a physician as its first president, despite his limited experience as a higher education administrator. Brian noted: “When it opened in 1970, the first President was Dr. Torres, and he was a prominent doctor at Met Hospital, the hospital of the South Metropolis. That was, I think, in line with the Cacique’s mission of allied health.” Rosa, who was in the same conversation, made a point to clarify some of the tensions that existed with Dr. Torres’ tenure, which spoke to potential tensions within the Latinx community at the start-up of the college. She added:

But it's important to mention that Dr. Torres was not with us for a long time, either. The Puerto Rican community felt—remember, I mentioned the South Metropolis Latino community was Puerto Rican—they felt that they wanted a Puerto Rican to be the president of the school. And, besides all of the other constraints, there was also this notion that they had selected Dr. Torres, who was a well-prepared person, but then, the community being Puerto Rican, they sort of were not happy. And he only lasted probably a year.

The tensions between ethnic communities at the start were not the only challenge faced by the college in its early years. Brian described how infrastructure and resources played a role as well:

But it was a very, very rough start, to say the least. I mean, it was that the college, they went looking for a place to put it in, you know. What they found was an old tire factory on the corner of [X] Street in the [main street] in the West South Metropolis. So, they moved in there and they were literally renovating the place when classes

began. And I remember talking to some of those students of that charter class and how they complained about the jackhammers going while they were trying to listen to the lesson, you know.

The tensions would continue to surmount for college members as they sought to get their institution off the ground, leading to nearly 4 years of activist struggle. The struggle to get the needs of the campus met, as well as the fight to keep it from shutting down, would mark the college's identity and values to this day.

Activist Years

Based on artifacts and the archivists' published work, college members referred to the college's activist years in the 1970s as "la lucha [the struggle]." A mural at the college depicted la lucha in three parts because of the different inflection points where college members rallied, campaigned, and fought for the protection of the college's needs and values. Between 1973–1978, those inflection points included the 1973–1974 struggle to acquire adequate space for the college, the 1975–1976 struggle to "save Cacique" from threat of closure by the system, and the 1977–1978 struggle for resources to renovate and open the building they had fought for in 1974. A quote from the college archivist's published work by a college member described la lucha as symbolizing both the larger struggle for social justice of the 1970s, as well as the college's own struggle to obtain proper facilities, thus it held a "double meaning."

There were several scholarly publications written by Latinx researchers and college members who participated in the early founding years of the college, detailing the political and activist participation of students, faculty, and local groups as they mobilized to address emerging issues of the times. A 2016 scholarly article by a Latina researcher described the

1973–1974 movement to acquire a five-floor building across from the “old tire factory,” referenced by collaborators, and traced a coalition of student government association members and staff and faculty unions who led early demonstrations at the state’s board of higher education. The Latina researcher described how “busloads” of students rallied at the state capital until the legislature passed a bill with funding to acquire the building.

Brian offered a personal, first-hand account of the subsequent two inflection points in la lucha. He offered that the second inflection point associated with the campus’ impending closure due to the city’s and system’s fiscal crisis caused a tremendous ripple effect. He illustrated as such: “When the city of Metropolis gets a cold, as they say, Metro Uni gets pneumonia, Cacique gets terminal cancer, you know. That’s the way it works.” The dire financial crisis of the times called for another round of organizing and mobilization by Puerto Rican, Latinx, and campus community members. He shared:

The second stage, that was from ‘73 to ‘75, and then ‘75 to ‘76 was when the city of Metropolis and the Metro Uni went bankrupt. And so, you know, to save money, the chancellor of the university proposed the merger—that is, you know, that’s a euphemism for closing—of Cacique Community College with [X] Community College. So that year, we went to the mat, so to speak. I mean, we were in the streets, all the time. We did takeovers and everything. The board of trustees, or the board of higher education, actually did vote for the merger, but we won at the last minute of the 11th hour. We won; it was incredible.

The college archivist’s published work cited that one of the historical marches to save the college involved 3,000 people from all over the city. The third inflection point also related to resource constraints, as the fiscal crisis had delayed the ability for the college to move

forward with inaugurating the building that it had acquired in the first phase of the struggle. Brian revealed: “But then, the Metro Uni didn't have the funds to renovate the building that we had acquired in the first phase, so there was another sort of phase of struggle until 1978. We won that, too.”

The three inflection points seemed to be the most prominent stories told by collaborators, though according to the work of scholars, the whole first decade and more of the college's life was fraught with various activist struggles. Brian also seemed to consider a longer history of struggle for their identity and to maintain their place with the Metro Uni system. He disclosed:

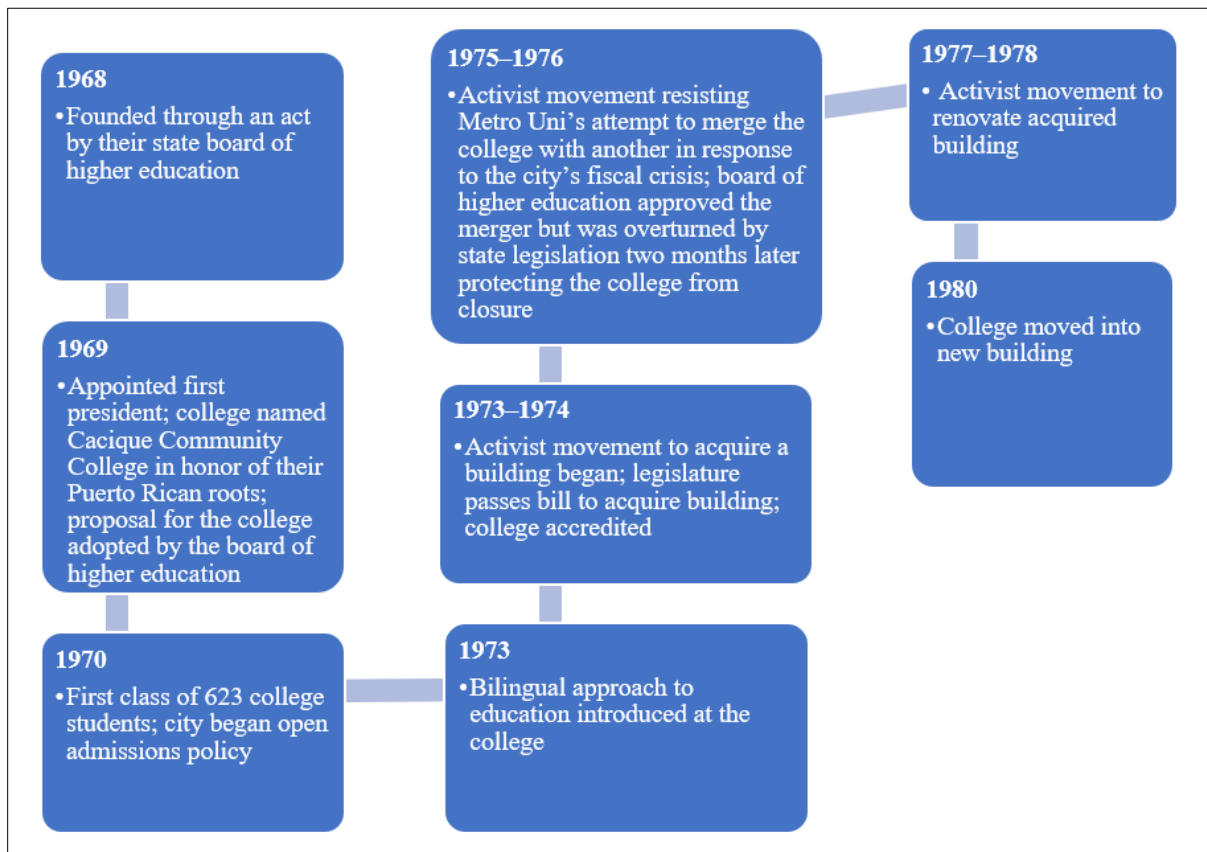
I maintain that the struggle for Cacique lasted 16 years because it was, from the very beginning. I mean, those chaotic conditions that I spoke to you about, you know? And there were takeovers that first year. The students protested the conditions and up. But still, even after '78, when things seemed to settle down, there was still Cacique teetering, you know. But then, the Board of Higher Education, and the Chancellor at the time, appointed a very competent President who sealed it, in my opinion, because she made some big academic reorganization.... She changed the planning process, she changed recruitment, and she was responsible for the founding of the Art Center. She is the one who gave me the assignment for it. So really, when Cacique, I think, was out of the woods, was in 1986, because it's then, in 1986, that they approved—the city of Metropolis and the board of trustees—approved the master plan for the Cacique campus. And that's what you see now. And now, with a campus like we have, now there's nobody who would dream of closing Cacique.

Historical Timeline

Below is a summary of key dates in Cacique Community College’s first decade of its founding history. Key dates were drawn from a review of founding documents such as the proposal to the Metro Uni system for the community college, the college’s library archives documenting the history of the college and its activist movements, the college’s website, which contained a historical project for an anniversary celebration, and scholarly articles produced by Latinx researchers (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Cacique Community College Historical Timeline



Contemporary Insights

One of the most salient contemporary issues that emerged from conversations with Cacique campus collaborators was the impact of COVID-19 on their teaching and learning. In particular, the shift to remote learning seemed to have disrupted the holistic supports that the college had become known for and appeared to raise questions about considerations for the future. During the spring 2022 data collection period for this study, the campus was still operating somewhat remotely, with only half of their classes conducted in-person. However, they were also in the midst of a 70/30 transition, as mandated by the system whereby 70% of classes needed to be in person. Regarding the considerations around remote learning, Ernesto (community partner/former staff member) posed:

How do you maintain a sense of culture and identity when the majority of your courses are taught remotely, and students don't even set foot on campus. So, I think a lot of those challenges are what people are grappling with now.... Right now, it's a period of rediscovery of what the institution needs to do, how it is going to operate. And while I don't think there's an explicit discussion of the climate and culture, I think there is a fundamental fear that the college, as it exists, may look and feel different because of forces beyond its control.

The fear noted by Ernesto was evident in conversations with faculty, like Manuel and Luis, who spoke extensively about their concerns and the nuances of online learning.

Manuel and Luis described how the pandemic shifted students' priorities to working in hospitality and service positions that were paying more as a result of the labor shortages. They stated that many students were opting to work rather than attend college. They expressed concerns about community college students not being able to see the long-term

consequences of their choices, including skewed preferences for online education despite students reporting feeling “lazy” about in-person classes. Manuel shared how one student confessed: “After 2 years taking the classes on the bed and doing almost nothing, coming to class again for me is traumatic.” The sentiment of Manuel’s student was also shared by a student in one of the two focus groups I conducted. Cris revealed:

When I'm on remote, I cannot ask questions because it's like you're not focused enough for me because I'm home and if I see my Xbox from my phone or a game system, I'm looking like this, "Yo, why am I doing this if I could be playing games?"

Yeah, or I could be sleeping. I could be sleeping, and I be doing that. Sometime when the professor is like, "Oh, you don't have to turn on the camera," I will fall asleep.

Manuel and Luis suggested that the challenges faced by students with online learning needed to be interrogated in terms of the quality of instruction and needs of community college students. Manuel suggested:

I keep saying, one thing is what a student wants, and another thing what they need. In the past, they have many problems, and they used to come to campus. Now they have the same problems or more problems. They need to find a way to preserve that education quality, because I think that one thing is, online education, and another thing is online education for community college students. So, I think we need to have that nuance there.

Some of the nuances that collaborators considered important for the community they served were related to the technology gaps revealed during COVID-19. The campus made efforts to try to resolve student needs around wi-fi access and laptops to work from home.

Faculty also illustrated how online education had revealed some cultural and values-based tensions that were counter to the mission of the institution. For example, Manuel disclosed:

And we have that dangerous conversation right now because I have been talking with faculty. That they want more online education for our students, but for their kids, that they're going to other institutions, oh, they want in-person education. I say really but, you know, you are telling me five minutes ago that the online education works, but not for your children. Why? So they think that it's a moment that we have to understand what works and what community college students need.

Collaborators seemed to fear that online education might have revealed underlying inequities and biases that could impact outcomes for their students. There was also a concern about how Cacique would fair with the shifting tide of higher education to more online education if it could not meet market demands for qualified workers. Manuel suggested: “The institution will pay the price when the market says, I don't want a student who has studied there in those years. They don't know anything.”

Despite this impact of COVID-19 on the experiences of collaborators with teaching and learning, there were also recent points of pride achieved by the college that gave collaborators a sense of hope. At the time of this study, the campus achieved its re-accreditation and had received news of a national award that signaled their quality and excellence in serving community college students. Joan (faculty) shared:

We have gone through some very rough times, but recently it was announced for 2023 [we] were among the 25 semifinalists for the [national award], but we have been twice in the top 10 for the [national award], which is one of the highest awards you

can get as a community college, so we have a bright future and the reason for it is not only our students who graduate and go on to great things, but to the faculty and staff and administrators who are actually working here to make sure we remain grounded and in the mission.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided institutional portraits drawn from founding member recollections, faculty and student perspectives, and a review of historical documents and artifacts. Ágape College's founding story was drawn primarily from direct accounts from the original founders of the institution. Their stories revealed deep connections to Latinx community clergy people who had the audacity to build organizations for Latinx people in the Core Park neighborhood of Core City. The founders started with a clergy-based organization, which led to the founding of a nonprofit community development organization which created K–12 charter schools and a college to address pathways to opportunity for Latinx people. Their stories provided insights on some of the motivations for establishing the college, as well as the steps that they took to get there. Their stories concluded by examining some of the contemporary issues faced by the college as they sought to maintain their identity and mission. For example, they sought to address affordability in higher education, understanding that this was a wider issue in the field. Still, they created a financial model to assist students while wondering how the model could be sustained in the future with the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on college enrollment. They also grappled with succession planning as the founders considered their future transition from the organizations they founded.

Cacique Community College's founding story captured insights from people who were around during the founding years as community partners and staff and who maintained strong ties to the college. Their voices, coupled with a review of published works, original college plans, and artifacts, revealed an uplifting of key people who were involved. Further, I uncovered the process to establish a Puerto-Rican community-activated public institution that was inspired by the Black civil rights movement. Their portrait also examined the first decade of their history, which included several critical activist movements to secure physical space and prevent the college's closure in the face of local fiscal crisis. Their story concluded by looking at the impact of COVID-19 on their teaching and learning praxis. This contemporary issue revealed concerns about online education and the long-term impacts it could have on students served by their mission.

CHAPTER 6

LATINX CENTERING AMID DISTINCT ORGANIZATIONAL EXPERIENCES

This question about how are we different is a struggle because the framework of the question is based on a majority perspective. You see what I'm trying to say? It's been a source of anxiety for me right because you're basically asking a question about how are you different than them? I'm like, "well, I don't know them. I just know me, and this is just what we do." So, I gotta sit down and unpack difference when difference is normative. It doesn't mean that it's very different than what they do. We do counseling for students, we do teaching in the classroom, we do, you know, it's the same thing. It's the same quote unquote professional space. What's different ultimately is other people who are doing it, who, by definition, to your point, this is just who we are.

—Benjamín, Ágape, founding member

Before delving into the findings of this study, there are three important insights that I want to share to help foreshadow the upcoming chapters. First, the findings for this study are situated in an interesting and complex tension about what is meant by Latinx-centering that some of my collaborators, like Benjamín, and I wrestled with. As Latinx-founded institutions where Latinx people were the majority in terms of the student population, college personnel, and their surrounding neighborhoods, the question of what and how they centered Latinx people's assets did not always seem obvious or easily discernable to collaborators or in the

review of study materials. Collaborators let me know that Latinx people were living as the majority in their institutional and neighborhood contexts even as they understood that there were worlds beyond their colleges where they were minoritized, marginalized peoples. This understanding also uncovered the sense that while their Latinx identity was important, it was also an inclusive identity. Like Latinx familial traditions of taking in extended families and adopting tías/tíos [aunts/uncles] and primos [cousins], the colleges' Latinx-centeredness adopted anyone who had shared experiences of growing up in urban, marginalized, and economically depressed communities. Additionally, since Latinx people are multi-cultural with multi-dimensional identities, for collaborators, the struggles of diverse racial, ethnic, religious, and mixed status communities seemed to mirror the complexity of what it meant to be a Latinx person in the U.S. For the colleges, their Latinx-centeredness seemed to extend, embrace, and reach beyond the presumptions imposed by the dominant culture about the U.S. Latinx identity itself.

Furthermore, the colleges did not seem to always have to contextualize or explain their existence as Latinx institutions and thus saw themselves as the same as any other educational institution that taught and provided student services. As noted from Benjamín's reflections, one of the things that made the colleges distinct was that the institutions were driven by Latinx people in predominantly Latinx urban communities with institutional cultures that organically threaded their Latinx-identity with higher education constructs. Thus, rather than provide a definition for what is meant by Latinx-centering ahead of the findings, the goal is for the findings to help understand the expansive and albeit complicated notion of Latinx-centeredness at the institutions.

Second, the findings for this study are also situated in a meaning-making process that naturally developed with collaborators about the title of this study, *for us by us about us*. When the title was mentioned as part of introductions with collaborators, I perceived excitement from collaborators, many of whom directly stated to me that they resonated with the title of my study. While I included one question in my interviews and focus groups that asked collaborators what came to mind for them when they heard the phrase *for us by us about us*, collaborators quickly seemed to adopt the phrase as their own when answering other questions. Thus, several of the quotes used for the study include the word “us” or adapted versions of FUBU-*About Us*, which was a way that collaborators took the phrase for themselves and made meaning of it. Collaborators also helped me understand their organizational identity and culture through the adoption of the phrase. For collaborators, FUBU-*About Us* represented a removal of invisibility and an empowerment of Latinx people and all people who were marginalized by the dominant culture. For example, Joli (student, Cacique) stated that the first thing this phrase brought to mind was, “not only white people with high incomes can go to college, we or I could go to college.” FUBU-*About Us* also represented Latinx people determining what was most relevant for Latinx people and People of Color, as stated by Matías, “what belongs to us rather than adopting others’ ideas, others’ places, thoughts.” Collaborators also had multiple ways in which they defined the “us” in FUBU-*About Us*. “Us” often stood for Latinx people, but also “everyone in the community,” “everyone in the college,” “the students,” “Black and Latinos,” “minorities in general,” “a brown hand reaching out to another brown hand to uplift and to inspire,” “People of Color,” and “immigrants.”

Third, the findings revealed complexities in the experiences and perspectives of collaborators, reflecting an understanding that while there were many promising aspects about the Latinx-founded institutions, they were not idyllic institutions. Like most organizations, the colleges also experienced places for further growth and learning, thus some findings may reveal minor contradictions and nuances that complicated the findings. Thus, the sensibility around the meaning-making of Latinx-centeredness and *FUBU-About Us*, and the reality of complex organizational experiences are important insights to carry forward when reviewing the findings in the following chapters.

The following three chapters provide an overview of the findings for each of the case study sites. Chapter 6 offers an individual analysis for each case with findings that were distinct and pervasive for Ágape College and Cacique Community College, respectively. Chapters 7 and 8 bring the two institutions together through a reporting of themes that resonated across both cases, albeit with nuances that are also described within themes as they emerged. The findings within the chapters represent an analysis of participant experiences and perspectives as primary data with researcher observations and review of documents and artifacts as additive information. The analytical process included an in-depth review of themes and subthemes using the study's research questions and conceptual framework's principal concepts of organizational identity, culture, and praxis. All the themes and subthemes in the subsequent chapters represent aspects of identity, culture, and/or praxis, with several overlaps across these concepts.

This chapter examines which assets the institutions promoted and centered; how they institutionalized and built upon these assets as part of their organizational identity, culture, and praxis, as well as how the institutions and Latinx communities contributed to and

supported each other. The findings in this chapter are organized by introducing key themes that were distinct for the two cases. For Ágape College, there were four major themes, including (1) Ownership as Resistance and Empowerment, (2) Honoring the Dignity of the People, (3) Faith as a Driver for Culture and Practice, and (4) Integrated Roles as Practical and Values-Oriented. Also, Cacique Community College had three major themes, including (1) Rooting Historical Activism as Central to Identity, (2) Planning Process Speaking to Values, and (3) Diversity Over Time, New Cultural Practices Over Time. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Case 1: Ágape College

Ágape College had several features about its organizational identity, culture, and praxis that were unique to their context, development, and understandings of *who they are*. Some emergent themes that help understand how Ágape College enacts Latinx-centering include (1) their sense of *Ownership as Resistance and Empowerment*, (2) their intentional focus on *Honoring the Dignity of People*, (3) their understanding and interpretations of *Faith as a Driver of Culture and Practice*, and (4) the ways in which they have built *Integrated Roles as Practical and Values Oriented*. Each theme includes several subthemes representing different dimensions within the theme.

Ownership as Resistance and Empowerment

The concept of ownership was a central feature of individual collaborators' understanding of who they were, how they related to others outside the institution, and how they realized a vision for Latinx resistance and empowerment. Founders, faculty, and staff were particularly aware of how this concept came to life in their institution and allowed them to center Latinx people. One of the college's founders and partners from Waterstone

University, Paul, suggested that the college was created as “a community-owned asset” and seemed to define that as an institution “where both languages were valued, where multiple cultures were valued, where leadership was from within the community.” Paul’s reflection offered one definition of what ownership meant to collaborators of the institution. In a different approach, for faculty like Ivan, who were around during the founding years, there was an imprinted memory of how ownership might have been defined by the Latinx founders of the institution as a clear message of Latinx self-determination, empowerment, and delineation of authority over the relationship with its partnering university. Ivan recounted: “Building ‘us’—Ágape College in our neighborhood, I remember Reverend Alvaro, him discussing this back in the 90s with Dr. Paul and going back and forth, ‘this is *our* college, this is *ours* now, *you* are a *partner*, Waterstone University, and we appreciate it, but *this is us* and to *serve us*.’”

Ivan’s historical perspective of ownership appeared to be about empowering and centering “us” Latinx people, which was also contemporarily shared by Francisco, who was both faculty and staff at the college. In reflecting about the title of my study, Francisco said: “What comes to mind, for me, when I hear that phrase ‘for us, by us, about us’ is really about ownership and about empowerment and about doing it in a way that is a good fit for us.” Francisco added that fit was about responding to how and what Latinx people need and want, and not conforming to practices that do not work well for Latinxs. The concept of ownership as a vehicle for Latinx-centering was thus deeply seeded in the founding of the institution. Ownership could also be understood through further subthemes, such as how it presents as a philosophy and act of resistance, a focus on empowering the Latinx community in ways that

may have not been possible otherwise, and in how voices were heard and valued. The ensuing sections describe these conceptualizations of ownership.

Ownership as a Philosophy and Act of Resistance

Rooted in the life experiences of founder, Alvaro, the concept of ownership preceded and inspired the founding of the college's nonprofit parent organization, Ágape Inc. and, subsequently, the college. Having worked at Waterstone University several years prior to founding Ágape Inc., Alvaro was struck by the decision of Waterstone's leaders to divert external resources from a Latinx student program for other institutional projects. This experience seemed to be a tipping point that would change his view on how ownership could be a philosophy and form of resistance for Latinx people:

Instead of taking [the grant] for the [Latinx] program, the President chose to ask them to give them the money to fix the lobby of the building. He took it as a capital grant instead of this program grant, and that's when I realized that if you don't own the institution, it's irrelevant how well you work. So, it became a philosophy, you cannot inherit what you don't own, you can't give away what you don't own, therefore, whenever we do something in the future, we have to own it.

Importantly, the consciousness around what is or is not "allowed" by oppressive, racialized power structures appeared to inform the decisions about ownership as resistance that were made at every level of the Ágape organization—its college, K–12 schools, and various programs. Alvaro explicated:

Ágape [Inc.] doesn't do anything that doesn't create an institution that it owns.

Hence, we own a campus. Hence, we own the [K–12] schools. Hence, we own job training programs, etcetera, etcetera. If we have a partnership, we must own 51% or

we have, there's no such thing as a 50-50 partner with white power. If there's white power involved and you don't control, a 50-50 partnership they control because they have access to more power, and so they can leverage their external power, even though you're equal partners. So, you have to control because they have more power, that's just the fact. So, we learned that. So, when we had an opportunity to start a college program, we said no. A lot of colleges came here, "Oh, we'll rent space. We'll do this, we'll do that," and we were, like, "No. We gotta own the program."

Founders, faculty, staff, and community collaborators also seemed to understand ownership intently from a lens of promoting and building upon the assets of the Latinx community in the face of oppressive structures. During my site visit at the college, I heard strong views expressed to me about the importance of ownership within the Latino community to create change and support the health of the community, e.g., ownership of land and institutions. These views were supported by Alvaro's passionate discussion about inequities in the local education system:

White people with power will call the school district, through its political leadership, and get the best teachers assigned to their children's schools. And we become the dumping ground because our parents are not empowered to do that, and don't know how to do it, and even if they try it, will not achieve it. Because they don't own the system. You got to own the system and the systems are owned.

This statement helps explain one of the reasons for "owning" their own K-2 schools and creating a college. Later in our conversation, Alvaro discussed how deeply linked the concept of ownership can be to the livelihood of the most disenfranchised:

Do I own the institution that is trying, that uses me for finance? That is the question.

Do I own the cops because the cops get paid to take care of me? Do I own the fire department, they get paid to take care of me. In my neighborhood, we don't own them. If you don't own them, you can't control them.

These findings reflect a dynamic relationship between the overarching theme of ownership and how it manifested as philosophy and resistance. The findings also demonstrated how organizational actors saw the nonprofit's and the college's roles in the community, and the kinds of community development projects they were taking on. This relationship will be explored in more depth in Chapter 7 when discussing the theme of being an institution of "el barrio." A relationship also existed between how the college's ethos of Latinx empowerment through ownership, drove the interest of faculty and staff in the work of the college, which is explored in the following section.

Focusing on Empowering Latinxs Is "Finally" Possible

Among Latinx faculty and staff, Ágape College's focus on ownership for Latinx people has provided a sense of relief and empowerment for them as well, especially for those who may have previously worked at a PWI. For example, Francisco was a faculty member and leader at a previous institution that made it challenging for him to focus on Latinx people's needs. In contrast, upon joining Ágape, the college provided for Francisco a sense of "joining of forces":

I loved the place where I used to work before coming to Ágape College, but that was a university, a wonderful university, but it wasn't created by Hispanics for Hispanics about Hispanics, and so a group of us who were Hispanic, we were advancing the idea of, we need to do more for the Hispanic community and a lot of times that fit

wasn't quite there. And then, at the end of the day, people who were not Hispanics had 'o approve what we wanted to do and sometimes the approval was done without understanding our objective, and I think when it's "for us, by us, about us," yes, sometimes we don't have as many resources that others would, but it's about empowerment and about ownership and about giving you space to get creative ... what drew me to [the college] was just the idea of joining forces with others who had a similar vision.

Like Francisco, Elena, a staff and faculty member at the college, had previously worked at a PWI, but in the corporate sector, where she was minoritized as a Latinx person and woman. The experience of joining the college revealed a different kind of focus that empowered her to relate to the college and students in a new way:

Of course, I was, at an eye level, a minority, because there were only a few females at a PhD level working in the research sector of the companies that I worked at. And then Latina, I was the only, so a few women, and then, of all of them, I was the only Latina so very, very much a minority or underrepresented. So, I went from that to all of a sudden being in an institution, where Spanish was spoken. My students, I could relate to my students when they talked about their families and where they came from, that type of thing, so it was very different.

In addition, from the founder's perspective, ownership allowed a non-negotiable focus on empowerment of Latinx people. The focus was legitimated through the academic programs and industry partnerships that the college had built. Alvaro stated:

We own it. It's ours, we have our faculty, our committees that make.... We're able to do things because we think it's the best thing to do for our people and we don't have

to check with... We only have to show that it has academic integrity, just like anybody else. But everybody has to do that. I don't have to convince people that we're worthy of the opportunity, that's already done. That is huge. So, we can sit with other schools and other ..., and bring opportunities here.... We're talking to [a Latino cinema company] and saying, "Hey, bring your business here and we will help you change the tax law, so you don't have to go to Atlanta" because that's where they go now. Everything is done in Atlanta because of that. Basically, the tax structure in Atlanta. So those are the kind of things we can do. We have our own legitimacy. We have our own standing. And we serve our community, and I don't have to care now.

Voices Heard and Valued

One way that ownership as empowerment manifested was through the exercise of voice and how voices were valued in decision-making at Ágape College. Elena shared a positive experience with how her contributions were received by college leaders, noting: "I've seen different changes of leadership at the college and everything else, but I think that, always, they've been very receptive to ideas, and, you know, given support to ideas and to projects." Similarly, when discussing his experience interacting with the college's and the nonprofit's leadership, Francisco described a participatory experience from his job interview to the current day as a member of the college. He expressed a sense of being valued and heard in conversations with top-level leaders:

When you're having a conversation with them [college's and the nonprofit's leaders], you feel like its super rich and super ... they bring so much, but yet what you're bringing to the table is also being listened to and built upon ... there's a real commitment to that aspect [vision and values], not just something that you put on

paper. I think that the conversations have been great, you feel like you're contributing, like you are making a difference, like your voice is not only heard, but also valued.

However, Hannah's experience as a younger member of the college's faculty and staff, complicated the way voices may or may not be heard at times. Her experience, while unique, marked some potential generational differences:

There's always that—being the youngest sometimes compared to others may, and may not, sometimes.... I would say sometimes the fresh ideas, sometimes are held up with doing things the way we always have done it. So, that would be the only challenge, I think I would have, you know, wanting to just—seeing things differently, because of your own experiences, and, you know, just having a younger mind. And sometimes that old stuff, you want to get rid of it. Let's get rid of that tradition. Let's get rid of that. It's a new thing, and that's the hardest part I would say, for me.

Though not overtly tied to feeling valued through an ethos of ownership as empowerment through voice, the generational differences came up again when Rob, a faculty member, shared an observation that may be constraining for the college. Rob noted: "As I look at the leaders across the board, I mean, I would say, three of them are baby boomers, some of the staff are generation X, prime millennials. But is there room for that space where if the trend is younger, then can we go younger in staff?" While Hannah and Rob expressed several other ways in which they felt empowered to own and drive decisions in their work with students and in the classroom, it appeared that there may have been areas for the college to increase the empowerment of younger team members' voices.

Finally, ownership as empowerment through voice at the student level may look different, and usually seemed to manifest in the interactions that they had in the classroom with their peers and professors. Students took ownership of their learning through contributing their knowledge and shared how these experiences made them feel heard and valued. For example, Andy and Alex talked about the technological expertise that they brought to the classroom through voluntarily offering support to other students and being enlisted by professors. Their exchange in the focus group revealed a feeling of importance and the leadership development opportunity that ownership as voice in the classroom provided them:

Andy: We're learning about Adobe Premiere Final Cut. Most of the students didn't know about it, so I was teaching them. So, it gave me the opportunity to kind of play a leader role, something that I'm not good at, so it stressed me in a way.

Alex: Yes, I'm going to add a little bit to what Andy said. I've actually had experiences in some classes, where I know I have some parts of knowledge that the teacher doesn't. One of my favorite examples was biology, in which we were going over animals and, well, I know quite a few things. There were some moments in which the teacher would actually ask me for some of my knowledge [strong head nods by some students], and it made me feel ...

Andy: Important

Alex: Like I actually had some respect and it made me feel included. Well, more included than before.

Honoring the Dignity of the People

While most people connected to the college felt heard and valued, many collaborators dove deeper as they reflected on the ways that the college had a Latinx-centered identity and culture that focused on people-centering (e.g., focusing on the individual needs of each person as whole people). Collaborators spoke about the college's ability to understand, affirm, and honor the dignity of people for who they were, what they experienced, and how they showed up in everyday life. Long-time community partner and current staff of Ágape Inc., Matías posited:

I think one thing the College does well is affirm the value, the dignity of other human beings, right? We touched on this very early in the conversation, and that is that if you're a person who grew up in poverty, you're of no less value, right, if you're a person who grew up, where you actually... For example, there are students who couch hop, right? They're really homeless, but they live on a friend's couch and make it to school anyway. The city doesn't consider them homeless, because they have a place to stay, even though it's not one of their own. The College is absolutely understanding in the dignity, value of the individuals, you know, those of us who grew up Latino/Latina have always had experienced discrimination, racism, if you will. I think the College understands the average population in this community and does it well. I think that's a significant strength.

In conversations with Matías and others, it seemed that the act of honoring the dignity of Latinx people stuck out as both essential and unique in their experiences with the college, compared to other normative educational experiences. The focus on dignity was striking and

palpable to Latinx collaborators and non-Latinx collaborators like Larry, who recounted the experience of outsiders coming to the college:

You kind of can't believe it. I mean, every time I tell people this really amazing stuff is going on in north Core City, they go, "Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Always good stuff." But then they go and they experience it. It's not just about the education. It's also the whole sense of community and identity, giving dignity to people who didn't grow up with dignity, it's a pretty beautiful thing, actually.

According to collaborators from the college, people-centering was understood through honoring their dignity. The concept of honoring the dignity of Latinx people and people-centering was further revealed in deeply held values of respect and belief in people and the communities from which they came, demonstrating humility, and Latinx peoples' deservingness of beautiful physical spaces. These findings are described in the following sections.

Respecting and Believing in People and the Community as a Whole

On one dimension, honoring the dignity of people through values like respect and belief in people was about how the college made people feel. For students, these values supported their personhood as they made choices, as articulated by Belinda: "Ellos respetan sea tu religión, tu situación, te respetan en el sentido completo. Y aparte del respeto, también tienen la capacidad de dejarte decidir y apoyarte en lo que tu decidas hacer aquí en la universidad como institución. [They respect your religion, your situation, they respect you in every way. And besides respect, they have the capacity to let you decide and support whatever you choose to do in the university as an institution.]"

Several collaborators drew connections between honoring the dignity of people through values of respect and belief in people and how those values translated to practice. For community partner, Nelson, respect in action was manifested in the college's commitment to excellence from the people who worked at the college and in the way services reached the community. He affirmed:

Treat[ing] others as you like to be treated. A sense of commitment to community.

And Ágape is known as an entity that strives for excellence in terms of how it delivers products and how it works and how it shows its image. And so, it also instills those values in their folk.

His observation aligned with a story that Francisco told me about an interaction he had with a student who recounted her experiences with an admissions staff member, Monica, who had persisted in making calls and leaving messages. Francisco noted that Monica's level of commitment to the student demonstrated a belief in the student, which turned into the student believing in herself. In the story, the student described to Francisco the actions that Monica took that increased her sense of belief:

[The student] said that there was a period of time ... where she kind of disappeared, she went MIA [missing in action] in the process, and [the student] said, "I used to be at home when you used to call me ... and I would hear your message and not pick up and you were saying 'hi this is Monica calling you, we are here to help you make your dreams a reality' and I wanted to reach out and pick up the phone," but I couldn't bring myself to do it because I was scared. I didn't think I could do it. And then eventually after you left me so many calls, I thought, if she believed in me maybe I should as well." I'm like "whoa!" because some people would give up on the calls,

but she could sense that Monica really meant it and that helped increase her self-efficacy. She didn't really believe that she could do it ... and so I think that that's part of what makes it worth it. It's what drives us, it's our faith and realizing that some of them don't see it in themselves but it's there and we just have to help them to be able to see it.

While Belinda, Nelson, and Francisco shared how respect and believing in students was a core value of the college, Hannah shared more about what this meant for her as a faculty member. In particular, Hannah asserted that, in the classroom, it was necessary to respect all students because they “need to know that they’re safe when they’re in your class” and “have to feel confident that they can be open and share their view.” For Hannah, honoring the dignity of students through safety and confidence were important operating principles because of the kind of trauma that existed in the world. She went on to explain that trauma also heightened students’ ability to decipher inauthenticity, so operating out of respect and love were also key to achieving mutuality with students. She explained:

We're a Christian organization that loves people, serves people, values people, and it's reflected in how we deliver our services with grace, with love.... You know, the world is cold. It's a cold place and we've got to be the warmth. Our hearts have to be warm for each and every person. You know, it's like I see us like we're burning, we're not burning fire but, you know what I mean. We're warm in this cold world. The cold lives that our students have had to live, like the trauma, like the death, like the heartache, the rejection. The pain that they've lived. We have to be that warmth, and give them comfort while they're here with us, you know. You have to do that because

they're not going to trust you, they're not going to believe in you. They're going to call you phony like the rest of the world, you know?

Demonstrating Humility in Knowledge and Knowledge Sharing

During the student focus group, there was a lively exchange among several students about how humility showed up in teaching and learning at the college. Humility in knowledge sharing between faculty and students seemed to be a normalized feature of their educational experiences at the college and was a highly valued way of honoring the dignity of people. Students Tito and Alex had an exchange where they discussed their experiences interacting with faculty and how faculty's humility around knowledge increased the human connection between students and faculty:

Tito: They're definitely all for self-improvement and humility. I've actually had [looks to other students], I don't know if you've gotten into it with professors who will admit when they're wrong about stuff, or something they don't even know. I have had professors who will admit when they didn't know certain things going on [head nods from multiple students in the room] and they'll never try and seem all high and mighty. [Student responds "yeah"] Just, like, that humility definitely makes it a lot easier to connect with them on different things. Even when [they] will start up random conversations while walking in the hallway and they see me.
[chuckles heard in the room]

Alex: It's always interesting when you know more than the professor in some parts and aspects.

Tito: Yeah, you know it definitely makes, and I'm not gonna say more humanizing, but it definitely makes them more approachable cause, yeah, we're here

to learn from these people for the subjects that they studied and they help take away that high and mighty status that would make them impossible to approach. “Okay, we are only at this point because we are studying this, you know. We don't expect you guys to, like, we don't expect you guys to come up with this crazy level work, you know. I understand and you guys are here to learn and to get our feedback. And even when you are in this position, you're still always learning.” Yeah, so they definitely make it a lot less intimidating than it would have been to approach.

Tito’s reflections demonstrated how humility in teaching and learning exchanges created more openness, approachability, and ability to connect with professors as people. In some sense, I noticed that the dignity of people did not just apply to how the college served students and the community, but also in how faculty and staff of the college also got to be honored and dignified as people who are “seen” and can grow along with students.

Students also recounted their own experiences of being honored for their knowledge, while also learning to be humbler in their intellectual growth. Andy, for example, came to the college with 8 years of experience in videography and candidly shared how his interactions with faculty and other students supported his journey to humility in knowledge sharing. He stated affirmatively that he felt the college honored the knowledge and experiences he brought and described how his humility and appreciation for the dignity of people grew:

There was moments that I was like, “Alright, you know” ... “What else can I learn?” So, that's when that mindset kind of came in, when I came to the school, but after that my walls kind of broke down and being able to talk to the professors and different individuals, I was able to kind of accept and humble myself more. Alright, you know, there's things I don't know, I'm willing to grow in.... Like, my example with being in

the classroom with the two students who didn't have much knowledge of the whole videography camera aspect of things. Just being able to just humble myself. So, there's a lot of humility, you see the humanity behind everything. You know, I didn't just take the opportunity to be like, "Oh, you know I have eight years in this, you know, suck it up. You know you'll learn eventually." But being able to teach them a few things while the professor is teaching as well, at times when there's most of his breakout sessions, or we're in the midst of editing. Somebody needs help with something, I'm able to kind of help while the professor is trying to help another individual out. There's a humbling process with that.

The humility and honoring of knowledges seemed to enable a mutual exchange of support for other learners and Andy's own leadership development. Andy's reflection revealed how humility and honoring knowledges created a lens through which students could see each other's humanity in the teaching and learning process. This sense of humanity and humility in students was also recognized by community partner, Nelson, who said, "I think you see it in the students, that they understand that there's things greater than them, that the students 'hat I've interacted with, who work with me. The sense of recognizing what a great opportunity they have and trying to seize it."

Finally, Andy later reflected on how faculty demonstrated the honoring of students' knowledge by how students were engaged in classroom discussions and the overall feeling of being part of the college community:

You see a lot of honor when it comes to the students asking any questions, or taking time to just state your opinion, how the professors, they don't go times two on you like, "Oh, you know, I had a PhD in this [sic]," but take the time and opportunity to

just humble themselves in a way. And you really see that within the teachers and the students, like there's a humbling moment—there's humbling moments in those times, you know, in classes and even outside. So, I really, that's what I see on a daily basis when I'm here.

Deserving of Beautiful Physical Spaces

The final subtheme within the theme of honoring the dignity of the people and community related to the importance of physical spaces as an artifact of how dignity for people was enacted. Across students, founders, staff/faculty, and community partners, there was a resounding accent on the beauty and cleanliness of the college campus and the entire Ágape complex, and how these virtues spilled over to the rest of the community. The students in the focus group had an involved back-and-forth exchange among themselves about this spillover effect. While Tito seemed confused by the level of commitment for keeping the building complex and surrounding neighborhood clean, Andy seemed impressed and connected to the focus on cleanliness as part of a broader organizational ethos:

Tito: [looks at peers] Y'all ever see how far the people cleaning go to help clean the community? [a few students head nod in agreement] They are found ... I've seen up to like two miles away from this school in the weirdest places. I see them just going around just cleaning. I don't expect Ágape to go around trying to make the neighborhood look super great, but I definitely don't expect them to go that far to just try to clean out the regular neighborhood.... I mean, there's no benefit to the school to be going this far out of the way to try and help the community.

Andy: Well, some of them, some of the individuals actually, most of the workers actually live around on our way, live nearby [sic].

Tito: But what is the school gain from that looking good? Well, not everyone's going to see that *Ágape*, the name on the trash can and going around. No one is going to go take a photo and post it....

Andy: Yeah, they go above and beyond. Basically, the co-founders of the school, what they did was they bought certain sections of the neighborhood. So, they will make sure that certain areas are clean, just as a good representation of who *Ágape* is. So, I think that's pretty dope.

While on my campus visit, I also observed a staff member sweeping and cleaning up debris from the sidewalks surrounding the *Ágape* complex. The cleanliness was in complete contrast with the frequent and voluminous appearance of litter in the rest of the area's surrounding buildings and sidewalks.

Overwhelmingly, through my observations and collaborators' stories, it seemed that the reason why beauty and cleanliness mattered was because of the poverty experienced by members of the community and associated impacts of poverty on the neighborhood. The sentiment across collaborators appeared to be that poverty did not mean that the poor did not deserve and could not have clean professional spaces—"they are deserving of excellence," as Matías emphatically articulated. The more common perception, according to Matías, was that "the reason why things are dilapidated, trashy, and messy, it's because we're poor, on and so forth." According to staff and faculty member, Gemma, outsiders to north Core City contributed to this narrative and were surprised by the college's appearance, "They have a certain idea for what a campus like ours will look or not look like, and I think that when people come to our campus, they are able to see the beauty of it and what we're trying to convey to our students, that they matter and that it's important for us that they come and

study in a beautiful and clean place because they did not always have that experience.”

Gemma’s last phrase of students not always having dignified, beautiful spaces suggests that the college sought to flip the narrative on what Latinx and poor students deserved.

To collaborators, honoring the dignity of people through physical spaces appeared to be synonymous with providing excellence and quality in education. Prior to my visit to Ágape, I had never been to a large urban complex housing middle, high school, and college educational institutions and social services, a large parking lot, community theater and event spaces with such pristine appearances. The walls were all clean and seemed freshly painted with limited, but intentionally placed artifacts. The floors were shiny and spotless, and you could not find a piece of litter along its corridors, stairwells, gathering spaces or even restrooms. Indeed, the focus on beautiful spaces felt like a welcomed and embraced discipline by collaborators that was connected to their deep beliefs in and value for their people.

Faith as a Driver for Culture and Practice

Ágape was a faith-based, Christian institution whose collaborators had a shared sense of purpose to help people. During my visit to the college and interactions with people, I could see that their faith manifested in how they spoke about their community and in the prayers and acts of gratitude that I witnessed at an executive leadership meeting and at an informal gathering of the staff and faculty. Their faith-based identity was expressed on their website and marketing materials and was institutionalized through coursework, chapel, and the use of testimonios [testimonies]. An exchange between two students, Ulises and Andy, illustrated some of the ways in which faith was expressed with Latinx values of storytelling/testimonios:

Ulises: They have a Chapel, I believe it was. I remember one time, we had a class and then we noticed a Chapel that was on. They were having a group meeting, but we were supposed to have class. Students were just like, “Oh, they’re having a Chapel so let’s just go over there.” So, we, all of us, we all went to Chapel. We listened to the stories, we listened to Andy’s story, actually, that day. Yeah, it felt good. Yeah, it felt nice, it felt like it was a family type thing, there.

Me: So, it's like storytelling?

Andy: Un testimonio [a testimonial].

Grounding the expression of faith at the college were shared beliefs. Benjamín, a founding member and administrator at Ágape Inc., described their faith base as stemming from “a liberation theology that informs our view of how the world exists and the need for us to [help...] people who have need” because it is a calling from God to “liberate [people] from oppression.” Oppressed peoples’ liberation mattered to collaborators because of Ágape’s “ontology that says God exists” and “the epistemology is that every being is created in the image of God,” as described by founder Alvaro. He noted that their ontology and epistemology made it “our job to help people ... self-actualize [and] ... develop themselves hopefully to better their lives, better their families’ lives, and better their service to the community.” Benjamín and Alvaro’s framework for faith as culture and practice seemed to derive from a realization of the need to “live out” their values as stated by several of the faculty. Benjamín posited: “We understand God called us to make a difference. So, we go into the barrios [neighborhoods]. It's not about saving souls, it's about saving people, though we don't object to saving souls.”

For collaborators, faith seemed to be defined by and “lived out” through the expression of values like love, acceptance, respect, service, integrity, and the belief in all humans as children of God. Faith was also appreciated through social actions, e.g., addressing Latinx community needs, and accountability, e.g., “walking our talk,” “being the same at all times,” and having a “continuous improvement mentality,” as stated by Francisco. For example, Elena felt that, as a Christian, she made herself accountable by putting her best self forward for students and modeling how to get through “good and bad days.” She also described putting her faith into action on behalf of students: “If I pray with them before a quiz or a test, I want them to feel that I'm really doing this [action], in a very honest way.” I inferred that most *Ágape* collaborators believed that God called for faith in action as much as he asked for people to have faith in him, in each other, and in what was possible through him.

My interpretation of collaborators’ faith as expressed values and social actions seemed to be what might differentiate a Latinx-centered faith-based higher education from a white faith-based experience. Larry, a non-Latinx community partner and administrator at Waterstone University, and Alvaro’s reflections on Waterstone and *Ágape* demonstrated some overlapping views about the difference in having a Latinx-centered faith. From Larry’s perspective, the difference seemed to lie in Waterstone, as a PWI, which focused on the dominant culture’s sense of individuality. According to Larry, Waterstone supported Christian faith itself as an institution and the individuals who practiced it, versus *Ágape*’s more socially conscious and communal “serving-all” way of enacting their faith. *Ágape*’s approach to faith was aligned with the Latinx community cultural value of collectivism. Larry illustrated the differences in the white faith-based and Latinx-centered faith-based approaches of the colleges:

The idea [at Waterstone] was to provide a Christianly shaped, and I would say sociologically insular experience for students. So, you don't have to go out and find out in the dark world all the problems with your faith. We're going to be your friends of faith. We're not going to be secular and that kind of thing. And I think *Ágape* shares those values, but I think it has tended to be more oriented towards the social good of education, and Waterstone has been a little more about the faith element. Don't get me wrong. They're very about the faith, but for them, the faith is taking care of everybody. Whereas for us, the faith for a long time has been taking care of everybody, but especially the Christians, right? They don't really care what your faith is when you come in, right? They just want to serve you. Waterstone traditionally kind of cares, even though we're open admission, it's... So, I think they're more faith serving all people. Whereas we have still struggled now and again to be faith serving all, we're still faith serving mainly faith, but also others.

Speaking on *Ágape*'s focus on the "social good" through Latinx-centered faith-based approaches, Alvaro described how Latinx faith-based peoples enacted their faith to address social justice issues as a direct need. He considered that the Latinx faith-based community had to get involved in social action to address inequities impacting Latinx people and the communities where they lived, putting them in contrast with the dominant faith-based community. He noted:

Our churches, by and large, there's a percentage of them, they're not into the conservative social values of white evangelicals.... That's not what we're about, we're about service to others.... Like, the conservative stuff, it's not in here. If anything, we can be accused of being quote unquote more liberal because we're looking at issues

like gun violence, teenage pregnancy, environmental issues.... they're seen as more liberal issues.... in some issues, like, public education is never discussed in the conservative community, but it's a big deal here because that's how our kids go to school.

Latinx-centered faith as a form of praxis might be considered a non-negotiable with the kinds of issues being faced by *Ágape's* community.

Faith as a driver for culture and praxis was also revealed through subthemes covering the significance of enacting “a heart of service” to people, how teaching was interpreted as a “special calling,” the integration of faith into curriculum, the inclusion of all faiths in a faith-based college, and ideas about (re)connecting with Latinx churches and the church community.

“A Heart of Service”—Serving the People

Faith as culture and praxis might also be tied to how collaborators interpreted the role of Christians, Christianity, and humanity as written in text. No matter their role, collaborators tended to easily site the Bible's Book of Matthew 25:40, “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me,’” with an emphasis on “serving the least of these.” It should be noted that all faculty, staff, and founders who collaborated in the study identified as Christians and seemingly took the Biblical mandate seriously and felt it deeply. For example, Francisco described faith and service as coming from a deep place of spirituality and transformation, noting that “it's really a change of heart that we believe comes as a result of having a true relationship with God.” Ivan affirmed that their faith-based commitment to serving students was a shared “mindset” among colleagues and “reflects who we are at *Ágape* college.” This core commitment and

heart work, as Ivan and Francisco described, was also a pre-requisite for working at the college. According to Elena, faith required a heart of service for students at the college who often needed more attention:

I would say to anyone that would like to come and work at the College that one of the things that you will need to be able to succeed is to be flexible and to have a heart of service because so many times, we have to really take the students by the hand, at times, and bring them forth. You have to make sacrifices to be able to do that. It is very rewarding, but I think that people have to be aware of the fact that that heart of service is very, very important.

Having a heart of service, as mandated by God, was what appeared to carry faculty and staff through the tough parts of the job. It also seemed to feed their commitment to walking alongside students on their journeys even beyond the college. “It’s our faith commitment,” Alvaro stated, “such that we must walk by [students’] side from the day they come into this institution to the day they leave and after because we have some students that go to other schools and then they kind of come back to get help.”

Teaching, a “Special Calling”

Among the faculty, there was a sense of a divine purpose in their chosen profession, like Ivan who passionately shared, “I truly believe that God has brought me [here].” Faculty also believed that this calling was a shared experience among colleagues. For example, Elena put forward: “I think that most of the people that are there, for them, this is not a job, this is really what they’re called to do.” Faculty seemed to feel called to become teachers and accepted their calling with a sense of dedication and love of teaching the Latinx and other local communities served by the college. Ivan related about the push and pull of growing up

in the community and how the call to teach and give back to the community was grounded in his faith:

I remember as a kid I wanted to get a job, move out to the suburbs, I mean that was the thing, I wanted to get out of the community. And then, after I received the Lord in my life, that all changed, I said “no, I want to stay in the community, I want to be here, I believe the Lord was calling me here.” I could have gone to the burbs, I didn’t want to, this is where I belong and I’ve been here 30 years, 30-plus years I’ve been in this community, serving it and when you talk about for us, by us, this is what I’m talking about, and for me that's important, that phrase means a lot to me because it's internalized, it's not just words for me, it's my heart, my soul, my mind, all those elements that I bring to this opportunity, into this job.

Ivan’s story also demonstrated the way that faculty enacted their faith to ensure that their special calling was protected and held sacred from the challenges that came with teaching. Faculty enacted their faith to better serve their students. Ivan asserted:

It's interesting being a professor at a college, you could easily fall into the trap of I’ve done this before, I got everything set up, and let me just go through the routine. I fight against that, I pray against that, I say Lord, every semester is a new semester with a handful of students, help me be someone in their lives that helps them grow, and develop, and is committed, and that is, I think, our call, every professor’s call, and not to take our kids and our quest for granted, be serious about and I think that's important.

The roots of this sense of calling were also found in how founders perceived their purpose in the work that they had done with the college and community. It seemed that the

“special calling” was a feature that they espoused and attracted in others, like Ivan and Elena, becoming a part of the institution’s culture. While not an educator in the traditional sense, Benjamín shared a personal reflection on the significance of the calling to the work with and for Latinx people and people from the community:

I always felt that my calling was, in that sense, my spiritual calling was to actually make life better for people in the barrio [neighborhood]. I think that's important because that's how I got grounded. I understood that my role as an emissary of the Lord, so to speak, was to go and change the byways and the highways. To go in and figure out how you bring, what they call, the Shalom of God, where you teach, you preach, and you heal people because that's what you understand the mandate to be. So, that's kind of the conviction.

Integrating Faith into Curriculum

One of the ways that Ágape College enacted their values of faith was through the curriculum and teaching practices. In reviewing the student handbook, all students took an introductory course to faith, reason, and justice, which were core principles shared with Waterstone University. This course helped students unpack the three principles and discover how they could “create lasting change in ourselves and in our world.” Aside from the traditional science, math, and English courses offered in most institutions of higher education, general education, and courses geared toward their major, students were required to take courses that fell within the three principles of faith, reason, and justice. Students took one course on faith (either introduction to biblical literature or foundations of Christian spirituality); three courses in the category of reason, which was about their intellectual development in social science areas such as human behavior, cultural perspective, and

western tradition; and one course in the area of social justice, which included several course offerings. *Ágape*'s student handbook described how the college's requirement of social justice coursework was based on their faith in the role of people and institutions to "transform" and "speak truth to power" in bringing about change in society "for the greater good." The role of people in social justice seemed aligned with their college's mission to serve "Hispanics" and equip the Latinx community with tools to aid their advancement.

Gemma, who was a staff and faculty member, provided further insight into how the college infused faith into the curriculum beyond the more obvious faith-based course requirements:

Also, for all classes, there's always an integration of faith with the curriculum. So, if you are teaching math, how do you integrate faith in your math class, that's something that we ask our professors to be conscious about, but also that they do it. So, for instance, there is a bible verse that says "as far as the East is from the West." Those are measurements; so, you can use that verse in a math class, how do you measure that? Or if you're doing biology, you see, you talk about a cell and how unique each cell is created, based on our beliefs. If you talk about justice, how are we concerned with the well-being of others, not just ourselves, how can we try to educate our students to look at the opportunities to make life in your community better for others.

In a similar role, Hannah shared that she used "the stories of the authors to teach [students] about life, and how to get through hard times," irrespective of the authors' faith. Hannah believed that lessons could be drawn from authors' stories to have conversations about their contributions to the greater good, which was one of the college's faith-based principles. She posited: "I focus more on that, like being a good citizen, but holding on to

something, because we know they're going to experience so many, so many things in life, but how do you still succeed in the midst of that?"

Rob, a faculty member, expressed a sense of confidence that professors at the college “do a really good job with tying [the curriculum] back to the Christian values of the institution. Our deans really stick firm to that.” While it would seem difficult to be able to infuse faith into certain courses, Rob gave his perspective on how faculty viewed the values and how to instill them in courses. He said:

The values of the College are kind of fleshed out.... Again, just helping them be critical thinkers, which is the reason portion. The faith component, of seeing their story in their narrative line up with the biblical narrative, which is this faith component, how we see the world and is typically influenced by how or what our belief systems are. How our belief systems influence our reason, how we critically think about the world. Then the justice aspect, which is how we practice being people that contribute to society in terms of justice. I think from the content perspective, but then, there's also opportunities where students are able to engage the community.

Community partners also spoke confidently about the way the college was enacting their faith-based values through teaching and coursework. One community member, Matías, had a close perspective to share as a parent of an alumnus of the college. He declared:

Regardless of who's leading which courses, I've had the opportunity over the last 6 years to know a lot of the curriculum, review a lot of the curriculum, know a lot of the professors, a lot of the programs, both in formal meetings, informal meetings. So, I think that's [how faith-based values are] clearly espoused throughout the curriculum.

The reason I can also say that it's because my oldest son, as well, got his associate degree at the College before getting his bachelor's elsewhere.

Including All Faiths in a Faith-Based College

Faculty, staff, and students shared the idea that even though Ágape was a Christian institution, they were open and enrolled students of different faiths and students with no religious inclination. Much like the college's expansive Latinx-centered approach, Francisco posited the college's inclusivity as geared toward serving the entire community regardless of faith by stating:

Ágape College is a Christian university, but unlike many other Christian universities, you don't have to be a Christian to come to Ágape College. You have to be ...well, let's not say you have to be in the community, it's open to anybody, open to anybody in the community whether you are a person of faith ... of the Christian faith, a person of a different faith, we have Muslim students, or a person of no faith. You can come to Ágape College. Ágape College is about the entire community.

Since service was a part of how Ágape translated their faith and it was tied to their value of centering people's dignity, knowing the students and providing them with a positive space for spiritual and intellectual growth seemed important. Sarita's reflection on her approach of including all faiths in the classroom was one example of how faculty tried to reach students. She expressed:

Just knowing that our students sometimes come from families that do not practice any faith, or do not practice any type of religion at all, and just being that positive voice to them. One of the things, also, is that we have students that don't practice Christianity, like they have a different religion, and just finding alternative ways to get to them,

bring them a positive message of encouragement without necessarily disrespecting their own beliefs.

A further subtheme that emerged from my conversations with faculty and students was the notion that including faith did not mean that non-believers or persons of a different faith were forced into conversion. Faculty emphasized the need to have “respect for all” and provide an example of “a different kind of Christian” since “some Christians have such a bad rap,” as articulated by Hannah. She emphatically expressed the desire to show a different face of Christianity as people who have more to offer, “it's not like us being here, that we're talking about Jesus all the time, and we're trying to make converts ... we just stick with the principles, which is the patience, which is grace, which is love, which is respect for all.” Hannah's focus on respect for all seemed connected with Ivan's thought on allowing students agency and self-determination to make choices, saying: “you have to let the students choose what path is best for them.”

Students seemed to feel supported as Christians or as non-religious people. Alex shared his initial apprehension applying to the college as someone who was not religious but was able to quickly stave off any fears he may have had. He revealed:

It is another reason why I like this college so much. Its acceptance of one's religion or lack thereof. I must say it outright that I'm not very religious and I may not consider myself religious at all. When I first applied to this college, I didn't know that it was religious whatsoever, and I was worried about that, and in the back of my mind, I was like, “Oh, God. I hope they don't try to make me a Christian.” But I had two classes that revolved around religion and Christianity and stuff like that and at the beginning, I always told the professor, “Professor, I just wanted to put it out there that I'm not

religious,” and they would always make a point to say, “Alex, don't worry. We're not going to try to convert you.” I know it's a small detail to be worried about, but I know for a fact that there's some school out there that would try to convert me no matter what. And I just, I'm glad that they were accepting and, you know, which I should have expected, but it really did quell that fear.

Similarly, Tito shared experiencing an interaction in the classroom between a nonreligious student and the faculty. The story demonstrated the college's openness and non-pressure for students to conform to their faith-based beliefs. Tito recounted the professor assuring the student that, “My goal isn't to make you Christian. It is just to let you see the interesting parallels between the Book and history.”

(Re)Connecting with Latinx Churches and Church Community

As a Christian institution founded by Latinx neighborhood clergy, the role of Latinx churches and the church community was an important pillar for the culture and praxis of the college and Ágape Inc. Some faculty had connections to neighborhood churches as members or clergy, as well as many of the staff and board at the Inc. Most importantly, according to Alvaro and others, the Latinx church community had a close pulse to community happenings and had expectations of Ágape to give back as an important resource to the community.

Alvaro provided an example of how Latinx clergy people informed Ágape's mobilization to ensure that Latinx people had access to vaccinations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Consequently, Ágape became one of the largest vaccination sites reaching Latinx people in the city. Alvaro stated:

Our churches are full of people that live in the hood and the pastors are in here all the time, and we have a program where we communicate with them all the time, and we

know what the hell's going on from that perspective. I'm not talking about religious perspective, but, “Oye, Alvaro. La gente no se está vacunando [Hey, Alvaro. People aren't getting vaccinated], right.

The college's special relationship with the Latinx church community was influential to how it served students, since many of its members had historically attended the college.

Gemma described the following scenario of accommodating students' church life:

Many of our classes, for instance, are not on Wednesday nights. We might have some science courses, majority of our students only take one science class so, but the majority of the classes wouldn't be offered on Wednesday nights and the reason is, we know that the majority of churches in that area have Bible study at night, so it would place the students in a difficult position to have to choose between school and church.

However, while the connection to churches was implicit, there was also a critique from community partners and some faculty that the relationship could be stronger. For example, Matías discussed that the relationship with the Latinx churches was stronger in the past and that by reconnecting with the churches, the college could have a receptive audience of local Latinx students. Matías noted:

There's an opportunity to create a relationship with the communities of faith. We have over 200 churches that serve the Latino community here ... there's a lot of young people who still attend church, who still attend youth groups, and who stay in the community.... I think more could be done to your question, around building upon this, the community of faith has an important role to play in that. And both things have to happen. One, on our side, as I say, Ágape College, you know, being amenable to speaking the churches' language, of the church's understanding the value of

education, and educating our young people, and that there's an opportunity here locally.

It seemed that collaborators like Matías considered reconnecting to the church community as not only vital to their mission, but also as a potential solution to some of the issues around declining enrollment that will be discussed in Chapter 7.

Integrated Roles: Practical and Values-Oriented

The final theme distinctive of Ágape College related to the structure of faculty and staff roles. Most full-time staff at the college had a three-fold role of faculty, staff, and mentor built-in to the expectations and fulfillment of their work. The integration of these tri-roles into one furthered the college's Latinx-centering and provide a practical and values-oriented choice for the college. Gemma explained how this worked:

We have what we call the program directors, the program directors serve as faculty as well as program directors, so in that sense there is not really a traditional tenured faculty like you will see in other institutions. Our full-time program directors, also in addition to overseeing faculty and students, they also teach at least two courses in a semester, as part of what we call the "load," so there is no distinction in that way.

From a values perspective, Gemma explained that this structure was built with "always student-centeredness" in mind, given the holistic needs of the college's majority Latinx students and students from marginalized communities. The founders and staff-faculty-mentors also linked mentoring with furthering the college's mission of Latinx student-centeredness and student-centeredness more broadly. For example, Francisco suggested: "I think on our end, we emphasize a lot more the mentoring side of things, although we look forward to partnering with others to do the research." Based on collaborator responses, it

appeared that the college valued time spent with students and on student success as their primary purpose for existing and, therefore, placed a high value on developing students and engaging with the community, which was where the students were coming from. Gemma further explained:

A lot of times, when you have full-time faculty, they focus on research, they focus on teaching, but they don't do a lot of advising in other institutions. Here, the focus is students, so we don't want you to ... you can do research if you want, but that's not an expectation, nor is it required for that role. What is required for that role is advising, developing of faculty, community engagement, and development of programs so that's the reason why it was done that way.

From a practical perspective, according to college administrators, hiring tri-fold roles supplemented by part-time faculty (who also were expected to serve as mentors) was more financially sustainable. The size and limited financial resources of the college made it challenging to afford personnel to fit every distinct role afforded to a traditional college. Thus, the college looked to hire people who would function as mentors to students in addition to their other roles. Additionally, there were a few roles that also overlapped with Ágape Inc., allowing for further integration and alignment with the resources and opportunities available at the Inc. While I did not find any individual who felt negatively about integrated roles, one college staff-faculty-mentor who was also associated with the Inc. shared that wearing multiple roles required flexibility on their part and on the part of the Inc. and the college. They stated, “as you can imagine there's a lot of, like there's sometimes, where some things have to do with my role at the college and the role, sort of, like, together, there's a match, but then sometimes it's separate. So again, speaking about flexibility, I think

that I've had the flexibility to do all of this.” Their reflection revealed a slight tension with having multiple roles across the college and at Inc., although their tone and overall discourse was more insightful than critical.

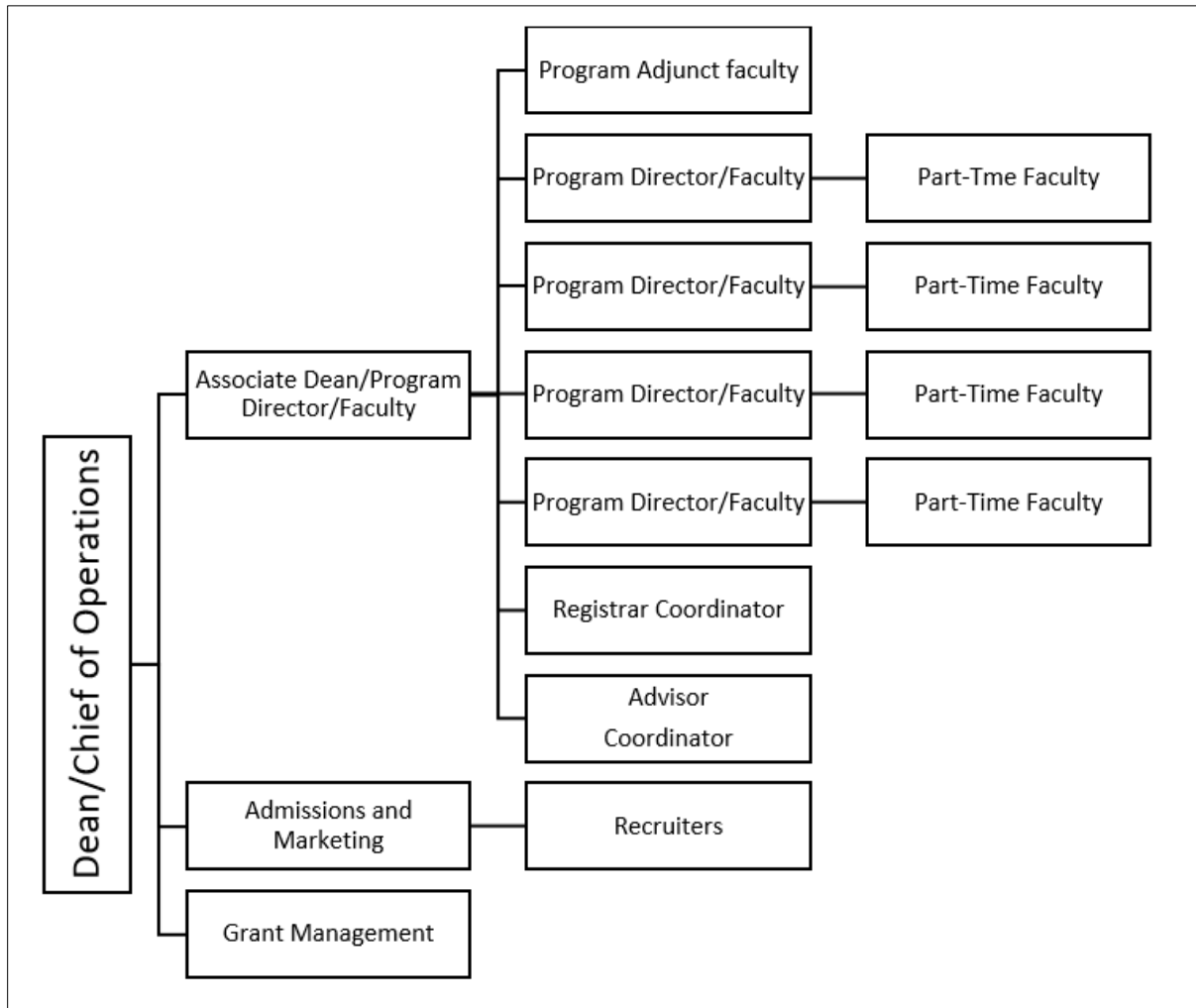
The theme of integrated roles also revealed three subthemes that help further understand the organizational culture and praxis of *Ágape*, including how integrated roles encouraged equity, allowed for deeper knowledge and relationships with students, and how part-time faculty fit in as part of the integrated model.

Encouraging Equity in the Value of Faculty and Staff

The integration of roles created a unique and dynamic relationship between faculty and staff, since the majority of the staff were also faculty themselves, and all staff functioned as mentors with direct student support roles. Additionally, the relatively small size of the college allowed for flatter organizational structures than often found at other colleges and universities. Based on the college’s organizational chart, there was a chief executive role or “dean” (administrative/operational function), an associate dean (academic focused, this person was also a faculty member and oversaw an academic program), academic program directors (with tri-fold roles) who reported to the associate dean, and part-time faculty who were hired by and reported to the program directors. All other areas like marketing, admissions, business operations, and a financial aid staffer reported to the dean. In Figure 5, I adapted and simplified *Ágape* College’s original organizational chart for a visual explanation of the roles as described.

Figure 5

Ágape College Organizational Chart



There was a sentiment that the integration of roles advanced the college’s Latinx-centered mission by encouraging equity in the perceived importance of faculty and staff roles in ways that felt distinct from the dominant higher education culture. Francisco’s reflection on the matter revealed the impact of role integration on climate and, possibly, morale. He commented:

I think at Ágape College, we really try to create a climate where faculty and staff are at the same level. A lot of times, I think in the hierarchy of things, faculty tend to be seen as being a little bit higher than staff. But at Ágape College, we really try to build an equal perspective.

I sensed that, in line with the college's mission and values of removing the invisibility and marginality of oppressed peoples often reproduced in dominant culture, they attempted to further their goals through organizational roles. According to collaborators, the integration of roles presumably created a more equitable dynamic and a profound focus on students. There was also a sense that integration granted an opportunity for understanding students better.

Allowing for Deeper Knowledge of and Relationships with Students

Faculty-mentors and staff with faculty-mentor integrated roles consistently spoke about the experiences of students and shared stories about students they taught in the classroom and/or related with through the mentoring process. I perceived their narratives as revealing a deep level of understanding of Latinx students' and Students of Color's context, which felt humanizing. Their relationship with students also seemed to inform their approaches to working with them, since many of the integrated roles saw students from the application process through graduation. Elena revealed how role integration could be constructive in developing knowledge about and relationships with students. She confirmed:

So, it's really good because I get to know them at a different level. So, I meet them during the process of applying to the College, or when they get accepted, and then new student orientation. And that first semester, we meet with them as advisors. We meet with them consistently during the first semester, to make sure that things are in place. "Consistently," because, of course, we need them to come and see us, or get on

a Zoom with us, so sometimes we'll schedule and then they won't show up, or we may be trying to schedule. Some of them are a little bit harder to get to meet with us. But then, in the second semester, they'll be in the classroom with me, so I get to know them, I think, at a deeper level. So, I really like that part of it.

Individuals with tri-fold roles at the college, like Elena, were also in a unique position to hire part-time faculty colleagues as part of the college's organizational model. The deep understanding of the student experience influenced what they looked for in part-time faculty, who also had integrated roles as faculty-mentors.

Fitting Part-Time Faculty as Part of the Model

The college was distinct from other higher education institutions in that it did not employ any full-time faculty. Instead, the college relied on a part-time faculty body of individuals who were professional practitioners in their respective fields who reported to the director of their corresponding academic program. Based on an organizational chart last updated in April 2022, there were seventy-six part-time faculty across the college's five academic programs. While the faculty contract or "covenant," as referred to by *Ágape*, did not have explicit language about mentoring, it was possible that this may have been found in the handbook supplied by the college to part-time faculty. I was unable to review the handbook; however, there were uncodified practices (e.g., mentoring) that existed in the oral traditions of the institution. Benjamín's inputs revealed some of the uncodified practices related to part-time faculty and how they fit into the college's model. He explained:

Most of our faculty are part-time, and they are usually individuals who come from the community. So, you know, you need a master's degree or a PhD to teach [a requirement for accreditation.] And if I could find a nurse who can teach a course

who meets the requirements of the institution, who comes from the barrio [neighborhood], I'm going to hire her. Or a chemistry [professor] -- our science person and medical person is Boricua [Puerto Rican] with a PhD in chemistry, so she teaches for us.

It can be inferred that part-time faculty provided an opportunity to be more selective about recruiting individuals who came from the Latinx and Core City communities. Benjamín also revealed the financial considerations that better fit part-time faculty and allowed them to ensure that they were attracting faculty that were tied to their cause. He elaborated:

I think there's also a question about what's your faculty for. And these things are related because money drives faculty. Money drives people. No money, no people. Faculty are part of the people equation. Financial models in poor communities cannot retain full time faculty that all they do is teach. The model doesn't work for that. I can't have one teacher making \$70,000 a year teaching three and three and three, or three and four, or whatever the course because we do the math, I probably am not going to be in a good place to have the resources for other things. So that's why our model is driven by a part-time faculty versus full-time faculty. So there needs to be some consideration about those financial models and what is the educational delivery system in the financial model that allows for education among the poor.

Ágape's model of integrated roles appeared to fit the size and resource constraints of the college. The model was also directly correlated with their identity and values as a college that "helps people in need," and was therefore focused on students and their communities as primary.

Case 2: Cacique Community College

As an institution established more than 50 years ago, Cacique Community College's organizational identity, culture, and praxis were the result of deeply embedded experiences that evolved over and, in some cases, transcended time. To understand the ways that Latinx-centering arose within their organizational context, three central themes surfaced, involving how (1) *Rooting Historical Activism is Central to the College's Identity*, (2) their *Planning Processes Speak to College Values*, and (3) the way increased *Diversity Over Time* led to *New Cultural Practices Over Time*. Various associated subthemes are also described as part of the case findings.

Rooting Historical Activism as Central to Identity

Chapter 5 described the accounts surrounding the founding of Cacique College and the subsequent decade-and-a-half struggle to acquire space and keep the campus open. The conversations with college collaborators across roles, a review of their website and recent publications, like their annual report and academic catalogue, and site visit observations, revealed the centrality of the college's history to how collaborators expressed the college's identity and values. Accented in the recollection of their history were the college's Puerto Rican activist roots. For example, the annual report opened with a message from Cacique's president and foundation chair stating how the college's present and future were informed by the standard set by and the determination of the individuals who "joined forces" to establish the college. In addition, an image on the cover of the college's academic catalogue was of different shades of brown hands lifting the campus buildings, which exuded bright rays of light. The catalogue's opening message also described the college's pride in its past, its namesake, and the activism of the community that established the college. Likewise, their

activist roots were carried into the present way of viewing themselves with phrases found on their website that suggested that they were a vehicle for transformation and change within the field of education.

Staff member, Mario, discussed Cacique's enduring culture of advocacy, transformation, and change, suggesting that it promoted the participation of students, staff, and faculty because of its "history of fighting to keep an institution open in the south Metropolis, in a community that didn't have higher education institutions." The campus' culture seemed to embrace its Puerto Rican community activist roots and tried to keep them alive through events, artifacts, and by encouraging advocacy. Mario went on to illustrate what activist history and culture looked like on campus:

That's all over the college, and you'll see it, and in works of art, history, pictures, and so I think students learn about that history, learn about the advocacy, learn how important it is to be vocal. I think that is part of the history of the college itself, faculty have been here 30 years, 40 years, people have been here a long time. They share those stories, they empower students, so I think it's just kind of something that we all, you know, we're about social justice and we're about change, I think we instill those values in our students and we encourage them to use their voices.

During my site visit to the campus, I witnessed several examples of Mario's depiction of the art works on campus. For example, an iconic bridge connecting two campus buildings had on display images of their 50th anniversary depicting the college's past and present. The main stairwell of the atrium in one of their academic buildings featured prominently a wall with a collage of pictures and excerpts about the college's activism—which Cacique staff

referred to as “la lucha in 3 parts: the fight to get the college, the fight to keep the college, and the fight to expand the college.”

According to Mario, history and the ongoing access to storytelling of long-time college members contributed to Cacique’s enduring values of advocacy and change. Brian and Rosa were two founding members who were staff at the college in its early years and remained connected as community partners, supporters, and among the storytellers of the college. For example, Brian was included in a digital story project recounting the early years of the college and was also found among the college’s archival collection. Brian and Rosa were also recommended by other collaborators to contribute to this study because of their memories and oral histories with the college. Together they shared with me their perspectives on college and community members’ sense of historic disenfranchisement as part of what drove their activism in education. The disenfranchisement was understood as a systemic issue tied to resources and discrimination that also fueled how they viewed education as a justice issue. Rosa explained:

Yeah, we didn’t have enough resources and we didn’t have a sense that we belonged.

There was a group of us that felt that we belonged, but many other people did not believe that we belonged within the higher educational system. That we belonged in school, that we needed to have good buildings, because our buildings were atrocious.

The activists who formed the institution believed in Black and Brown people’s deservingness to and belonging in education, but the complicated history made it so that they “were fighting all the time. We were just fighting for our existence,” stated Brian, “it was like we were constantly at war and justifying ourselves. It was so difficult.”

Perhaps because of how long campus and community members endured the challenges, and the fact that long-standing members like Rosa and Brian were still around to tell the stories of struggle, its Latinx and activist roots remained unforgotten. The centrality of the college's activist roots could be further understood through their foci on people of the past, including a special reverence for their Puerto Rican namesake, Puerto Rican culture and historical relics, and a nostalgia for what was.

People of the Past

One of the common subthemes that emerged from conversations with college collaborators was a reverence for people of the past who made significant contributions to the college's existence. In some instances, the college's activists of the past were spoken of as a collective and were recognized for their sacrifices as a point of institutional identification -- like in the way that one might talk about civil rights leaders. For example, in speaking about one of the times the college faced a threat of closure, Fatima explained:

But many people sacrificed, I would say, made the ultimate sacrifice for that because they used to protest and picket. They would tie chains around themselves, around the buildings and took over the buildings and said, "No, you're not closing our doors." It's a true testament to who we are. Because of what those individuals did, we still hold a strong presence in the community.

Many of the individuals who played instrumental roles in the past had since passed on, but some remained and were depicted with what I inferred as respect and admiration. Inez expressed:

We still have a few people around that were present in those days or that are still connected to the college. I think the work that was done to help build the college up

to where it is now, I think it represents each part like it was for us. It was for us, our community. It was done by us. Right? Because it's the people who work here that were out there, that were protesting and advocating for the needs of the community. As mentioned previously, I witnessed how people of the past were respected and admired through pictures, art, posters, and other visual artifacts throughout the campus. The library, for example, had enlarged newspaper clippings, programs from events, photos, and descriptive texts highlighting activists associated with the college, as well as Latinx social and political figures who were influential to the college.

In addition to visual artifacts, living people of the past also used storytelling, research, and ceremonial opportunities to ensure that deceased Latinx activists of the past were remembered. For example, Rosa produced her dissertation on deceased founding member Celia and recounted stories about her passion for Puerto-Rican and Latinx-centered education. Celia's surviving sister, Alma (who was also around for the founding years and an active supporter of the college), shared several accounts of her sister's involvement with the college and social justice issues locally and beyond. Alma also described artifacts and activities that she and other members of Cacique College and the community were organizing in Celia's memory. She revealed:

There's a playground next to Cacique, one of the buildings, and it was named after my sister, Celia's Playground. And now, this year with the efforts of Rosa, who got her doctorate because of Celia, her thesis and dissertation was on, and we're doing Celia's 100th Centennial and Cacique is leading that. They, in terms of sponsorship. I mean, we have a committee of many people planning.... this year, Celia would have

been 100 years old.... And we're going to celebrate her and celebrate all the things that she did for the community.

While Celia's Centennial represents a far past, even further is the number one person that was most spoken about across college collaborators – the college's Puerto Rican namesake.

Reverence to Namesake. From students all the way up to the president of the college, through the name of the boulevard adjoining the campus, to the quotes, portraits, and student-created artworks depicting the namesake – this person from the past seemed to play a significant role in the identity and culture of the college. The namesake of the college represented an icon and example for what the college tried to exude, not just for Puerto Rican and Latinx people at the college, but also for collaborators who saw themselves in the values that the namesake stood for. Joan, a non-Latinx faculty member, described:

I think the [namesake's] flavor [makes us unique], because [the namesake] was an awesome human being when you really look at [their] history and at the time that [they] lived, [they] was visionary, [they] went over the world, particularly to Cuba, Puerto Rico, but [they] really had so much in [them], and it's such a passion for learning and the fact that [they] had such a passion for women and their mobility, their ability to be educated, I mean I would have loved to have met [them], just an amazing [hu]man. I think we try to keep that alive, a respect for our founding names.

The respect Joan spoke of was also present for community leaders, like Santiago, who considered the college's being named after the namesake an important pillar in the community.

Santiago also critiqued college members' knowledge of who the namesake was and therefore what they represented to the college and the broader Puerto Rican community and local neighborhoods. He posited:

Basically, the fact is that I've been always so proud that we have a college by the name of [Namesake], which I don't know how many students actually know too much about [Namesake] who actually go there, which is one of my other beefs when I go to see these other schools [named after Latinx icons], and I ask, I even ask the teachers, "You know what's the name? Who is [names a Latinx namesake]?" And teachers look at me and say, "No?" "So how do you go to school when you don't even know who [they are]," you know? Well, same thing with [college's Namesake]. It's just to nab the name there and what it represents. I've always been an activist thinking that the south Metropolis is the little Puerto Rico.

In learning about the Latinx activist roots of the college, and people of the past like the namesake, Celia, Alma, Rosa, and others, collaborators made clear the importance of Cacique's Puerto Rican community origins as central to their identity.

Puerto Rican Culture and Historical Relics

The college was founded by Puerto Rican people primarily in coalition with Black people. Beyond the founding, this subtheme is informed by how campus collaborators interpreted the way Puerto Rican culture and activist roots were (or were not) expressed through the college's culture and praxis. Community collaborators, along with collaborators who had been around since the early years of the college, had vivid memories about the Puerto Rican community's place in the neighborhood surrounding the college and the artifacts that marked their presence. Santiago asserted: "If you wanted to know anything

about the Puerto Rican community outside of Puerto Rico, you came to [the college's neighboring streets]. This was the epicenter of the Puerto Rican diaspora, which, by the way, [the] street, which is a major thoroughfare ... the real name of it, also is [college's Namesake] Boulevard.”

The symbolism of an epicenter seemed to translate to the way collaborators expressed a concern for ensuring that the college's Puerto Rican roots were not lost with time. Community member, Romero, for example, invested 7 years of his retirement toward building an archive of the community and Cacique's Puerto Rican histories, noting: “I've been doing this as a labor of love.” Still, community collaborators seemed to feel strongly that more had to be done to ensure that the college did not abandon its founding Puerto Rican identity. Santiago expressed:

So, there's a lot of history in the south Metropolis of Puerto Ricans and Puerto Rico and I just don't want that to be forgotten. So, I seen the college that came up, and it was from a factory building to a sprawling little campus that's developing more, and more, and more. That's always been my motivation to see institutions like this establish themselves. That's why I kept my businesses in the south Metropolis, because I believe that this should be truly the Puerto Rican Mecca, but we have to document it. We have to maintain it, we have to share it, and that's what motivates me.

The Puerto Rican Mecca and motivation for establishing Puerto Rican institutions, as described by Santiago was representative of the sense of dignity that I heard from Puerto Rican collaborators who had long-time ties to Cacique. From collaborators' perspective, the sense of dignity came from acknowledging that the college's historical Puerto Rican roots

were in part what made the college unique. Rosa emphasized: “It was founded by the Puerto Rican community and that's different. [X College] was founded by the African American, you know, [Y] College and [Z] College has that reputation of being the Jewish Harvard for the board, but Cacique is the Puerto Rican Latino college, now Dominican college, within the Metro Uni system.”

Rosa’s statement of the “now Dominican college” is a nod to demographic changes at the college and neighborhood. The demographic changes presented a further impulse for collaborators like Rosa to want to see the Puerto Rican roots of the college further imprinted in the present and future of the college. A lively exchange between Rosa and Brian depicted the passionate feelings and values that were invoked in the desire to preserve the college’s Puerto Rican heritage:

Brian: Yeah. But, still, I think it's doing its job, because it is the gateway. That's what, yes, it was founded by Puerto Ricans, and all that.

Rosa: That's never going to change, that’s never going to change. That reputation is never going to change.

Brian: But we delegate, I mean, and that's the important thing. You know, populations change. You know, Puerto Ricans are no longer the huge community they were in [The] City.

Rosa: Yeah, Brian, but, like [names two other Puerto Rican cultural institutions in the community], Cacique, we need to continue saying that they were founded by Puerto Ricans because when African Americans do the same for their organization, regardless of the changes in the community, you need to recognize that it was founded by African Americans. So, we want to have that same credit that

Cacique was founded by us. It's not that we want the college to only serve Puerto Ricans, but it needs to be recognized, and I think it continues to be recognized ...

“Mira, esos fueron los Puertorriqueños que recogieron palos en la cabeza [Look, those were the Puerto Ricans that picked up the sticks and put them on their heads], that they created...” We did that....

Rosa: I think it's important that new generations of Dominicans and all the Latinos recognize that there was this history behind it and that we were the one opening doors for many other groups later on.

Rosa's discussion with Brian revealed a need to feel seen and recognized for the contributions made by Puerto Rican community members, perhaps beyond some of the relics that were on display around the college. They, along with Santiago's and Romero's reflections, uncovered an underlying feeling of fear of erasure and a sense of nostalgia for the past; for what was, at a time when so much appeared to be changing at the college and in the broader landscape.

Nostalgia for What Was

Community leaders and some staff revealed sentimental reflections on the past and what seemed like a yearning for what once was. Ernesto opened the possibility that discussion about change considering the past often rested “among the Puerto Rican old guard.” For example, discussions about the perceived old bilingual mission of the college, which had since changed, brought up what he described as a “more romantic notion of the past than it is a conscious discussion of what might happen to the fundamental nature of the institution.”

The perceived romantic notion of the past was evidenced by my conversation with Romero, who had many anecdotes and reflections to share about a melancholic past of the college and the community. Romero talked about how the Metropolis of the 1970s included Latinx people fighting for their rights and achieving political power despite the challenges of that era. He reflected on the changes since then in the way the Latinx community was centered by the college and gave the analogy of the urban “stoop” and the college as a “stoop”:

I used to love sitting on stoops.... the stoops were the cultural centers of the community and what was in this stoop was in the College at the time. It was that type of sensibility, I'm just thinking that it was a special time, but please, a very tough time.

Romero seemed to recognize that his sentimentalism needed to be balanced with the difficulties of the past. His anecdote was an example of the kinds of reflections I heard from other elders, community members, and past staff of the college who seemed to be concerned about whether the Puerto Rican and Latinx-centering of the college remained strong enough. Ernesto’s critique provided a summary of where some of the nostalgia was coming from, its prevalence in the campus culture, and some of the tensions that this culture of nostalgia created at Cacique. He explained:

You know, people of my era still fondly remember the good old days. You know, we're taking over buildings, yet again that kind of revolutionary spirit. Some of it is political, in terms of ... Again, you have the kind of radical left. I'm not talking about progressives, I'm talking about Communists, leftists, socialists who, you know, have a particular worldview, and people who are much more centrist. So that kind of creates

yet another tension. The opportunity that I see is that it does allow people to have discussions, and you know, the kinds of things that they can't do because of a romantic and biased view of the world is counterbalanced by people who have an equally biased and romantic view, but contrary to theirs. So that tension and discussion allows things to be brought forward that ordinarily wouldn't. I mean, I don't think that there is an overwhelming worldview that dominates the landscape at Cacique.

Ernesto's analysis spoke to the role of nostalgia at the college and the way that it shaped the views and ways that people on campus related to one another and the college's Latinx-centering. His perspective also shed light on a spectrum of ideologies, some rooted in the college's Latinx activist history, and how these various ideologies might have an impact on participation and engagement in campus planning processes.

Planning Processes Speaking to Values and Mission

When trying to understand how Cacique College translated its values and mission to serve "Hispanics," people historically excluded from higher education, and the South Metropolis community through praxis, college collaborators often pointed to campus planning processes as an example. In particular, collaborators often referred to the planning efforts involved in the accreditation process, in which the college was engaged during data collection for this study. Aside from students and community collaborators, nearly all faculty, staff, and some of the people involved in the early founding years were aware of the campus' planning efforts. Collaborators saw campus planning efforts as a vehicle for inclusion, participation, and stronger alignment to campus values. It is possible that collaborators' emphasis on values around inclusion and participation may have evolved from

the college's founding focus on increasing opportunities for Latinx and Black people. Thus, inclusion and participation seemed to be broadly understood features of the college's culture and how they considered business should be conducted. For example, focusing on the centrality of Cacique College's mission and core values in the strategic planning process, staff member Fatima asserted:

Everybody's collaborating always with each other to hold true the values of our core mission.... I think that goes across the board for faculty and staff. They're well-represented, well-balanced in everything that we do. For example, these high-stake committees that they put in place to work on strategic planning for the next 5 years, the college executives have done a deliberate job to make sure that there is dual representation. It could be an administrator and a faculty member working as co-chairs to make sure, again, that everything is connected to the vision and the mission of the college and the core values are always in everything that we do.

Fatima further suggested that, in the last 10 years, campus leaders were encouraging campus members to understand the meaning of the college's mission and values while "ensuring it's represented in the work that we do." Campus leaders, from her perspective, were calling for deeper alignment of people and departments to the college's mission and values so that "it wasn't just like, it's just a statement that's plastered on the website. It means something."

Campus collaborators seemed to derive meaning in campus planning as it related to participation and inclusion, as well as the venues where values-based planning took place. Campus artifacts like prominently displayed mission statements also added to the elevation of values-based planning processes and outcomes.

Participation and Inclusion

Staff discussed their experiences with campus planning processes as participatory along vertical (administrative hierarchy) and horizontal (across diverse member roles) power lines. From the hierarchal perspective, there was a sense that the president and her cabinet had to model the values of the college in processes. Inez noted:

It has to trickle down from the president to the vice president, to the dean, to the staff member. So, the part-time staff member, they have to understand why we're here. It's when you're involved in that process, when you're contributing to that process, that's, I would say, meaningful and where we are today.

At the same time, Inez acknowledged that the college's Latina president brought with her Latinx community values and assets around community building that created more inclusivity in processes, with an impact on campus members at different levels of the organization. Inez explained:

I think one of the good things I would say that's very positive is that a lot of the work that happens, it's inclusive. So, it's not like it's just the president and she decides everything. No. She likes to build on community, so she pulls people from different areas, whether you're in institutional advancement, working on fundraising to a faculty member, to someone like me in career services. Getting different perspectives, I think that's what helps launch the initiatives and activities and supports that are in place. So, I think that's one of the important things like having voices, having different voices represents what is happening.

From a horizontal perspective, Mario recognized that carrying out the values of the college and the majority of Latinx and Students of Color it served “starts from the top down”

and, at the same time, is implemented through inclusive processes that span across different kinds of roles. Mario indicated:

So, it becomes a creative committee, and that committee as an example will talk about what are we experiencing, what are we seeing, how do we respond, what efforts can we put in, what resources do we have, what connections do we have to community-based organizations that can support us. So, I think “us” is everyone, faculty, staff. Generally, when a group is put together, they try to diversify from different departments, a representative from student leadership, a representative from the faculty side, and the staff side, administration, and so our committees are pretty diverse in that way, that people can come from different perspectives and share their ideas and figure out solutions.

From Mario’s view, the values of inclusivity and participation had been put into practice through the creation of campus groups that represented not just diverse roles, but also diverse ideas for addressing campus issues. Creative committees seemed to be one of several venues where collaborators described values-based planning that occurred at the college.

Venues for Values-Based Planning

Campus collaborators discussed multiple places where they saw campus values being discussed and enacted. Among these were campus meetings, workshops, forums, committees, the college senate, the campus accreditation process, and campus strategic planning. Greg stated: “I think [the college's values] come up in every single state of the college. Anytime the president speaks, in any meeting, it will always be addressed... It's around in a lot, if not all of the senior leadership meetings. You'll also see it somewhat, not always, but somewhat in the student government meetings.” To illustrate, I will focus on two

of the most frequently referenced venues, including the college senate and campus accreditation process.

The college senate was one venue where faculty and staff considered how the college expressed its uniqueness and values. The college senate met monthly and unlike other senates in the Metro Uni system that focused solely on faculty participants, Cacique's senate included students, faculty, and staff. According to Joan: "If you go to other Metro Uni colleges, they have faculty senates, so the other constituencies are excluded, that's why I said I think we're more inclusive, and sometimes not as inclusive as we can be, but that to me, that's a daily tension that's always going to be present."

Joan recognized that inclusion at Cacique was not a haven and was a work in progress at the campus. Still, the senate came up as an important venue for enacting the college's values, with an emphasis on student empowerment in processes. For example, Fatima considered that students were involved in all campus matters, declaring: "Students have a strong voice at our campus. They represent the college not only on the association board, they're also at the Senate, they're also at the auxiliary committee. They're everywhere. The students are everywhere." While student participation in planning processes did not emerge in student focus groups, I had the opportunity to attend a virtual senate meeting that housed more than eight people over Zoom and saw the student representatives on the senate.

From my observation, the senate meeting appeared to be a formal space for decision making around academic and programmatic issues and their values of inclusion were on display in the way that senate members referred to each other and created space for different roles to speak on different agenda items. Student representatives, staff, and faculty alike were referred to as "Mr.," "Ms.," or "professor." While I did not observe translanguaging or

explicit Latinx-centered ideas or beliefs being expressed, there was an interesting discussion around a proposed course in Black Studies. The discussion included comments like “we want to provide broad access,” the importance of “align[ment] with Metro Uni requirements around equity and inclusion,” and concerns about not “want[ing] to disenfranchise students with different levels of experience” as it related to course pre-requisites. The meeting discussion revealed attention to the college’s values around diversity and multicultural education.

A second venue that was important at the time of my data collection was campus members’ participation in the college’s accreditation process. Much like any higher education accreditation process, the process included several open meetings, forums, and working groups that tapped individuals from across the campus and various roles. “There’s a self-study group as well. There’s the first-year experience group.... There is a social justice group that meets regularly, and it’s comprised of people from Cacique and other colleges,” shared Inez. According to the accreditation self-study organizational chart, there were a total of eight working groups, one of which was dedicated to mission and goals.

I observed two of the campus’ virtual accreditation forums. The first was a campus member feedback/working meeting and the second was the review team report out forum to the campus. I also reviewed Cacique’s self-study to understand how campus values and Latinx-centeredness showed up in the accreditation process. Latinx people’s inclusion in the accreditation process was verified in looking at the study design team charts which, based on names/surnames, appeared to have included many Latinx people and people from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds.

During the first campus forum, I observed that the campus' accreditation leadership team included Latinx people and some of the values-based issues that arose centered around how to build on the college's identity. For example, one white faculty member expressed that they were "struggling to understand how the identity of the college" might be impacted by the shift to online education, since the student's location was irrelevant with remote learning. They further questioned: "If location doesn't matter, ... how do we make sure that our mission to serve the local population" is fulfilled?" The subsequent discussion drew nods to the campus' values of building support systems for students to "embrace student needs" and suggestions by others that the college should "return to traditional teaching" as a priority. There was also a focus on the college's justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion (JDEI) standards and the need to better show how the college embedded these values into training and curriculum, as well as clarify how campus-wide initiatives at the time fulfilled this objective. While the second forum was a one-directional presentation from the review team to the campus community, Latinx-centeredness was expressed in the opening remarks via the use of the Spanish Language. The president also made a brief remark about being of Caribbean descent and invited the peer evaluator to consider the campus their "home." My assumption was that when Spanish was used, it was to set a tone of *familiaridad* (familiarity) and to create a welcoming environment for the peer evaluator and meeting participants.

The accreditation self-study report, like many of Cacique's publications, started with an institutional overview that highlighted the local, activist roots of the institution, and the predominantly "Hispanic or Black" residents of the community served by the college. Its cover art was an artistic rendition of the institution's namesake with photographic collaged images of Black and Brown students from the past and more recent times. Some of the

photos appeared to be of past strikes, forums, graduations, and scenes from classroom, athletic, and neighborhood happenings. The executive summary expressed values- and mission-related statements like, playing a role in student “socio-economic mobility,” being “rooted in social justice and equity,” and serving students for whom “the American Dream” was more difficult to obtain. The college also described itself in the report as a “predominantly Hispanic- and Black-serving public 2-year institution.” Much of the study addressed many of the issues traditional to community colleges in terms of challenges and opportunities in student access and success, shared governance, financial management, and assessment, among others. In all, among the challenges and strengths identified, values most frequently expressed included inclusion, diversity, equity, social justice, renewing a commitment to community, and addressing structural barriers in various areas of praxis, such as digital divides exposed by COVID-19.

Despite the expression of the values in the final self-study, faculty like Manuel, who was involved in the accreditation process, admitted that sometimes there was a disconnect for people on campus when asked to answer questions about how they were fulfilling the campus’ mission and values. Specifically, Manuel saw a tension in how faculty interpreted their work in light of strategic planning, operational planning, and performance indicators processes. He posited that, for faculty, this language “looks like a corporation” and can be “problematic” for some of them. He provided examples of how campus members could better connect their work to the campus’s mission and plans with better understanding, but also noted some improvements in this regard:

Sometimes people don't know that [by] providing financial aid literacy workshops, let's say you are providing access to higher education. There is always room to

connect those dots, the philosophical or the theoretical framework of the mission, with your concrete action in the ground. I think that we have improved [as an institutional] leader in the last year, trying to build understanding how the strategic plans of the institution represent the manifestation of how the mission gets expressed, and the subsequent operational plan.

Even with this potential tension, there was a consistent sense from collaborators, like Fatima, that the values were “in the core mission,” and could be found clearly in “strategic and operational plans,” and “it's embedded” in the way campus members met and engaged.

Imprinting the Mission Everywhere

Post data collection for this study, the campus started to engage in a new campus strategic plan with the conclusion of the accreditation process. In reviewing the campus' most recent 2017–2022 strategic plan, its mission named six pillars which could be understood as guiding values with foci on access, diversity and multiculturalism, socio-economic mobility, being a community resource, as well as concentrating on academic skill development and lifelong learning. During my visit to the college, I observed that the mission statement was printed on foam board posters and consistently showcased throughout the college across the various buildings. These included buildings at the center of the campus, as well as buildings that were blocks away from the main campus. The mission statement could be found on the main entryways of elevators, along main corridor walls, and near entryways. The prominent visibility of the mission statement across campus made it appear that it was highly valued and there was a commitment to ensuring that it was imprinted in the campus psyche – serving as a constant reminder of its purpose to the campus community.

As I walked through the campus and inquired about the mission statements plastered on the walls, a staff member noted that they were unsure about the extent to which the students knew what the showcased mission statements meant or any of the historical relics displayed on the walls. It seemed disconcerting for them that there were also possibly staff and faculty who also did not know what these artifacts meant or what the campus' roots were. The staff mentioned that they did not want colleagues at the college who saw working at the college as just a job or as a steppingstone. They were emphatic in telling me that they believed that the work of the college was mission-based and that only people who got why they were serving the population they served were the ones that needed to be at the college. Admittedly, the staff member was concerned that there were people who did not align with their institutional mission nor understood their historical roots.

The imprinting of the mission was symbolic, but it also represented what some staff, like the one described above, believed were non-negotiables for working at Cacique. A 2019 staff survey conducted by Cacique's institutional research team found that "the vast majority of staff are familiar with Cacique's institutional goals and the mission." So, while the institutional data stated that there was an understanding of the campus' mission, it did not cancel campus collaborators' apprehensiveness about their colleagues' commitment to the mission and its Latinx roots.

Diversity Over Time, New Cultural Practices Over Time

A central component of Cacique's identity, culture, and praxis involved their focus on the ethnic and racial diversity of the college. As mentioned previously, diversity was written into their institutional mission, accreditation report, and strategic plan, and could be found notably on display in their marketing materials and publications. Conversations about

diversity included the Latinx community's heterogeneity and increase in Latinx people from countries across the Caribbean, as well as Central and South America. However, more often, diversity was discussed in terms of the students from across the globe who were part of the campus' fabric and the way they influenced how campus collaborators felt about and saw the identity of the college. For example, Ernesto noted, "students from wherever they come in the world bring a richness of diversity that to me is really exciting. That is, you know, even within the Latino community. You speak to somebody from Uruguay, Ecuador, Colombia, Mexico, Cuba, you know. And those discussions are just richer than they would be if everybody was the same."

Like Ernesto, most campus collaborators enthusiastically discussed the diversity of the campus, citing that it was what made working at the college feel "most rewarding." For Latinx collaborators, being surrounded by Latinx peoples allowed them to feel a sense of belonging while also embracing the sense of belonging of people from other non-Latin countries. My sense from collaborators was that their college's identity of fighting for educational opportunity for marginalized communities allowed them to more openly adopt immigrants from other countries who were also seeking opportunity despite language and other barriers in adapting to U.S. culture. Josiane's reflection captured what was similarly expressed by others:

That has been tremendous, to be at a place where you can talk Spanish and you're safe, others can speak French, Ukrainian and a whole lot of other languages that pop out at Cacique, where people just feel it's okay. That's also a really tremendous experience, the embrace of diversity, the unspoken but spoken nurturing, a space where diversity is truly admired, respected, nurtured. And then, also the fact that it's

like we're all speaking one language in that sense, that invisible realm where what matters are people, not what you look like, not who you like, not how old you are. So, there's a very familiar atmosphere at the college, and that's very beautiful.

While diversity was a widely accepted feature of the college, some important nuances emerged in the way diversity was enacted and experienced at Cacique. Some of the subthemes revealed through conversations with collaborators included the way diversity led the college to expand how it considered diversity in its everyday culture and practices, the manifestation of diversity through monthly heritage celebrations and a hall of flags, as well as the tensions and assumptions that came with being a diverse campus.

Expanding Considerations

The campus' espoused values around diversity and increased diversification of the student body urged the college to consider what diversity meant in practice. The urgency appeared to be coming from external and internal constituents to strengthen their claims around diversity and better the opportunities set forth for people of diverse faiths, racial/ethnic backgrounds, and gender expressions.

One of the external influences included Cacique's accreditation process, whereby the campus' diversity efforts were discussed. The self-study seemed to help the campus interrogate its work in enacting its values around diversity. According to the self-study, the campus had an office that was focused on "implementing all aspects of the college's respectful climate" in terms of inclusion, diversity, equity, and safety. For example, related to diversity, the study stated that the office had created annual Affirmative Action plans. Other examples included a diversity fellow among the faculty ranks to support curriculum, trainings, and events, as well as courses, academic discussions, and conferences hosted by

the campus that focused on race, gender, and sexuality. The study also stated that the college had two general education competency areas that addressed DEI, and offered two dozen courses that were in alignment with those areas.

As mentioned, I observed discussions on how to implement diversity values through curriculum and intentional mapping of current campus programs during the campus forum. Collaborators, like Manuel, also illuminated the feedback from the external review team and the college's need to be more intentional in how diversity was embedded in academics.

Manuel shared:

[The accreditation body] suggested to be more intentional, to have a conversation about curriculum and diversity. Thinking what is diversity for us today. It's kind of here there, but there is not an intentional programming at curricular level. Even though the liberal arts options have been diversified in the last year. And there are more options, Latin American studies.... Yeah. They just suggested to be more intentional.

Manuel also expressed some skepticism about the extent to which the campus considered diversity issues beyond a need to be in compliance, stating: "I remember going to a meeting about diversity. The administration, do they really care about diversity? Or is something that they have to be in.... One thing is to be in compliance with the university and with federal guidelines, and the intentionality behind diversity." The accreditation self-study seemed to attempt to respond to the intentionality that Manuel brought up by citing the campus' aim to "directly interrogate how to strengthen justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion" in curricula and campus operations as part of their future 5-year strategic plan.

Internally, collaborators discussed many considerations for how diversity was manifesting at the college and should be approached moving forward. For example, multiple collaborators raised the issue of diversity in faith referring, specifically, to the increases in students of Muslim faith shifting from what might have been more students from Catholic and Christian denominations in the past. As a result, the campus had to consider physical space and other offerings to ensure that the needs of this population were met, as described by Mario:

A couple years ago, there was students advocating for prayer room, to be able to pray in a place throughout the day, where they can just go in and pray, Muslim students, and so we had to think about that. How can we create the space that they feel comfortable in, they can use whenever they want to use, and again being welcoming. I remember advocating for halal food at the cafeteria, and kind of negotiating with the cafeteria vendors and said look, “we got a big community that wants to see halal food, but you don't offer it, can you do something about that?” So, it's things like that, where we have to just really listen to the students’ needs.

In addition to faith, another consideration related to how the college confronted anti-Black racism and the murder of Black people in the U.S. to ensure that the campus community had spaces to process these injustices. According to staff member Greg, the response from the campus was inadequate shortly after the murder of George Floyd, though he admitted to more recent activity emerging as the campus began to return from the pandemic:

To be quite frank, there was no response from the entire campus. No leadership message, no anything for any of the student population. And my office actually

started doing something. I won't take credit for it, it was my team, it was the colleagues that worked in my office, put together a weekly Zoom meeting for students to be able to drop in. And we were having candid conversations, they were having candid conversations about the different topics that were being put out in the ethos. And I got some pushback from executive leadership about, maybe that's not something that you want to do because they didn't know how to navigate those waters. Like I said, there's new senior leadership in place now, and there is definitely an emphasis being placed on including more of a rich cultural background with different lectures happening, with different conversations happening, with different celebrations being acknowledged.

Finally, there was critique about the depth of understanding of nuances that came with diversity issues with which the college had to grapple. Manuel shared his impressions of the kind of education that was needed around issues related to gender and sexuality:

I don't see a comprehensive approach and intentionality. Not only thinking the students, only thinking in faculty and staff. Because for example.... And I know that there is room for improvement, but I see that the women and gender months, that I usually tell the people, "Hello, the gender definition has evolved. Because if you see the program for women and gender months is only about white middle-class women issues." Or, "Hello, I recommend you to remove gender from the celebration because it's all about women. You're going to be talking about gender, you need to expand." To be talking about gender, you need to expand the programming. And also, you are talking about women, where are Latin, trans, Black, women in the celebration? So, we need to be more intentional about those definitions.

The considerations raised by campus collaborators seemed to demonstrate an evolution of understandings and concerns about how the campus lived its diversity mission. These expanded considerations also had an impact on new cultural practices for the campus, including how diversity was celebrated.

Celebrating Different Heritages

Faculty, staff, and students discussed the ways that they saw the campus acknowledging and expressing value for its diversity. Among these forms of acknowledgement were the different heritage months that were held. Ana, a student at Cacique, shared her views on how the college celebrated Latinx people and the various cultures represented within the diaspora, stating:

Well, Cacique has many activities for Latinos. They are always celebrating, for example, they celebrate Puerto Rican independence. They always send emails for Dominicans' independence. They're always concerned about even our religious practices. They are open that you can celebrate whatever is in your culture. Not only Latino, all the other cultures that go to Cacique. They embrace and they don't ... how can I put this? They don't criticize or put you on the spot if you embrace your culture.

Ana's reflection suggested that Latinx-centering through celebrations did not exclude the celebration of other cultures represented at the college. One of the ways that collaborators saw the celebration of other cultures beyond just Latinx cultures was through a prominent physical space on campus – a dedicated hall of flags.

The hall of flags was a consistent artifact of the college that was highlighted by collaborators. In asking students what I would need to see and know if I were a student coming to the college, Cris emphatically described the hall:

Well, if I were giving a tour, I think the first thing I would show is the [X] Building because you can see all the flags there, and it represents everybody's culture and it makes you feel like, "Oh, you will not be discriminated here." Because you will see everybody, like every race would come there and get together. Doesn't matter of your color. It doesn't matter of your race. It doesn't matter who you like, it doesn't matter, anything. For me, every time I look at the [X] Building and just stand right there in the middle and see all the flags, at least we can say we are united.

Likewise, Ana, who was in a different focus group, stated, "they have all those flags hanging out in that lobby. That says a lot, because they care. They could just hang the United States flag and that's it." Cris' and Ana's comments demonstrated the power of physical spaces in creating feelings of belonging for people of diverse backgrounds and a recognition that it was a choice of the campus to feature its diversity as a signal of their attention and "care."

I was able to visit the [X] Building during my campus site observations. The [X] Building was an academic building that also housed the campus gym and recreational facilities, the theater, student activities and student club offices, classrooms, and faculty offices. This building was filled with art throughout the facilities. The main gallery/atrium of the building that Cris described featured flags from several countries that hung prominently at every level of the six-floor atrium. One member shared with me that the college made an event of each time a new country was represented among the student body through the addition of their flag in the hall. In the same hall, there was also a large installation with several artistic pieces in 2D and 3D by a local Puerto Rican artist. The experience of being surrounded by so many vivid colors through art and floors of flags was a tremendous

experience of belonging, even for me as the researcher visiting this beautiful, thoughtfully crafted space.

Tensions and Assumptions

While revelations about embracing and celebrating diversity evoked positive experiences for collaborators who were members of the college, there were also some tensions that were expressed by both Latinx and non-Latinx members. On the one hand, collaborators felt that since the campus had always been diverse and supportive of Black and Brown people, it was ahead of contemporary movements toward diversity, equity, and inclusion. Staff member Josiane considered that the college had adapted well to its increased diversity over time, while still retaining an acknowledgement for its Latinx servingness. She explained:

If only in recent years as more of identity politics have drawn more of a request for attention right, but that hasn't really impacted Cacique that much only because the institution from its beginning has been so diverse, we really don't have that need to catch up, it is sincere what the college did at a time where there were African Americans, Caribbeans, Latin Americans, Africans. That's the urban milieu of The City that's it, so the south Metropolis is a hub for many of these immigrant communities, so it never, again it never had to catch up to DEI, it just has always been that right, and within that 50 years, on it has always interacted, moved around, but it has throughout most of the 50 years served predominantly Latino populations. Overall, it has never really been an issue, people are very aware of it, people that go to the college are very aware of it, the college has adapted, and especially through the

pandemic, what are the other constituencies and other diverse groups that we have that we can engage in conversation.

The assumptions about the campus' comfortability with diversity based on its historic population were critiqued and complicated by non-Latinx collaborators like Joan and Greg. While they acknowledged that the college's faculty and staff were diverse, the college's Latinx identity and history could be challenging at times because of the assumptions that had been built about what it meant to be a diverse campus. Greg described feelings of exclusion because of the campus' Latinx-centeredness despite its espoused embrace of diversity. He mentioned:

Those that want to participate in activities, want to learn, want to celebrate, but I don't speak Spanish, but I don't know all customs and cultural elements. And at times, you can definitely be excluded, at times, you can definitely be outside looking in, coming into a room when a meeting's going on, everyone's speaking in Spanish, you walk in, it gets silent. There are moments like that, that'll happen.

Greg suggested that cultural barriers did not have a deep impact on him, but would cause awkward interactions with colleagues at times, noting: "There have been times where I've had people come to me and tell me I should learn to speak Spanish, and that it's best for me to speak that for students and my staff. And if I don't, that could be problematic." Related to organizational culture or normalizing the Spanish language, Joan, a faculty member, shared that when she first joined her academic department, there were perhaps some expectations for her bilingualism, "at first people were like, you're teaching in the English department, do you speak Spanish? I would get that."

Despite the earlier expectations placed on Joan, she expressed that she felt welcomed in her department and had opportunities to advance in her career at the college; however, she stated that this was not always the experience of others. She explained: “I’ve always felt very secure about being Black here, and that’s not necessarily what others may have experienced over time, there are people to this day who basically think that at times they have been passed over for positions, promotions because others were favored over them.”

While diversity appeared to be a central part of the college’s identity and a point of pride, the tensions and assumptions described by collaborators provided a nuanced way of thinking about diversity issues. As the college continued to grow its focus on diversity as a praxis, it seemed that collaborators’ reflections signaled a tension in maintaining Cacique’s identity while bringing in others, and possibly exploring the evolution of its identity over time. In particular, the critiques of the college’s Latinx-centeredness by non-Latinx collaborators may have revealed tensions in their ability to see or feel the potential expansiveness of the college’s approach to Latinx-centeredness.

Chapter Summary

In summary, findings for *Ágape* College and Cacique Community College demonstrated how they enacted their organizational identity, culture, and praxis depending on their collaborators’ perspectives and organizational context. For *Ágape*, some of the key themes included how Latinx people’s assets and values were represented through ownership as a philosophy and act of resistance; a means to emphasize the needs, desires, and assets of the Latinx community; and in how people were valued. Secondly, participants revealed a dedication to honoring the dignity of people through respect and belief in people and the communities; humility in knowledge sharing; and their commitment to uplifting the

deservingness of Latinx people and people living in poverty through clean, beautiful physical spaces. Thirdly, collaborators unveiled their understandings of faith as an institutional guide manifested through having “a heart of service” for people, following a “special calling” in their teaching, the fusion of faith into the curriculum, the inclusion of all faiths, and their perceptions about the college’s links to the Latinx church community. Finally, the review of documents and collaborator narratives showed that the college’s unique model of integrated roles and how they appeared to encourage equity allowed for greater knowledge of and relationships with students, and the role of part-time faculty within the integrated model.

Regarding Cacique Community College, themes highlighted the way they rooted historical activism as central to their identity by remembering people of the past, preserved Puerto Rican culture and historical relics, and felt nostalgia for what was. Findings also revealed how Cacique’s planning processes connected to values, such as through participation and inclusion of members, multiple venues for values-based planning, and imprinting the mission across the campus. Finally, Cacique’s increased diversity led to new cultural practices over time. Diversity issues were nuanced through expanded considerations, heritage month celebrations and dedicated spaces, as well as some of the tensions and assumptions that were revealed by campus collaborators about being a diverse campus.

CHAPTER 7

LATINX CENTERING AS SHARED AND NUANCED REALITIES—PART 1

As a study that sought to learn about how Latinx-founded institutions enact Latinx assets through the organizational context, the reporting on findings across the two cases is a tool for understanding how and what this looks like through overarching themes that cut across Ágape College and Cacique Community College. The overarching themes encompass several shared findings that emerged through the analysis, while also reporting on some nuanced experiences of the colleges within these common themes. There are 11 themes reported in two parts, across two chapters—7 and 8. Thus, this chapter includes the first six of the 11 themes with several subthemes that further explain shared and more nuanced findings related to which assets the institutions promoted and centered; how they institutionalized and built upon these assets as part of their organizational identity, culture, and praxis, as well as how the institutions and Latinx communities contributed to and supported each other. The six themes include: (1) a *Targeted but Inclusive Mission*, (2) the *Importance of Place: Institutions of El Barrio*, (3) a *Community Relationship of Mutuality and Commensalism*, (4) *Naming Strengths in the Midst of Challenges*, (5) *Normalizing Bilingualism and Translanguaging*, and (6) *College as Home: Familismo and Familia as an Asset and Practice*.

A Targeted but Inclusive Mission

While Chapter 5 discussed the founding and current missions of the colleges as described through the document review, the theme described in this section relates to collaborators' perspectives on the approach and execution of the mission by the colleges. As discussed in previous chapters, the colleges were founded with missions to prepare and serve the Latinx community while also being inclusive of people from other diverse backgrounds. To further understand how the colleges enacted targeted but inclusive missions at the colleges, this theme explores what about this mission motivated collaborators to engage. Additional subthemes include a focus on building social mobility, such as providing a "college prep" experience, and finally, on contributing to the community's leadership and workforce development.

A Motivating Factor for Engagement

In discussing their perspectives of the mission and values of their respective institutions, faculty, staff, community partners, and people who were around from the early founding years also shared what motivated them to join their college community and continue their engagement. For faculty, some of the sentiments expressed included being drawn to the institution's track record in the community and desire to "join forces" with people who had a "similar vision," as reflected by Francisco (Ágape College, staff-faculty-mentor). He asserted that Latinx people "are driving the vision, the vision was about serving our community, and therefore, we are at the table where the direction and the decisions are made." Faculty and staff alike expressed a motivation for working with the kinds of populations served by the college's mission, suggesting that focusing on certain populations made them feel like they could have a greater impact on their growth. For example, Mario

(Cacique, staff) expressed a sense of gratification and excitement because of an alignment of personal values that made him feel “at home” at the college. He further explained the sense of social impact that came with working at the college because of its targeted mission, stating: “working within a community that there is a lot of inequity, it was really nice to be able to kind of work with folks and be able to figure out how to fill some of those gaps and services and needs that they don't necessarily have access to and trying to figure out how to get them from A to Z.”

The social impacts noted by Mario also emerged in discussions with community partners and founding collaborators who were motivated to engage with the colleges because of the populations they served. For example, Nelson (Ágape College, community partner) had an appreciation for the college’s targeted focus and described the population served as non-traditional students, “people who are in the community in various tracks and different roles, older. And so, they are an important segment of the community.” The targeted mission and how palpable it felt to collaborators like Larry (Ágape College, founding member) was also a motivating factor for engagement. Larry had been a leader in higher education who entered the field because of his desire to contribute to social change and human thriving through working with students. He emphasized:

If you hang around Ágape at all, you're going to be inspired by what they're doing in students' lives. So, it's pretty easy to get on board missionally if you're into higher ed in the first place with what Ágape is doing, which is a kind of unique incarnation of higher education. I mean, I'm in it for changing lives, and so it's pretty easy to be enthused about their work.

The enthusiasm from Larry and others seemed to be as much about the targeted mission, as it was about the impact the colleges had on Latinx and other marginalized students' trajectories.

“An Opportunity Institution,” Building Social Mobility

The colleges were founded and continued to focus on the goal of advancing the Latinx community and their local constituents through education for social mobility. Collaborators across roles discussed how their colleges served some of the poorest communities within their states, and embedded in their missions was a goal to “achieve socioeconomic mobility for communities that have traditionally been excluded from higher education,” as put by Josiane (Cacique staff). Therefore, collaborators saw that their purpose was to work collectively to ensure that students could “successfully transfer and that they somehow manage to get meaningful job employment opportunities or internships that would then elevate them and their families out of, a little bit out of the poverty line,” as suggested by Fatima (Cacique staff).

The assurance of mobility for students through the colleges' educational mission was considered important because of the kind of opportunities that could be opened for students, their families, the broader Latinx community, and the local communities served by the college. Nelson (Ágape College, community partner) discussed the kind of capacity building that student social mobility could bring to communities, stating:

[I] see an effort to empower our community by helping its residents increase the capacity to be good community members in all facets, from being more knowledgeable, to being more able to elevate the income of their family and the living standards of their family.

The focus on income and employability was especially resounding with students like Cesar (Cacique) who brought up multiple times throughout the focus group conversation the value of education for the purpose of socioeconomic mobility. He discussed concrete examples experienced by peers and him with this part of the college's mission:

We hear stories all the time. At least Ana and I do because we're in the DH [dental hygiene] program of students who, they graduate and then they do very, very well post-graduation, they have jobs lined up for them or they go to offices and they're making good money. So, as far as them saying, or at least from my eyes, them saying that they can help you socioeconomically to have a good transition from go to school and then actually have your score matter. I think that's a good example to me to say people graduate and they do get jobs. Well, at least for the DH program, the employment rate is 99% or something like that. So, they're doing what they're saying their vision and mission is.

Since the colleges wanted to help elevate the income and living standards of students, families, and communities, it would seem to make sense why so many of their academic programs were geared toward fields that promised a greater return on investment. In reviewing the degree programs available both on their websites and academic catalogues, and reflecting on conversations with collaborators, it was evident that the colleges had a heavy focus on STEM programs and health careers. In fact, it is known from the founding of Cacique Community College that they were meant to address healthcare needs of their community and brought on a physician as their first college president. Also, Ágape College had a staff-faculty-mentor who oversaw STEM not only for the college, but also for their K–12 schools and neighborhood-focused STEM offerings.

However, while the colleges were invested in being places of “affirmation of our culture, of people, and a gateway, a ramp, a doorway, by which we are making it possible for them to play on a level surface,” as declared Benjamín (Ágape College, founder), there was a recognition that opportunity through the colleges was relative. Benjamín reflected:

Let's be clear, even the college is not a level service because colleges are stratified relative to opportunity, I can't give them what Harvard gives them. I don't have the bankroll. So, what we can give them is a credential that offers them an opportunity for advancement and continued education and, more importantly, a realization that they can.

Despite the limited resources of the colleges, collaborators felt confident about the role of the colleges in advancing student life circumstances, where they could “move on to better jobs, better pay, and better life for themselves and their families,” as Alma (Cacique) affirmed. Collaborators saw the colleges as an “on-ramp” and prep-space for students’ futures.

“College Prep” for Bachelor’s and Beyond

The idea of the colleges serving as a preparatory space emerged from collaborators as having a dual meaning. On the one hand, there was a recognition that because students were arriving at the colleges from “flawed” K–12 educational systems, they were playing the role of supporting student preparation for college-level work. This required collaborators to “lean into those experiences” as Pablo (Ágape College, faculty) put it. The sense of embracing the students and realizing that the approach to serving them might need to be different was also a common response. Benjamín (Ágape College, founder) emphatically stated:

It's not a question of capacity. They go and succeed in whatever it is Waterstone does to their own. It's a question of getting them to the place where they understand [that]

they can, and they understand how to do it, so, you just don't walk into college and have never been in an academic setting that demanded much for you and just succeed. We provide, in a sense, a 2-year cushion for the creating of the skill sets and the requirements to be effective in 4-year institutions.

Benjamín's last statement spoke to the second meaning of serving as a "college prep," which was building up students to continue at 4-year institutions and beyond. Students like Tito (Ágape College) verified how the colleges supported their comfort and development in seeing themselves beyond the 2-year college experience. The class sizes also contributed to allowing for the kind of preparation needed to continue at a larger 4-year institution. He shared: "Due to the experiences here, I feel like, if I am to continue on to bigger universities, I would feel pretty okay talking to the professors there no matter how big the classes." The on-ramp to a 4-year experience was logical given that Ágape College (only) and Cacique (primarily) offered associate degrees. For Ágape College, their partnership with Waterstone University allowed for a nearly seamless path for entry into Waterstone's bachelor's degree programs, though students also transferred to institutions across the region.

A nuance to the "college prep" role of the colleges was the extent to which collaborators considered the colleges as mostly a direct route to jobs over a path to continued higher education that could lead to more than just a job but also a long-lasting career. This nuance, which presented a dilemma to some, was most evident among Cacique collaborators. For example, Greg (staff) posited:

I think the dream that is pitched to students is, the associate degree will change your life. Will it change your family's life? Because once again, in the student body that comes in, we have a large portion of them that English is not their first language, so

literally going to college is teaching them English, and being part of an ESL program ... so the dream is the associate degree, rather than the dream could be the baccalaureate or the doctoral-level degree. And maybe that's not emphasized mainly because we're just trying to get them to graduate with the associate degree, so maybe by default you're setting the bar lower.

In contrast, other collaborators like Ernesto (community partner/past staff member) stated that, during his time working with the college, they tried to ensure building career opportunities for students that would not “relegate” them to “second class citizenship.” He gave examples of programs like accounting and registered nursing as pathways that the college had, which could lead to bachelor’s and master's degrees. He said: “I don't want my students coming back to me in 5 years to get another degree because the job we prepared them for is now obsolete.”

Ernesto’s perspective of building life-long learners and opportunities for further mobility beyond the associate’s spoke to the college’s mission, yet the perspective of Cacique being a place focused on employment after 2 years was the most predominant. Santiago (community partner) admitted: “Here are some students who go to a 2-year college and then they move on to a 4-year for their profession. But Cacique is basically preparing students for almost like a job.” Nonetheless, community collaborators like Santiago and others did not dispute the welcomed contributions that the college was making to the community’s enhanced workforce.

Contributing to the Community’s Leadership and Workforce

The colleges’ targeting of Latinx and local communities revealed positive perspectives from collaborators regarding the colleges’ contributions to their community’s

leadership and workforce. Elena (Ágape College, staff-faculty-mentor) discussed that because Latinx people were underrepresented in certain growing STEM fields, the college was focused on ensuring “a voice at the table,” which was also an evident focus at Cacique. Collaborators like Santiago (Cacique, community partner) perceived that the college was “doing what they’re supposed to be doing,” which was “giving education to community residents” from the Metropolis.

Santiago and Alma (founding years, community partners) provided specific examples of instances where they were seeing Latinx students in the field, in their local communities. They both shared times that they went to their local hospitals and received care from Cacique graduates. For example, Santiago went in for a sonogram and was gratified by the “patient-friendly style” of his sonographer, noting: “[She’s] una [one] Latina, got out of Cacique, and she’s working in a local community hospital in the South Metropolis. Yeah. I’m sure there’s many like her.” Similarly, Alma spoke enthusiastically about her encounter with a Latina nurse that recently treated her in the emergency room. She shared:

She works full time, and goes, because, right now, she's like an intern type of thing, and she has a child at home, and her mother helps her because the mother lives nearby. But, I mean, if she's in her mid-20s, or somewhere around the 26–27, I was so thrilled and that's the second time that I've been in a hospital where I came across a student from Cacique, and that's a great feeling.

Alma shared that she was so excited, that she took the nurse’s name down so that she could share it back with the college that they had an alumnus working at that hospital, a sign of the pride instilled by the college’s contributions to local talent development.

As the Cacique local community continued to experience changes, collaborators seemed conscious about the implications of the growth of businesses in the area. Collaborators at Cacique revealed the need for the college to ensure that students could access not just service roles within the local employment base, but also opportunities for leadership roles. Fatima asserted: “we have to make sure that they’re paying our students living wages as well. Then, not only to have our students represented in the service tiers, but also give our students the opportunities to be in managerial positions or in executive level positions when they do have their credentials.” The focus on the colleges’ surrounding areas was an important part of both colleges’ identities and was further illuminated in their culture and praxis.

Importance of Place: Institutions of el Barrio

A salient theme was the colleges’ connection to the community, discussed here from the perspective of the centrality of their physical place or location. In this sense, community was defined as the place/neighborhood(s) where the colleges were housed and where the people served by the colleges lived. Since their physical place included majority populations of Latinx people and other People of Color and contained contextual factors that had an impact on the people they served, place was a central component of their identity and shaped their existence. Some of the Latinx administrators/staff/faculty who grew up in the neighborhoods of the colleges or similar urban cities used being from “el barrio,” which is slang for “the neighborhood” or “the hood,” as a personal identifier and way of describing their own ontologies and epistemologies. The founders of Ágape College were explicit in stating their goal to build institutions of el barrio for people of el barrio, as they themselves identified as having come from el barrio.

One of the reasons that place was so important was that the institutions were created by and for people from el barrio and were built in those neighborhoods alongside residents of the community. For example, Alvaro (Ágape College, founder) described the college as “a neighborhood school,” since nearly all their students came from the neighborhood of Core Park, where the college was located. The colleges were also considered unique because of their neighborhood-based locations and because they were situated in some of the most socio-economically challenged places where institutions of their kind were not expected to be built and thrive. Carl (Ágape College, founding member) was one of the individuals who described the uniqueness and amazement at the existence of the college based on the neighborhood’s context. He articulated: “In a sense that you can get a college education at [street name] and Core Park [neighborhood], ... in the heart of North Core City, it’s amazing! If you go to a neighborhood in, especially in 2000, and put yourself on a path to get a college education, it’s unbelievable.” Students like Cesar (Cacique) shared the significance of having access to a college in the neighborhood, which included several benefits. He named the following examples:

You can save money; you go to a school that you live by. You don't have to pay room and board. You can walk to school. There is a program that helps with metro card fair if you live too far. And I think it does help the people in the community a lot who want to attend college and not be too far from home.

The urban context of their place was also what collaborators considered as having made the colleges unique and relevant. Matías (Ágape College, community member) said that people at every level of the college, from students to administrators, had ongoing discussions on the value of Ágape College’s relevance in the context of place. He shared

about the discussions: “I don't know how to define this, but the sense of urbanization. We are people of the city, and we love it and we're not trying to change that. And I think that's the value of the institution, as well.”

To better understand how these institutions of el barrio focused on and related to their place, three subthemes emerged, including: (1) the culture and practices involved in targeting local communities; (2) how el barrio's changing demographics were changing the “us” of who the colleges serve; and (3) the realities and unpredictable futures posed by the gentrification of their barrios.

Targeting Local Communities

Both colleges' campus mission statements described serving their surrounding communities. Cacique's explicitly stated its mission to serve the South Metropolis. When speaking to collaborators, the focus of their college on place seemed to take precedence over a focus on Latinx people themselves. Perhaps since the places served by the colleges had been historically Latinx-majority populations, there may have been an assumption that focusing on place was equivalent to focusing on Latinx peoples. Elena's (Ágape College, staff-faculty-mentor) reflection provided some insight:

I don't know if we are as much Latino-focused, as we are community-focused, so it's a representation of the community that we're located in, yeah. We're also serving immigrants coming into the country. We have the English Institute for those that may not speak English well. So, I think again, maybe there's a little bit of a change from Latino-focused to be more community-centered and community-focused.

Elena's last remark spoke to a targeting of local communities, which was a feature of both the colleges. Her colleague Francisco (staff-faculty-mentor) said the “us” for the college was

the community around it and stated that there were approximately six zip codes around the college that they focused on. He also brought up the heterogeneity of the Latinx community and alluded to how this fit into their broader community focus, stating: “It’s a people group that is made up of everything whether it’s white, Black, Asian, Native American, and everything in between.” Similarly, at Cacique, staff discussed the use of five zip codes as their target community. Also, Cacique was receiving students from two other urban cities that were accessible to their college by train, though they remained focused and continued to enroll most of their students from their immediate community of South Metropolis.

Targeting el barrio and surrounding local communities revealed some nuanced experiences, particularly for Ágape College. Ágape College collaborators shared some of the challenges posed by el barrio and some of the ways that they were looking to drive holistic community development to address these challenges. Both colleges’ collaborators also discussed the way they tried to change narratives for students from el barrio.

Living Through Challenges Posed by el Barrio

Ágape College collaborators across every role, except for students, described numerous challenges that came with living and being an institution of el barrio. Collaborators talked about the ongoing drugs, crime, murder, domestic violence, and extreme poverty that existed in their barrio, citing themselves as one of the poorest Hispanic communities in America. They consistently talked about how difficult it was to live in their community and the kind of trauma that Latinx people and community members brought with them to Ágape College. Benjamín illustrated the challenges and how the college attempted to confront them through compassion and creating a nurturing environment. He described:

We're in the barrio, it is what it is. I mean, people get shot and they die, you know. So, we've had kids who, young men or women, who've been impacted by violence. So, you know, most of them don't die. They come back to us broken, so you have to embrace people. You gotta find a way to help them deal with their challenges, which are large. I wish I could say that that's not a common story, but that's part of the mandate. It's part of the requirement of running an institution in the barrio, you got to deal with the reality.

I heard several related stories through the interviews and focus groups, but also during my in-person visit to Ágape College. To illustrate, on day two of my site visit, I stayed in the college late into the night to observe their classes. In the last class I observed that night, the professor spoke with me in front of the students about the violence in the neighborhood and cautioned me to be careful leaving the campus, to which a Black man student in the class reacted through some chuckles and rigorous nodding, in agreement. The professor showed me a phone application that was used by locals to report active crimes in the neighborhood. During that time, the phone application showed a woman being assaulted just 600 feet from the Ágape building complex. The faculty went on to share their views on the increases of crime and violence in the neighborhoods because of the mayor's and police chief's neglectful policies that steered police away from intervening in low-petty crime. I sensed their frustration and critique of the disinvestment by city officials—to which, again, the student nodded in agreement. The faculty member shared a personal incident where they had been stalked by an individual in the parking lot. The building security officers intervened to ensure the individual could not get into the building, which they attempted on three occasions. The faculty and the students advised me to take a specific route back to my hotel

and suggested that I ask the security officer to walk me to my car, which was one of the services the security was known to provide to people in the building.

I also had the opportunity to walk and drive around Ágape's barrio and adjacent neighborhoods. The college's immediate neighborhood housed a bustling business district, which I learned was part of Ágape's economic development strategy. The business district was rich with Latinx-owned restaurants and storefronts. At the same time, the barrio had a significant number of vacant lots, boarded up and abandoned buildings, empty and run-down factory mills, homes in significant disrepair, many potholes that made it difficult to drive safely, and lots of visible debris on the streets nearly everywhere we went. The neighborhood to the south of Core Park appeared even more challenged with many white, Black, and some Latinx people consuming illegal substances, namely heroine, on the sidewalks and streets in broad daylight. It seemed as if the use and selling of substances went on for several city blocks, even though a police station could be found nearby with iron bars against its windows and doors. Anecdotally, the community person I was with during my drive through this neighborhood shared that a lot of the white heroine substance users that could be seen in the area had come from outside communities to buy drugs, got addicted, and stayed. The community person also shared how many of their middle-class families still supported them, even while living on the streets, and that this could be noticed by the difference in their apparel.

Despite these challenges posed by el barrio, collaborators spoke of the assets that could be found there. Matías (community partner) gave a few examples of what this looked and felt like to him:

Our city can be one of the toughest cities to do business, to open up your own nonprofits, and open up your business. The wages, the wage tax, the business taxes, compared to other major cities are really, really high, from what I understand. But some were very daring. [They] will do an ice cream stand, a piragua [shaved ice dessert] stand, selling guineos [bananas], and so on, until they're licensed. In many other communities you can't quote unquote get away with that. I think another thing is we, I think, as a people, one of the things that I see is we tend to celebrate a lot, there's a lot of block closures for the kids to play in the streets during the summer. There's always all kinds of birthday parties that you drive by, people in their balcones [balconies] announcing somebody's birthday, somebody's graduation. The park is always open every Sunday. There's softball, there's music, we like to celebrate. And poverty doesn't stop much of our folks from celebrating.

The asset-based view of the community that Matías described was also what seemed to drive Ágape Inc. and the college to consider how their education agenda had to and could be tied to a holistic community transformation model.

Driving a Holistic, Eco-Systemic Community Development Agenda

As described in Chapter 5, Ágape College's context was unique in that it was a college that was created and housed within the nonprofit Ágape Inc. Thus, the way Ágape College did higher education was wrapped around a larger community development agenda that ran through the entire Ágape Inc. organization. Nearly every member discussed the college as part of a holistic approach to addressing issues of el barrio and ensuring a thriving future for the community. A review of Ágape Inc. documents such as a chart of their programs and companies showed that the nonprofit housed thirteen institutions or programs

in service of the North Core City Latinx community. Some of the institutions and programs included workforce development, immigration and legal services, housing and economic development, real-estate holding companies, a community land trust, music and education programs, a local youth initiative, the arts center, a 501(c4) advocacy arm, pre-K–12 charter schools, and the college. Benjamín stated that the creation of the college was “an important dimension to the stability of the barrio.” He further described the interconnected nature of the educational work they were doing to the improvement of Latinx people in the community.

He added:

The largest expression of our work today is education. Again, if you think about the value of education, the correlation between education, the correlations of work, the correlation of housing, to stability, and to providing homes. And spaces for people to better and improve their lives, that's pretty straight up.

Collaborators saw the college as being contextualized and influenced by the community as a “Communiversality” as put by Paul (founder). Therefore, it was difficult to separate the work of the college from the broader community development, which had been the project of *Ágape* since its inception.

Ágape's purpose of driving holistic change in the community led to the creation of a Core Park Neighborhood Plan in 2022, which sought to “weave education” into every stage of the neighborhood's revitalization by connecting education more intentionally with areas such as housing, employment, and other areas, to build up the assets of the community. The goal has been from the start to ensure that Latinx people could “live, raise a family, operate a business, work, learn, worship, and play.” The 175-page plan detailed a community co-created process, including a proposed community education road map that started from birth

through adulthood and healthy aging. Additionally, in 2022, Ágape drafted what appeared to be a complementary plan for what they called an opportunity community model (OCM). The OCM was defined as one that “builds on the assets of the neighborhood” to create access for people to feel “a sense of belonging, empowerment, and ownership; and take on leadership roles.” Within, they described the community’s assets, including the college and institutions that “are operated by and reflect the community.” Furthermore, they re-established a commitment to building “Hispanic-owned and operated institutions with long-term value, sustainability and permanence that prioritize the needs of the Hispanic community.”

The holistic eco-systemic approach of Ágape Inc. and the college was appreciated by collaborators from the college, including students, who seemed well versed in Ágape’s programs and interconnections with the college. For example, Andy described the way he felt that Ágape College did not work to “just benefit themselves as a university, but to help out the community,” listing examples of outreach to local businesses and efforts to mitigate heat islands in the barrio through planting trees. One of the clear motivators for the holistic model was to change the narrative of el barrio and ensure that students and families could see and contribute toward the assets of their community.

Changing Narratives for Students from el Barrio

Collaborators revealed some of the deficit-based narratives about el barrio brought on by people from surrounding communities that may not have had a relationship to the college or community. Nelson (Ágape College, community partner) emphasized that those perceptions were countered by being associated with the college. He shared:

There are perceptions of us as being a bunch of savages, being the bad lands, et cetera, by people from outside our community. But again, I'm just trying to say the

overall impression of students enrolled in the college and working with the college is not that. Actually, being associated with the college enhances the perception of those people, because you can tell that they have learned some things.

Students like Tito (Ágape College) discussed how the negative narratives also came from within the Latinx community and how the college tried to change these impressions through a narrative of Latinx people's empowerment. He explained:

If someone has a bad mindset like, "Oh, I'm Hispanic. I ain't going to do much in life. We're in poverty, this entire place is in poverty, we're never leaving this place." They [Ágape College] actively go out to try and change these mindsets. Not to think of us as, how to say, disadvantaged, although they definitely do try to help with as many different areas as possible. Posters all throughout the school, there's a bunch of programs we can try and take part in anything to help the household or help free up your time to get you here. Even if you can't personally come here, they have tutors that they have access to where you can send in your stuff. So yeah, pretty much just changing your mindset and trying to get people to recognize that, hey, even though we're in this part of the area that's mainly Hispanic, even though the type of view we may have here may not be the best of ourselves, we can be the driving force to change that by going here and improving upon ourselves and doing more.

Tito's reflection on changing mindsets was at the core of what others at the college also expressed were the college's and their role in changing the narrative. Gemma (Ágape College, staff-faculty-mentor) suggested: "We believe in educating and raising indigenous leaders that will come into the community and change." This sentiment was similarly shared by Matías (Ágape College, community partner) who talked about the common phenomenon

of people leaving urban communities to get a college education and never returning. He stated:

We're trying to reverse that trend, that success can and is found here in the community. The transformation of our communities is not going to change unless we believe and we are part of that change. There's way too much that happens where we emulate the culture by moving out, and leaving a vacuum, leaving our people behind.

It seemed that the ideas expressed by Gemma and Matías were also what drove some of the passion of faculty who were from el barrio. Like Rob, who described his fascination and commitment to teaching because he wanted to “be able to give a different perspective and insight away from the streets that we’re from, from the neighborhoods we’re from.”

There was an overall sense from Ágape College collaborators that there was a different story that needed to be told about the possibilities within their community and the ways that students could grow through their college education to contribute toward their community’s success.

While this subtheme was not as prevalent in conversations with people at Cacique, one member, Joan (faculty) provided an example of a curricular practice that was seeking to change the narrative of their city from deficit- to asset-based. According to Joan, the college required students to take a course called Metropolis Beautiful, which incorporated general education competencies while students got to explore more deeply their city of Metropolis.

As she has taught this course in the past, she shared:

The first class, I might say to the class, “I say Metropolis ... you say...” and then they'll respond “crime, dirty,” and a lot of negativity and, the more you get students to talk, they'll often at the beginning of the semester talk about leaving the Metropolis,

and that by leaving the Metropolis they would have demonstrated success. So, my goal is shifting the course, talking about values, is that at the end of the semester, they're going to be able to say that I can make my community work, and I must give back to that community, and not try and look for an exit out...

Changing narratives of el barrio seemed to be about dispelling the myths of students having to leave their communities in order to thrive. Instead, collaborators suggested that their communities were assets and places where thriving was possible through the contributions of graduating students as future leaders of the community.

Changing Demographics: Changing the Us

A prevailing subtheme that emerged from conversations with collaborators about the colleges' place-based work had to do with the changing demographics of el barrio. For Ágape College, the changes reflected a shift from Puerto Rican to more pan-Latinx with more Dominicans, Mexicans, and Central Americans from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. Participants shared a sense of commonality with "people of Hispanic descent" because of the language and colonial histories. The changing demographics for Ágape College meant that their "us" was inclusive of a broader Latinx diaspora than when originally founded over two decades before. However, the demographic changes within the Latinx population also led collaborators like Nelson (community partner) to consider the unique needs of Latinx people coming from different countries and with different histories of living in the U.S. mainland. He posed:

With the Puerto Rican community, I'm Puerto Rican, I'm very proud of it, you have issues related to educational attainment because of the bad state of our public education system. With the new immigrants, they may have had a better public

education experience. Some of them may have even had college experience, but to them, the whole Americanization, the English, et cetera. So, it's kind of like everybody's in the same boat. They have to deal with their weaknesses and try to hone them at Ágape.

Like Ágape College, Cacique had seen an increase of Latinx people from the Caribbean as well as Central and South America though, according to collaborators, their numbers of Puerto Rican peoples have decreased even more greatly than Ágape College's. According to collaborators, Cacique had also seen an increase in Jewish students and African immigrant communities which, unlike Latinx people, were less likely to share a common language. While at Cacique, "us" had been Puerto Rican and Black from the start, and the issues of Black Americans and African people required nuanced considerations for how the college supported their increasingly multi-lingual, multicultural, multi-racial, and multi-ethnic constituency.

Collaborators of the colleges both seemed to welcome the changes in demographics and embraced how the changing community was defining who the "us" was at their college. Mario (Cacique, staff) spoke about the growing West African community at Cacique, stating: "That community has kind of gotten bigger, which is really wonderful, because I think change is always great, and as communities evolve, it's really nice to see." Because the colleges' missions sought to provide opportunities for historically marginalized people coming from el barrio, there seemed to be an automatic sense of embrace for the changing racial and ethnic demographics of people who shared the experience of living in el barrio. Benjamín (Ágape College, founder) summarized the experience as "once you start living in the barrio and the barrio changes, all the people in the barrio are us."

The changing “us” of student demographics, however, called up two potential threats to the identity of the colleges. One of these was at Cacique, where collaborators like Rosa (founding member) considered that the college’s distinctness might be challenged. She stated: “I think that Cacique is beginning to look a lot like any other college within the Metro Uni system. It is serving basically the same students, you know. The uniqueness of Cacique is still attached to the fact that it is a Latino sort of known college.” By using the word “attached,” I presumed she meant the strong historic ties of the college to its activist history and the continued feel within the college that it was still known as a Latinx-identified college. However, there was an underlying question from participants about what the impact of the demographic changes would be on the future of the college in terms of its Puerto Rican-Latinx identity.

The second potential threat to the colleges’ Latinx identity related to the changes in demographics of the colleges’ personnel. When speaking to non-Latinx collaborators, the shifts in staff/faculty demographics was seen as a positive shift; however, this shift was met with more mixed reviews from Latinx collaborators. Also, not all the shifts were necessarily tilting toward more People of Color; in fact, at Cacique, this meant increases of white faculty and staff members. Joan shared:

We're one of the largest departments of the college, and when I first came in, it was pretty much diverse in terms of African Americans, Asians, Latinos, of course predominantly, and whites in the actual department. Right now, the demographics, there are only two Blacks full time and Latinx full time and the rest are pretty white, and we're talking about 28 faculty members.

Moving Away from Spanish-Language Dominant, Adult Learners

The colleges both saw shifts in their Spanish-language and adult-learner demographics. In both cases, collaborators shared how, at the beginning, the colleges served majority Spanish-language populations and many learners who had received their primary education outside of their local districts, for example, back home in Puerto Rico. However, el barrio now reflected multi-generational Latinx peoples with students who were arriving at the college already speaking English. This change in Spanish language-dominant populations had made the colleges shift their Spanish-language tracks, further discussed later in the theme about the colleges' bilingualism and translanguaging cultures and praxis. Collaborators revealed that many of the second- and third-generation Latinx students they served were being educated in the local school districts and graduating in the U.S., rather than coming as high school graduates from Puerto Rico or the Dominican Republic, for example. Manuel (Cacique, faculty) reflected on how the generational changes of Latinx students also had an impact on how students saw their identity. He posited:

Sometimes, now we have a student who were born and raised here in the United States even though they identify themselves as Dominican or Puerto Rican. Different when you had the students who were born and raised in Puerto Rico and Dominican Republic and came as an adult. So that, even though in terms of demographic is still Dominican student, their identity is a little different because they were, they were raised here in America.

With the increased generations of Latinx students who were born and raised in the U.S. mainland, the colleges had shifted to serving more “traditional-aged” college students rather than their base of adult learners. Fatima (Cacique, staff) provided some context about

how this shift had come organically rather than as a choice of the college. She described: “We have open admissions so everyone who wants to come in can, but it's just reflective of what's happening throughout society and the world, less people are coming from other countries to Cacique. Usually, it's people from five feeder schools in the community that are enrolling.” Still, collaborators felt that there was still an opportunity to serve adult learners with the increase in immigrant populations in the barrio who may need support upskilling from service jobs. For example, Santiago (Cacique, community partner) felt that the college should do more to attract adult learners given the continued need in the community. He asserted: “I think that a lot of others can benefit from getting a skill to leave a dishwashing job, or waitering job, or cleaning job, or parking job, and get themselves... like that young lady that was doing the sonogram for me [at the hospital].”

Gentrifying Neighborhoods: Realities and Unpredictable Futures

A final subtheme of the place-based emphasis brought forth by collaborators was the real-time gentrification taking place in el barrio. As a researcher, I found this theme compelling in that it seemed to call up very passionate and disconcerting responses from collaborators who were living through the beginnings of the gentrification of their communities. Santiago (Cacique, community partners) shared: “Every day, there's changes going on. So, I just don't know where it's really going. I know that all my neighbors, the ones who have been living here, as long as I have, they're all moving. They are all selling.” All collaborators across roles brought up the physical changes of their communities and had reservations about how these changes would impact the future of their neighborhoods, as well as the work of the colleges.

In South Metropolis, gentrification of the neighborhood where Cacique was located included rapid construction of high-rise buildings and an increase in construction all around the campus, which I witnessed during my campus visit. The barrio also saw an increase of hotels, restaurants, and buildings closer to the highway, whereby commuters could come in and out of Metropolis without having to walk through el barrio. Inez (staff) stated that she had seen more white people living in the community, but they were often contained within the areas of the new developments.

Collaborators spoke emphatically and at times angrily about the lack of affordable housing and displacement of communities. Ana (Cacique, student) spoke about her concerns about the erasure of Latinx neighborhoods. Speaking of a specific neighborhood in South Metropolis, she stated:

[It's] a Latino community, is a poor Latino community, the South Metropolis. They just ... They're going to erase everything there. They're building a new, beautiful, expensive place for ... I don't know who's going to live there. I don't even know what they're going to do with the people that live there, but they already begin. My fear is that the South Metropolis in the future is going to be something ... They're going to vanish everything. They're just going to do a whole new city.

Similarly, Josiane (Cacique, staff) poured out her concerns about the changes in the community due to gentrification, posing:

I don't know where this is headed, I do think that it can hurt the school, because, as people get priced out of a place that was a barrio, working class, for many thousands of people living right below the poverty line, this is hard, that'll be hard on

enrollment, they'll have to move away, they'll have to go somewhere else, it's a tension that I think is unsustainable.

Several of Cacique's collaborators shared similar questions about how the change in demographics with the gentrifying communities would influence the college. Mario (staff) pondered about the ties of the mission to the community and how this might shift how they thought about academic programs. He shared: "We're really kind of tied to our mission and our values, but it's just interesting to see how that may impact some of the students we have living in the surrounding community as far as curriculum and academic offerings."

While South Metropolis' gentrification was occurring in the home barrio of the college, in North Core City, Ágape College was experiencing a squeeze of gentrification coming from each direction, in neighboring communities. Matías (Ágape College, community partner) described: "The seeds of gentrification are happening to the neighborhood to the south of us, it's happening to the neighborhood to the east of us. And so, gentrification is happening in about 18 different neighborhoods in Core City." Like at Cacique, Ágape College collaborators also thought about their mission and how they would serve a community that was likely going to change. Benjamín (founder) seemed to suggest that the college might need to consider how to protect their core values in light of neighborhood changes:

For us, one of the challenges is we've created an institution in the idea for the barrio, by the barrio, when we find that the wave of gentrification is moving North towards us. So that would, if that were to happen, it would necessitate a revisiting of some of our core principles or figuring out how we keep them, but reposition them, given a change in constituents.

As described in a previous subtheme about the holistic community development approach that Ágape was taking, some of the planning efforts were a way to curb the impacts of gentrification on the college's neighborhood and promote Latinx-people's ability to stay and resist displacement. The planning efforts underway were also attached to significant investments and commitment to serve the Latinx community regardless of the changes that might come. Alvaro (Ágape College, founder) posited:

We've put out millions here, ... You're not going to move, you may have an extension in Lawrence, but if the school is here, it's here. I think, and if we get our way, we'll ... we can't stop gentrification. We can defray it a little bit, and so we are doing that. You build enough public housing and stuff like that, low-low-income housing, then poor people will always find that. So, if you can build enough of it, if you build it, they will come, and then their children will need. Right now, the community college is downtown, so it's downtown. As long as you have parking and the buses come up around, ... people for a college will travel and if this becomes a white neighborhood, it'll be interesting to see how the white neighborhood deals with the Latino institution that brings in undesirables into the hood, driving those kind of cars, Toyotas, what's with the Toyotas, I don't know but we seem to love the Toyota.

What was evident from findings around Ágape College's and Cacique's place-based focus on el barrio were their undeniable deep ties to the people and cities in which they lived. The ties were, however, challenged by rapid changes. Additionally, their preparedness and ability to be resilient amid these changes seemed to be top of mind for collaborators.

A Community Relationship of Mutuality and Commensalism

The previous theme uncovered the ties of the colleges to their communities in terms of their physical location and demographic changes. This theme discusses the colleges' connection to communities from the perspective of their relationship to Latinx community members themselves, such as residents, leaders, and other Latinx-focused organizations. Since the colleges were created by individuals from the community, collaborators described the "open door" that existed for the community. After all, their "survival" depended upon community members. Conversations with collaborators revealed that the relationship between the college and community was at times mutual, as Fatima (Cacique, staff) explained: "An equal exchange ... If you do for us, we'll do for you, and we'll open up our doors depending on what you need." Other times, the relationship leaned more toward the benefit of the college and its students and had no direct benefit or harm to the community, as described by Inez (Cacique, staff):

It's the resources in the community like neighboring local businesses, resources as such as organizations like ... the door that supplements a lot of the work that we do because we can't provide everything for our students and our students come with very specific needs. So being able to link the work we do with the surrounding organizations, nonprofits that offer services, it's just a benefit for us as staff and that are limited on resource, but also for our students to succeed.

In some cases, collaborators discussed how the relationships that sought to primarily benefit students created positive secondary impacts for the broader community. According to Nelson (community partner), Ágape College supported the community "by honing the talent in the

community, by connecting students with opportunities to serve and do service.... And by preparing students to be better community people, stronger community people.”

Collaborators shared several examples of how their colleges demonstrated their value for community members and sought to maintain those relationships. To understand their relationship to community members, some of the subthemes that emerged included the colleges’ presence in the community; the ways the colleges sought to loop-in community feedback; how colleges and communities acted in solidarity; the facilitated growth of students and communities through community-engaged and hands-on learning; the expanded educational opportunities that went beyond the college level, and, finally, the challenges with college–community partnerships.

Presence in Community

College collaborators revealed the ways in which community members and the college influenced one another in advancing individual and mutual goals. According to collaborators, one of the vehicles for influence was through the kind of presence that the college had in the community. For example, at Cacique, staff and faculty shared how colleagues engaged in different boards and councils, and with local nonprofit organizations, hospitals, and businesses. Students described how the college’s healthcare programs hosted public campaigns and blood drives to address health disparities in the local community. One student also recounted that the college had opened its doors to provide shelter to houseless individuals during a storm. At Ágape College, collaborators discussed that Ágape Inc. had many grassroots street teams helping with neighborhood cleanup, climate mitigation, and how their youth workers and pastoral network served as a pulse for community happenings. In addition, since the college was part of Ágape Inc., collaborators seemed to speak about the

college and its nonprofit parent interchangeably when it came to talking about its presence in the community. At the same time, some community collaborators spoke of a less encouraging narrative of the colleges' diminished presence and reduced understanding of community members' needs.

Community collaborators at both colleges seemed to suggest that the colleges started as highly present and engaged in community life and that community members saw them more as their own. One member seemed to consider a loss of passion over time leading to barriers to the relationship. Romero (Cacique) posits:

The passion of the community and the college were one and the same, the spirit of the community and the college were one and the same. I don't mean to say that back then was better than today, but that was the biggest difference, you cannot say in good conscience that the passion of the college today is the same passion of the community, the spirits are the same, you can't say until those barriers come down, and you don't have to put up walls, people know them, people walk right by the schools, people walk right by the entrances as if they didn't exist.

Others rationalized the diminished presence of the college with the changes in the community's infrastructure, which had interrupted the facilitation of these relationships. For example, Santiago (Cacique) recounted a time when he could see faculty and staff sitting down at locally owned eateries across from the campus that had recently been replaced by corporate franchises, leading to fewer places for organic congregation. He shared: "I don't see any other way, any other place, where there's intermingling. And if there's no intermingling, it's hard to understand the [sic] of the community. And that community, even

if you was to come outside, that's not the community. That's just a hustle and bustle,” referring to the main streets and squares surrounding the college.

Some college collaborators like Joan (Cacique, faculty) also seemed to consider the earlier years of when the college was more involved but felt that the college had more recently become more active in doing outreach, particularly through curriculum. Other college collaborators like Gemma (Ágape College, staff-faculty-mentor) discussed how the shift away from employees native to the area might also have contributed to the diminished presence in the community. She stated: “Majority of our employees actually don't live in the area, so that changes. My staff, a few live in Core City but majority of them don't live on the zip codes that we serve, so it's a little different than before. We used to have admissions people that lived in the neighborhood and there was a connection there that is not now.” This shift in college personnel from the area was true at both colleges, and community partners also sensed the shift. For example, Santiago (Cacique, community partner) articulated:

[Staff and faculty] come here, they just see inside themselves in the College. They don't see too much of what's going on outside the College. I think that's one of the concerns that needs to be changed so that people can then understand that there is this back-and-forth relationship because what happens out here, affects the College, and vice versa.

The disconnect in the back-and-forth relationship also resounded in my conversation with Romero (Cacique, community partner), who seemed to critique Cacique's ability to be present and understanding of the experience of everyday community members. He seemed to suggest that the college was only focused on “structured” relationships built on assumptions

about community needs, all the while missing opportunities to serve certain members of the community. He shared what seemed like a call to action for Cacique:

Go to the maintenance people, go wait in a bus stop, see people, and see what the struggling at the end of the day, coming out of subways, the challenges they have, how life is beating the hell out of them, but they still wake up for the next round that next morning, still go at it, that they have something to go, to create, to provide for their family. What can the college learn from that? I don't know, but I think being identified with that struggle will help us be better informed in how you present to the community.

It was clear from the conversations with collaborators that there were mixed understandings and impressions of what the presence of the colleges was and should look like.

Looping in Community Feedback

The colleges each had their own mechanisms for looping in community feedback to influence the work of the college. At Ágape College, collaborators discussed the different bodies that made up the college's infrastructure as ways to influence the college. Nelson (community member) described: "Through the student body, through the board of Ágape and the college, through the advisory boards that they have, through their interactions with the community. That's how we influence what goes on in the college." Nelson also reflected on his own participation in an advisory body and seemed to empathize with the college, stating: "It's not easy running a college, and you can have a lot of people who can talk out of their fears or whatever about what can or cannot be done, but it's not easy." Also unique to Ágape College, again, were its community links via its parent nonprofit. The community-based nature of its parent organization seemed to allow for feedback loops to the college from

community members even through other non-college-related activities. Alvaro (founder) described:

If you say pastors as community, right, these are men and women, most of them live in the 'hood. All of them spend more time in the hood than anywhere else, and with people who live in the neighborhood. Yes, they influenced a lot because they're the ones that tell us, we need X or people need, you know. We get what I'm going to call ground floor info from them, we get ground floor info from our organizers. One of our staffers, the woman that runs the career center, feels that the community has told her that we may be charging, that we are too expensive. Now, how are we expensive? Pell and the state grant plus five? But that's the rumor she's heard, so we're checking it out.

While Ágape College seemed to have both informal and formal mechanisms for community members to influence their college's practices, Cacique seemed to lean on more formal channels. Like Ágape College, Cacique collaborators spoke about the college's board as a place where people in the community served and contributed ideas. However, one of the most cited was their recently created advisory council which, according to their website, included more than 70 members serving 3-year appointments. The website described that the charge of the council was to support links between the college's academic programs and regional workforce development opportunities. Furthermore, the council was meant to support Cacique's social mobility goals.

Cacique collaborators had mixed perspectives on the utility of the new council. Some collaborators like Alma (founding member) saw the council as an opportunity for "not just leaders, but ordinary people in the community to voice their opinion." Some collaborators

saw the number of members on the council as “a lot” and mentioned that it was filled with “a lot of the usual suspects.” The volume of participants made collaborators like Santiago (community member) have reservations about its potential impact. He posed:

When you have that many people, it's very difficult to have input. I think that a lot of people might be part of the group because it's a nice title to say, “I'm part of the Advisory Board of Cacique Community College,” but besides that title, like, what's the relationship? What do you bring them, what can you get? And I don't know if that's taking place.

While I did not have the opportunity to attend a meeting of the council, staff member Josiane described the meetings as an opportunity “where the president of the college reports on what the college was doing, accomplishments of some of the students” and exchanges related to internship opportunities for students. She also disclosed that the council was a cross-sectoral group from across the city with “people that are executives, the VP’s, founders, from healthcare, to after school, to urban planning, entertainment,” etc. With limited details, it was hard to determine the racial/ethnic makeup of the council and to what extent the council was engaged in conversations related to the college’s relationship to the Latinx community, more specifically.

Acting in Solidarity

One of the ways that collaborators talked about the relationship between the college and community members was the way the college demonstrated solidarity with the community. Solidarity was expressed through engaging in place-based issues and the ways the colleges served as an important convening space for community members.

Regarding engaging in activism and place-based issues, collaborators discussed their engagement in local coalitions on behalf of the college focused on issues like educational advocacy and health inequities. For example, Benjamín (Ágape College, founder) chaired an education coalition of 18 agencies advocating for local K–12 education, and Mario (Cacique, staff) co-chaired an emotional wellness committee and served on an immigration partnership with several area service agencies. Collaborators also shared examples of the colleges working together with community members in times of crisis, like Ágape, which “did a large civil rights protest” when the Latinx community was not getting access to vaccines. They advocated for and hosted a vaccination site during the COVID-19 pandemic. Cacique collaborators cited fundraisers and other activities for victims of local disasters. Mario (Cacique, staff) shared a story about a big fire impacting a Gambian community in the city, reflecting the spirit of solidarity from the college, “we all kind of got together and organized and collected supplies, and things that we could do.”

Community collaborators also illustrated times in which the college acted in support of resolving together issues faced by community members. At Cacique, Santiago had several examples such as advocacy work that they did with the college to get elevators installed in the local train stop or connections that he helped facilitate for the college to become involved in a new houseless shelter emergency assistance unit. In both instances, he shared how his relationship with previous presidents allowed him an access point to the college and relatively timely response to issues raised. Santiago shared a few perspectives on the college’s engagement in local issues; one of these was a symbiotic (and expected) relationship with the college:

Cacique being right across the street, you know, like a block away, it was just common sense to go to the college, and say, “Hey, you are a community college, we are a community, not in the name only. I mean, we're right across the street from you, so whatever happens to us affects you and vice versa. So, when I fight to try to get sanitation to come here and pick up more garbage, guess what? It affects you, too, because when you have all these students coming out of [name] Street. Boom, look what happens.

Santiago also described a burden that fell more heavily on community members when engaging in place-based issues and encouraged the college to be more proactive about meeting the community where they were. He stated:

That they have to find a way to link up with because not too many people are going to come to the college and knock on the door and say, “Hey, can you help me put together a community garden,” or, “can you help me organize a block association,” or, “I want to do a block party for kids,” how do you do that? No one is going to come to the College and knock on the door to do that.

Santiago’s comments suggested a need for the college to be more reciprocal in its outreach. He also seemed to relinquish his call to action to the college to other factors at play, including, for example, the politics of higher education and budget allocations that might seem to take priority for college members over community issues.

Regarding the colleges acting as a space of connection and convening for the community, collaborators described the colleges as a “family-friendly place,” a place to deliver conferences, symposiums, workshops, hold public meetings and hearings to “educate

the community about issues,” and to engage community members with local elected officials. For example, Josiane (Cacique, staff) described:

Cacique is like a hub, so many things happen there, press conferences, and state of the union, ... state of the city, [public transportation] hearings, all kinds of stuff. Voting happens at Cacique, and that's because of the connections that it has with the President, with the state legislators, with the council, the city council, the assembly senators, I mean we have them all throughout and participating in events all the time, so it's very active, very engaged.

As institutions trying to support the empowerment and upward mobility of Latinx people and People of Color, engagement in civic life seemed to fall naturally in their goals to elevate people historically disenfranchised. As such, collaborators also spoke about the colleges as places for collaboration and seeding opportunities for the community's growth.

Facilitating Growth of Students and Community via Community-Engaged Learning

College collaborators across roles discussed their institutions' working closely with local organizations not only to bring them on campus to deliver workshops, supports, and services for students, but also to bolster community-engaged learning, internships, and employment opportunities. In an exchange, students Tito and Elías (Ágape College) discussed how the college sought to give opportunities to Latinx people in the community and extend support through student projects in and with community members. For example, Tito shared how he and Elías both worked with a local Latinx nonprofit partner to conduct outreach to high school and middle schoolers “to help get them down a different road than the streets.” Tito and Elías described how they worked with law enforcement to identify local areas in need of youth violence prevention. Likewise, Elena and Francisco (Ágape College,

staff-faculty-mentors) individually discussed collaborating with each other, across disciplines to address diabetes prevention in the Latinx community, both citing how the rates of diabetes were highest among Latinx people. Elena shared that the college created “a multi-generational, intergenerational project” that involved college and high school students and was helping students “realize that they can make an impact in the community” regardless of their age. She also discussed several other projects students in the health sciences were involved in that were aimed at addressing health inequities faced by Latinx people in their community. She shared the mutual benefit to Latinx students and the community when engaging in community-engaged activities, noting:

When you first start this, [students] they're so shy, and they don't know how to talk to people. Then you see how they start to loosen up and to realize that they can do this, they've learned. They have their back, their knowledge base, and they can act as a health professional. They can do this, so I think that giving back to the community that way, it's something. It's a win-win situation. It's good for them and it's good for the community. And then it's good when we get requests from the community for our students to participate in things, so.

Cesar and Ana, both students at Cacique, also had an uplifting exchange about how mutually helpful they found their experience delivering free dental care to community members through the college's on-campus clinical site. They described how their and their faculty's Spanish-English bilingualism was valuable in engaging with Spanish-speaking patients, and also treating patients with mixed status. While Cacique students in the health sciences programs had several examples of work that they were doing with communities that enabled both their and the communities' growth, others not in the health sciences shared how

COVID hampered their ability to do community-engaged work. Nonetheless, students shared a motivation to serve the Latinx community because of the college's Latinx-centered identity. Eddie (Cacique) described: "Right now is a difficult time with COVID, which really hampers my ability to be in the community. But definitely being part of Cacique, it's a motivation to take part in Hispanic-related organizations or groups or volunteering, it definitely is a motivation."

It was common among collaborators to hear the motivation to serve the Latinx community as a mutual growth effort. At Ágape College, since they were connected to a multi-service, community development nonprofit organization, the college frequently sought to create alignment with their parent nonprofit's community initiatives. Additionally, their reputation in the community and longevity allowed them the opportunity to attract companies and partners, as well as respond to community needs through the development of academic programs and curricula. Paul (founder) stated that the college "grows from the soil of the community" as part of its ethos, delivering curricula not always offered at Waterstone University. He asserted that though the college followed Waterstone University's accredited course sequence, the stance of the college had always been: "We're going to have curricula that serve our community and the people in our community, even if you don't have them ... So, the substance of teaching and learning is community based, not Waterstone based."

Students of the Community

Paul's point about Ágape College serving the people of their community was also an opportunity point for the colleges in forming mutually beneficial relationships with community members. Since most students lived near the campuses, they were part of the community. Linda (Ágape College, community partner) described the way the local sourcing

of the college was influential to the advancement of the community, saying “if the kids in the community are going to college, to their college, that is influencing the community to get a higher education.”

From the student perspective, most students made choices to attend Ágape College and Cacique because of the proximity to home and the comfort of being a Latinx institution. Eddie (Cacique), who had worked at the college as a high schooler and taken college courses there and at another campus, talked about why he decided to return to Cacique. He stated: “Transportation definitely played a factor, but I felt very comfortable in the school. It had a very strong Hispanic community, and it just felt like really easy for me, felt really comfortable. I felt like I was going home in a way.” Cris was in the same focus group and shared that he had an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) and, like Eddie, enjoyed the college’s proximity to home because of the kind of safety and comfort it provided him as a person with a disability. Cris shared: “It’s a 30-minute trip. If I walk fast enough, it could be 20 minutes, but it’s places that I know and that I know people around there. So at least I know how to get there, know people around there. So, if something happened, I hang out with them.”

A slightly nuanced perspective about students coming from the community was presented by collaborators who thought that recruitment of community members could be strengthened, particularly at Cacique. For instance, Rosa (founding member/former staff) shared how, in the early years of the college, she was involved in admissions. During those years, she recounted how the college did rigorous outreach to ensure that Latinx Spanish-speaking and immigrant communities were being served. She stated that she had a list of nearly 350 community agencies from where she recruited. However, she felt that the

admissions office no longer conducted community-centered recruitment because it was more “centralized” through the Metro Uni system. She emphasized: “So the interaction with the students, that's lost. The interaction with the community, going to recruit, it's not happening, you know. That's not something that is connected.”

Expanding Educational Opportunities Beyond College Level

While collaborators spoke proudly about how both colleges were engaging in early-college and dual-enrollment programs with local high schools, they also revealed how the colleges were expanding education beyond the college level. At Ágape College, the educational offerings seemed geared toward making educational experiences available to el barrio. Alvaro (founder) talked about a science program for the kids in the neighborhood where “million-dollar telescopes” were brought “to the hood” and set up in their building parking lot, attracting 400 neighborhood kids (pre-COVID). A few of the staff at Ágape College also highlighted a “minorities in science” symposium that brought top Latinx doctors and researchers, as well as other People of Color to speak to students from neighborhood schools. Alvaro stated: “We get the best and the brightest from our neighborhood exposed to science and they could go elsewhere,” suggesting that the goal was access, exposure, and opportunity for all regardless of whether they attended their college in the future.

At Cacique, students and faculty talked about the kinds of certificate programs that attracted adults in the community through their continuing education and workforce development arm. Cesar (student) had been to a few other institutions prior to Cacique and seemed content that the college's certificate programs did not all focus on degree attainment like other colleges. He seemed to signal a fit for the immediate workforce needs of the community. He shared: “I don't really see that in a lot of other places where they offer so

many programs that aren't necessarily focused on degrees. I think that to me, that looks like they're trying to make sure that the people who leave are employable.”

Still, collaborators had additional ideas as to how the colleges could continue to strengthen the educational needs of the Latinx community beyond the colleges’ current offerings. Some of the ideas offered included “hav[ing] like an institute or something on Community organizing” to help the community “better organize” around issues and solutions; facilitating “workshops on nonprofit management” to support learning and networking opportunities for local organizations; and providing “workshops that are not accredited” to “lead in the in-between spaces” that go beyond formal education.

Challenges with College–Community Partnerships

While collaborators appreciated the connections that were happening between the college and the community, community partners shared some of the challenges they experienced in realizing college–community partnerships. Some of the challenges at Cacique were related to “bureaucracy” and the “politics” that went into “getting things done” with the college, particularly when communities needed quick responses to timely issues of concern. Santiago discussed his frustration in those times of need, stating that he had to make the college understand when it was necessary to act with more urgency. He stated:

Listen, we don't have time for that. We need to get answers quickly because when you close, and you stop your class, and you go home, we live here. We stay here. If there's a shoot-out on [Name] Street, and there are students coming on at daytime, your students are going to get shot. So, when we're at night fighting because there was a shoot out here, then it's important for you. So therefore, it's very important for

us to deal with that. And the bureaucracy, sometimes they move slow like molasses in winter. Yeah, and as an activist, I don't move like that.

Another challenge was the inevitable incongruence of student schedules and community needs. For example, at Ágape College, many of the classes were offered in the evenings for adult learners and working students, so trying to build programmatic activities suited for communities within the academic structure was sometimes difficult. The challenges with accommodating students' availability seemed to be frustrating, but were also received with understanding, given the circumstances faced by students who were also community members. Regarding an unsuccessful community-engaged learning experience, Nelson shared: "They also are unorthodox for the students, right? Because for the students, it's very convenient to come in at a time certain and get stuff done rather than some of the more loosely scheduled experiences that are provided when you try to do programmatic things as instructional vehicles. So, I understand it, but I wish it would've worked better."

Naming Strengths in the Midst of Challenges

As a study focused on asset-based approaches, I asked collaborators to describe the assets of the communities served by the colleges and how they thought their college considered those assets in the work that they did. I found that the question about assets was not always easily understood, so I tried to reframe it by using words like "strengths," "special skills," "qualities," "valuable traits" and, even so, it seemed difficult for some collaborators to answer across roles. I observed that part of the challenge was trying to think of assets amid the many challenges students and the local community faced. One of the often-discussed challenges related to the personal life circumstance of students, many of whom were first-generation to college, parents, working young and older adults, new immigrants navigating

U.S. systems, English-language learners, and students with generally enormous life responsibilities. Fatima (Cacique, staff) noted: “They're doing multiple things at the same time. They're working while they're trying to get an education. They're dealing with their own personal stressors and other issues that are all components to pretty much stop them in their way of getting a degree.”

Another kind of challenge described by collaborators had to do with trauma and adversities associated with growing up in some of the poorest urban communities in the U.S., such as high incidences of violence, transportation issues, and housing and food insecurity. Joan (Cacique, faculty) illustrated some of the burden students confronted, which seemed to be heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic. She shared: “You hear these stories particularly during the pandemic, you know that someone's being stalked, someone is homeless, someone is experiencing three deaths in a family and they're all out of state.” What collaborators described made more sense to me as I conducted my site visits of North Core City and South Metropolis. I realized that the level of visible poverty and overall public disinvestment in the social, physical, and economic health of the neighborhoods surrounding the colleges made it so that collaborators could only focus on the challenges presented by their context, and explained why the question about strengths was more difficult to address.

A third type of challenge that collaborators considered related to the systemic barriers of poor K–12 educational systems that students endured and survived in route to a higher education. Carl (Ágape College, founding member) discussed that there was a time in which he was teaching at the college, and he found “some very smart students who had bad formal education,” which created gaps in what they knew and how prepared they were coming into the college. Collaborators discussed that they felt confident about the colleges’ ability to help

students with “the formal education structure piece of higher education” because of how smart and highly motivated they found students to be. Faculty also talked about how students from el barrio came with “street smarts” and “common sense” knowledge that was often not found at other PWI and Ivy league institutions that some of them had worked at in the past. Rob (Ágape College, faculty) expressed: “I think we have some brilliant minds, but they're easily judged and discriminated on how they express their brilliance because it's not used on an academic term or level.” He also emphasized the capacity of the students to do well because of their experiences and “great working skills.” Collaborators often spoke of the motivation and hardworking nature of students as being part of their strength and what allowed them to be successful at the colleges.

When collaborators talked about assets, they also focused heavily on the resilience of students in the face of adversity. Faculty, staff, and founding collaborators all discussed how students came to the colleges with difficult life circumstances but were focused on bettering themselves and their families despite the challenges. Ivan (Ágape College, faculty) shared: “They had to overcome a lot, and I respect that and that's valuable, all kinds of calamities, and all kinds of struggles, everything. I can make a list of it, but what I'm saying is that those experiences have made our students stronger.” Collaborators were consistently impressed by students' sheer determination and capacity to keep going with all the barriers imposed on them. Mario (Cacique, staff) and other collaborators talked about parenting students who juggled many things, yet persisted because they were focused on being role models to their children. He also shared a story about a student who gave birth and came to school the next week to finish. He stated: “No matter what the obstacles are, they succeed, and that to me is very motivating and seeing those strengths.” Like Mario, most college collaborators talked

about how students' relentless pursuit for better futures and "eagerness to survive," as put by Joan (Cacique, faculty), was motivating for them as well.

To understand more about how collaborators talked about the assets of the communities served, there were two subthemes that emerged as central to the conversations. One was how collaborators understood the challenges as also assets and vice versa. The second was a focus on the ways in which students forged ahead and did not give up despite the challenges.

Understanding Challenges as Assets, Assets as Challenges

This subtheme was inspired by something Ernesto (Cacique, community partner/former staff member) said to me when grappling with the question around assets. He made sense of the question about assets through the lens of the college's worldview on how it considered challenges as assets. He stated that the college was of a particular mindset that made the question difficult to answer within their context. He said:

The line between challenges and assets in a community like that is a very, very fine one.... I think what most people in institutions will consider challenges, Cacique considers assets. That is, you know, being a single parent is an asset, you know, speaking multiple languages is an asset, having the experience of homelessness and living in a Metropolis housing project, or all of the things that people everybody else considered a challenge, or a problem. Those are assets, those are worldviews that we need to cultivate because when these young men and women are sitting in boardrooms, they're going to bring a perspective that folks who have gone through traditional colleges and traditional college experiences, myself included, will not bring.

The worldview that Ernesto so clearly articulated was shared among collaborators of both colleges and further helped explain why the question of naming assets might have been challenging for some collaborators. One faculty member, Manuel (Cacique), called the challenges as assets that Ernesto described “personal literacy,” since students brought with them real-life experiences like their immigration experience and survival skills.

Faculty often talked about how they incorporated these challenges as assets in the classroom. For example, Manuel stated that he often told his students: “You have been able to come from other country, survive in those environments, chemistry class will be nothing for you.” He suggested that he encouraged students to “capitalize your personal journey into the college experience.” Similarly, Ivan (Ágape College, faculty) gave the example of how he also told students that what they had been through in life was much more difficult than college, and that proved that they could succeed over what they may feel was difficult about college. He also leaned on the faith-based values of the college to talk about struggle as strength, stating: “The purpose of struggle is to become stronger and go forward,” in an effort to remind students of the qualities they already had.

Collaborators also discussed assets as challenges. For example, the multi-tasking, hardworking, dedicated, and persistent nature of students were all strengths, but could also be seen as “a negative,” as described by Hannah (Ágape College, staff-faculty-mentor). She considered that the strengths that came with managing multiple life challenges, like working, parenting, etc. also meant that students inevitably might drop a few things. She articulated that the life of multi-tasking sometimes had an impact on student retention, suggesting: They're doing so many things, so that strength, it gets broken down into like all these different percentages, like us, maybe 20%, work 50%, you know, so it's good, but it can also,

for some students, be a hardship. So they get the job done, but then it's, "Wow, I forgot about your homework because I had to work."

Forging Ahead, Not Giving Up

Collaborators talked about how humbling an experience it was to work with students who demonstrated a steadfast commitment to keep going. Some of the key words used were determination, persistence, and grit. Benjamín (Ágape College, Founder) gave the example of seeing the willful defiance against the odds in students, such as a formerly incarcerated young man who "comes and sits in our classroom with the bracelet because he understands. 'I gotta get, I gotta get somewhere else, and these people can help me.'" Collaborators gave many stories of students not giving up under great pressures. Benjamín also captured the essence of where the strength to forge ahead stemmed from as he reflected on the experiences of being a Person of Color in the U.S. and related it back to the realities that his communities had to confront in the face of extreme adversity. He described the anti-Black and anti-immigrant discrimination faced by their communities that forced them to have resilience and determination to not give up and continue. He posited:

The blatant disrespect and lack of acceptance is massive. Do you know what it is to walk and have a parent struggle with the fact that their child cannot come home when they put them on the street? Okay, now our Latin American people understand it because you got parents sending their kids to come to our border because the streets are too dangerous back home. So, they know what is to let them go, and America rejects that, too, by the way. So that's not a good enough reason to want to come to America, the land of opportunity [stated sarcastically]. You know it's resilience, it's an ability to look at that in the face.

Like Benjamín, collaborators amply discussed the hard realities faced by students. They were also able to articulate, in between all the challenges, some of the assets that pushed their students forward. Table 4 summarizes a few of the words that collaborators across roles used to describe the assets of the communities served by the colleges. Of all the collaborators, students seemed to have a harder time articulating strengths of the communities served by the colleges.

Table 4

Assets Described by Collaborators Across Roles

College	Roles				
	Staff	Faculty	Students	Founders	Community
Ágape College	resilience strength over trauma, bright, inquisitive, diversity as strength	eager to survive, personal literacy, tenacity, diversity	bilingualism, multiculturalism, culinary skills	hardworking, focused on bettering their lives	community organizing
Cacique Community College	resilience, love of family, cultural pride, hardworking (strength and hardship)	brilliant street smarts, work skills, capacity, perseverance, strength through struggle	diversity of lived experiences, unity	highly motivated, women as a force, language and culture, resilience, smart despite bad public schools, community organizations, intergenerational focus on success	strong families, faith, dedicated workers, innovative, persistence, relationships, Latino organizations and churches, overcoming barriers, celebratory people

One of the commonly cited strengths that emerged throughout conversations with collaborators was the Spanish-English bilingualism and multilingualism that was vivid at the colleges. Collaborators often spoke about how the value of bilingualism was embedded in the culture and practices of the colleges, as explained in the next theme.

Normalizing Bilingualism and Translanguaging

While the histories of when bilingualism became embedded in their institutional identities differ, both institutions had historical roots tied to providing linguistic access and justice to Spanish-speaking communities. For example, at Ágape College, the promotion and use of bilingualism was an educational strategy that was part of their founding from the start. In reviewing their founding memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Waterstone University, the MOU listed several goals of the partnership. The first goal on the list included, “Create a culturally appropriate learning environment for students (Spanish & English languages, spirituality/faith issues, culturally competent faculty, contextualized curriculum, and alternative student assessment tools).” Other goals explicitly stated the focus on establishing a “Hispanic-operated post-secondary institution in the Hispanic community of Core City” with the goal of increasing college going of “Hispanics.” Additionally, there was a goal about improving “self-esteem” within the Latinx community by “working in Spanish language as needed across the curriculum.” Furthermore, a section of the MOU that discussed outcomes of the partnership specified on multiple occasions their quest to provide a “model for bi-lingual learning;” stating that their college-level coursework would be “in Spanish and, through English language acquisition, transitions to English language instruction” with a “companion curriculum fully in English for all semesters.”

In reviewing Cacique's original proposal for establishing the college, I found no bilingual mission built into its founding plans or explicit mention of Latinx communities, despite the demographics of its early founders and activists. Instead, the college proposal had a strong emphasis on fulfilling the healthcare demands of the Metropolis through the founding of a new community college. There was a mention about the aims of the college to "assist disadvantaged people" and "respond to the needs of the community" where it was located. Brian (founding member) shared that he had spoken to the deceased founding president of the college and admitted that the mixed bilingual history of the college was "emblematic of the kind of pull and tug of an institution as it evolved." Brian and other collaborators discussed how the bilingual mission of the college had evolved over time in order to address the needs of students entering with limited English-language proficiency. Brian posited: "We can argue in hindsight, whether or not that should or should not have happened. But it was an experiment that people tried."

Regardless of their mixed histories, talking with collaborators revealed cultures at the colleges that normalized bilingualism and translanguaging (which describes the fluid coming in and out of Spanish and English). Some of the subthemes that help understand the institutional cultures and practices around bilingualism and translanguaging include how strengthening bilingualism was a form of resistance to assimilation, the way that collaborators vibed through language in everyday interactions, uncodified language-related hiring practices, and the way the colleges were addressing the Spanish language needs of the Latinx community through teaching and learning practices, e.g., using it as a tool in the classroom and established academic programs.

Strengthening Bilingualism; Resisting Forced Assimilation

Collaborators often discussed how being at a college that valued and sought to strengthen the Spanish language and bilingualism was a sense of cultural affirmation and embrace of who they were. Paul (Ágape College, founding member) shared that, in building the college, there was a value for “speaking and thinking in Spanish, not to the exclusion of English” and vice versa. He discussed that there had been a time early on when people at the Waterstone campus did not have a “proper understanding of the bilingual brilliance of the community” with their “monolingual minds,” and how, together with founders Alvaro and Benjamín, who were well respected among the Waterstone community, they made a case for how the Waterstone campus could learn from bilingual people. Paul suggested that Waterstone University created a requirement for Waterstone students to take Spanish language classes as part of their belief in strengthening bilingualism across people of different backgrounds.

While discussion with collaborators revealed that bilingualism was bolstered through the colleges’ commitment to instituting bilingualism as a valued asset, students gave compelling narratives about how the use of the Spanish language at the colleges was embraced in ways not seen in other educational, work, and social environments. They described that they did not feel as if students were forced to assimilate to the English language and U.S. dominant culture and, therefore, felt free of linguistic discrimination. For example, Joli and Cesar, who were in separate Cacique student focus groups, had mirroring reflections about how they enjoyed coming to a school where Spanish-language use was not shunned. Jolie shared: “You don't hear, ‘Come on, this is not Spanish class, stop speak Spanish,’ because that's something that a lot of people say, it's like, ‘Oh, if you are in the

U.S., you need to only speak English.’ I don't know where they made that rule at, but yeah, they don't use that in Cacique.” Similarly, Cesar recounted: “I have seen in other places where people are like, ‘speak English’ or like, ‘you have such an accent.’ You don't hear that at all at least at Cacique.... No one comments on, ‘Oh, your English is so good.’ It's like, well, you speak in English, you speak in English, it's just—you speak English.”

Cesar and several other students also discussed that college faculty and staff spoke comfortably to them in Spanish, without asking if they spoke Spanish themselves. They posited that Spanish was normalized based on the population they served. Even Latinx students who did not speak much Spanish saw the use of Spanish at the college as a positive thing, making the college feel more familiar.

Vibing Through Language: Meetings, Hallways, Relationality

Collaborators talked about how the culture of bilingualism and translanguaging was normalized in everyday interactions and experiences at the colleges, providing a sense of comfort. For example, many collaborators spoke about the fact that Spanish was heard at meetings and when walking down the hallways of the colleges, with people often switching organically between English and Spanish. Ernesto (Cacique, community partner/former staff) jokingly shared that sometimes Spanish-speaking members would speak to monolingual English speakers in Spanish without thinking much about it, and then realizing they had not “switched” languages. He also shared that students from non-Latinx immigrant countries would acquire an understanding of Spanish words if they were around the campus long enough. Even with the embracing vibe of Spanish-English bilingualism, there was a sense from collaborators of their consciousness of needing to be “mindful,” “inclusive,” and “respectful” of colleagues who did not speak Spanish. Furthermore, the ability to

translanguage seemed normal to collaborators and helped create a vibe or atmosphere that allowed for integration of other forms of Spanish-language expression, such as music, jokes and sayings. Even among Latinx peoples who came from diverse nations, Spanish language variations also allowed for a strengthening of the pan-Latinx culture of the campus. Mario (Cacique, staff) shared: “It’s nice to kind of share our different cultures and customs, because Latinx is such a wide area of people from different parts of the world, different colors to different cultures and words and languages.” Additionally, for Latinx people who did not speak Spanish, hearing Spanish also created a feeling of home, as Cris (Cacique, student) shared: “If people speak Spanish, it just remind me of my grandparents because they always talk to me in Spanish.”

Hiring Bilingual Staff and Faculty—an Uncodified Practice

Campus collaborators admitted that no hiring policies were in place for hiring bilingual and Latinx staff and faculty members. However, collaborators on staff discussed that their campus cultures recognized the need for bilingual individuals to be represented across the institution. The uncodified practices of hiring Spanish speakers seemed most common at Ágape College, perhaps since their founding mission was focused on serving Latinx and Spanish-language communities. Gemma (staff-faculty-mentor) explained: “Whoever comes to our institution knows that we are a Hispanic-Serving Institution and therefore, well, not everybody has to speak Spanish, we know that. There is an understanding that many of our students will feel more comfortable in Spanish, so we tried to hire as many staff and faculty that are bilingual.” Gemma went on to describe how the college was intentional about ensuring that there were bilingual people on staff for key areas such as admissions, financial aid, the registrar, etc. From her perspective, Ágape College considered

that bilingualism served not just students, but also their families and that it was “important that the student is not always the translator and there is a way of connecting with parents.”

Ágape College’s hiring culture and recognition that students should not be burdened with translating for their families or in community-engaged learning experiences also came up in the Cacique student focus group. Cesar talked about his own life experiences where he, at times, was unfairly put in the position to translate for others in his previous higher education institution where no one on staff spoke Spanish. He talked about how, at Cacique, having faculty who could connect through language and help translate with Latinx, Spanish-speaking patients was a valuable resource and help. He shared: “I do speak Spanish, but sometimes I’m not as comfortable speaking in Spanish because I think mostly in English. But if I have a teacher who is a staff member there who speaks fluent Spanish, and they see the patient is uncomfortable and needs further explanation, they can just do it.” Cesar and other students seemed to have a variety of experiences with staff and faculty who were bilingual, which seemed to enrich their learning opportunities. Contrarily, community collaborators at Cacique who had been around during the founding years, like Rosa, talked about a time when they felt that the college was more committed to hiring people who spoke Spanish in key roles, like admissions, and to ensuring all materials were translated for Spanish speakers.

Addressing Spanish Language Needs in Teaching and Learning

In reviewing academic catalogues and websites, as well as participating in classroom observations, and discussions with collaborators, several teaching and learning practices were revealed. For example, the colleges housed programs to address English language learning, while also informally using bilingualism in the classroom as a tool for teaching and learning. Since the colleges had different origin stories when it came to how they approached

institutionalizing bilingualism as part of their educational models, their approaches to and experiences with addressing the needs of students seemed to also differ.

Bilingualism as a Tool in the Classroom

Regarding the use of Spanish in the classroom, I had the opportunity to observe a few college courses at Ágape College, including one 3-hour computer literacy course that was taught in-person (which I joined remotely) by a Latinx faculty, and in-person courses in psychology taught by a white faculty member and a course for English-language-learners taught by a Latinx faculty member. The computer literacy course, which was technically an English-language taught course, provided some interesting insights into the culture and practices around bilingualism and translanguaging that I had heard participants talk about through our conversations. In the context of the classroom, I found that bilingualism was often used as a tool for students to relate and support each other, as well as for faculty and students to communicate and enhance the learning experience.

During the computer course, I noticed that there was a fascinating and normalized dynamic of students who spoke and answered in Spanish only, and students who spoke and answered only in English (with some having a limited understanding of Spanish). Nonetheless, students seemed to be able to communicate with each other and do it fluidly across languages with a sense of ease. The professor noted to me that the students in this class who were English learners preferred for the class to be taught in English. There was one student who was an English learner who engaged very well with students and the material, strictly in Spanish, even as the dominant language exchanged in the classroom was English. My impression was that there was a comfort in translanguaging and bilingualism based on the interactions among students, and between the students and teacher. There was a point

where the professor shared with students about his son's upcoming birthday, and students engaged bilingually, asking more about his son.

There was also a point where the professor gave students time to try techniques learned in the classroom on their own and I could hear a student explaining in Spanish to a pair of students how to run the technique. The peer-to-peer support added to what I observed to be an atmosphere of co-learning in that students were actively assisting each other with the course content and activities. I also noticed that students were very open about translanguaging in Spanish and English and directed their questions to the faculty member and other students in Spanish without any translation. Of the nine students in the classroom, I noticed that about five of them spoke Spanish. I also noticed that during a classroom break, there were students speaking in Spanish primarily or translanguaging in and out of Spanish/English without any hesitation. With the limited opportunities for classroom observations at both the colleges, it was hard to establish if what I experienced in the computer literacy course was a common occurrence. However, it seemed from conversations with the faculty that translanguaging in the classroom as part of teaching and learning was a welcomed, normalized practice.

During my visit, I also had the opportunity to speak with a college administrator who explained that many of the part-time faculty at the college were bilingual. Furthermore, students who were still learning Spanish were put in classes with bilingual professors who could assist the students in Spanish. The administrator noted that the college did everything to ensure that language was not a barrier for students to enter and succeed at the college.

Curriculum and Academic Programs

College faculty and staff collaborators (primarily) spoke about some of the curriculum and academic programs offered by the colleges to support strengthening bilingualism. Information was triangulated by reviewing the Ágape College and Cacique academic catalogues and websites. As per their mission and founding goals, Ágape College appeared to remain committed to Spanish-English instruction. Their community's demographic shifts saw increased immigrant communities from Latin America and the Caribbean, which kept a steady enrollment of nearly 150 students a year in their English Institute, catering to English language learners regardless of their educational level. Benjamín (Ágape College, founder) reported that a few of the students in the Institute eventually enrolled in the college. At the same time, he said that the college had historically provided dual instruction in English and Spanish for students to ease into the English language while taking college credit courses through a cohort-based model of native Spanish speakers. He suggested that the two language options were meant to support different kinds of learners who may “need a different track.”

At Cacique, staff spoke about their English as a Second Language and Metro Uni Language Immersion programs, which were directed not just at Latinx students, but also at students arriving from all ethnic and language groups. Staff spoke most often about the Metro Uni program. Mario, for example, described it as a “pipeline program into the college” allowing students to master the English language on the non-credit bearing side of the college before enrolling as a college student. Table 5 displays the Spanish-English programs offered by the colleges.

Table 5*Spanish-English Academic Program Offerings Across the Colleges*

College	Spanish-English Academic Program Offerings	
	Program	Description
Ágape College	Language Transition Track (college-credit)	Dual track instruction in English and Spanish, whereby students first two semesters are taught in Spanish and gradually increase amounts of English in instruction and assessments from first thru third semesters with all English courses by the fourth semester.
	English Institute (3 levels; non-college credit)	An English for native speakers, caters to new immigrants regardless of their educational level; students do not use financial aid.
	Accuplacer Prep (non-college credit)	Since Accuplacer is only available in English, if a student does not understand English, the college will offer them an English language course for native speakers to get them prepared; offered free to students (per my conversation with a campus administrator).
Cacique Community College	English as a Second Language (ESL; college-credit)	Students “flagged” as ESL upon applying to college or upon taking the Accuplacer exam; Builds English language skills while fulfilling general education; courses; program sometimes offers enrollment in a learning community.
	Metro Uni Language Immersion (non-college credit)	Up to 900 hours or one semester (if more advanced) of English instruction prior to college-level coursework taught through the college’s division of continuing education; students do not use financial aid.

According to collaborators, demographic shifts at both colleges had also meant a shift in their practices with slightly reduced bilingual education offerings. Collaborators talked about how some of the newer generations accessing the colleges predominantly spoke English as their first language or were English language proficient. At a place like Ágape College, this meant that there were fewer students enrolling in the Language Transition Track, yet enrollment in their English Institute remained steady. For Cacique, increased changes in their non-Latinx demographics led some faculty to suggest that the college might need to consider its curricular offerings. For example, Luis posited: “We used to offer

[Spanish] courses in our natural science department. I taught one of them, environmental science. And I believe actually for the last couple of years or more, we haven't actually offered that course in [Spanish?] because we don't have now the population to offer the course.”

At Cacique, the perceived cutback in Spanish language academic offerings was a source of contention that was revealed in my formal and informal discussions with multiple collaborators. There were divergent views on the bilingual mission of the college, understood as Spanish language and transitional language instruction. There was a perception that either bilingual education never existed (for those who perceived that the college primarily focused on English as a Second Language) or that it had disappeared over time (for those who perceived the college’s elimination of courses taught in Spanish). Collaborators also shared a deflated sense of advocacy around bilingual education issues at the college with the transitioning of many founding staff members at the college. Fatima (staff) shared her perspective:

People saw that the course offerings, bilingual course offerings were diminishing fast throughout the years. There were a handful of individuals that were there during the initial struggle that really fought hard to question why and to advocate for those students that were being impacted by this change. But it died down throughout the years just because the demographic had changed but I do know, probably, that several people were impacted by it.

The tension of upholding the claimed bilingual values of Cacique appeared to be about a fear in the potential shift of their identity. This tension did not emerge at Ágape College. Nevertheless, for both colleges, bilingualism and translanguaging were assets that

were central to the colleges' identities, cultures, and practices and contributed to collaborators' comfort and feelings of home.

College as Home: Familismo and Familia as an Asset and Practice

Another central feature revealed by collaborators was the commonly described feeling that the colleges were like “home” and the people at the institutions were like a “family.” The feeling of family seemed in part based on the nurturing, attention, care, comfort, and belonging that were customary practices at both colleges. For Latinx collaborators, feelings of care resembled the care they received in their family structures, in addition to the Latinx cultures felt at the colleges. For instance, Eddie (Cacique, student) compared his previous experiences at other higher education institutions with his journey at Cacique. He said that, at his previous college, he felt “awkward” and as if he did not belong because of the culture of the institution: “I didn't mean academically. I just meant when classes were over, I just didn't feel that comfortable,” he said. Yet, at Cacique, Eddie voiced that the college offered a different environment, stating: “I feel like I'm home. I'm next door, I'm at my cousin's house, my friend's house.”

Most students, faculty, and staff expressed feelings of home and spoke extensively of different aspects of familismo found at the colleges. They discussed the ways in which the colleges valued students' families as part of their educational and life journeys. For example, collaborators felt that their institution recognized that students needed certain cultural and programmatic supports to sustain their families, and that families were an integral part of the student and community ecosystem that could not be ignored and must be included. To deepen an understanding of how the culture and concepts of home and familia manifested at the colleges, five subthemes are explored: (1) how the colleges built up student families and

created academic families; (2) the way familismo was embedded in their cultures; (3) collectivist approaches to success; (4) the way families were engaged in educational processes; and (5) programs and services that catered to parenting students and their families.

Building Up Student Families and Academic Families

Collaborators spoke about the ways in which the colleges recognized the key role of families in their students' lives and the kinds of responsibilities that many students carried as family members. Students like Tito (Ágape College) shared that the Latinx-centering of the college meant that a lot of professors came from similar households as the students and, therefore, understood what it meant “to be a child in the Hispanic community,” and the need to take care of the home. Tito and others in the student focus group gave examples of professors checking in on students around family needs and providing leniency on assignments so that students could fulfill their family responsibilities, which made students feel understood and respected. Tito expressed: “Their entire thing is, like, you can take care of your family and still find ways to take care of yourself and build yourself up.”

This sense of understanding, care, and respect for the role of families also came up in conversations with faculty and staff at Ágape College. They spoke about how students represented the first in their families to attend college and, as such, were “pioneers for their families and those that are going to come right after them, right, their descendants,” as put by Pablo (faculty). They also had mixed impressions about the kinds of support or lack thereof that Latinx students received in their households. Pablo felt that it was “not normal” for Latinx families to “promote higher education” simply because Latinx people were confronted with many disadvantages in high school and thus few pursued a higher education. Gemma (staff) believed that many Latinx families saw higher education as “a luxury” because many

of them were “struggling” to meet more immediate needs. However, she was assertive in stating that Latinx people valued education and it was the reason many migrated to the U.S. However, “need versus the wants are very different,” so it was the job of the college to be a bridge for students. She suggested that for students arriving at the college with limited supports, the college became their family.

Based on conversations with collaborators, Ágape College seemed to practice values that were geared toward supporting students through providing an academic family. For example, Alvaro (founder) spoke about how he looked to faculty and staff to be caretakers for students. He felt that carrying out familial roles was necessary for students’ needs to be met given their context. He asserted that students were capable, but needed familial nurturing to realize their full potential. He shared:

If I was running the university, I'm like, “No, you go to the office of student affairs.” But, in our school, when mom works, runs home, tries to take care of the kids for a couple hours, runs them over to her cousin's, friend's, wherever she's running them, and then gets here 10 minutes later, “no comio? [you haven't eaten?],” I need a mom. The dean needs to be the mom. The dean is the one that calls teachers, and says, “Listen, you're about to give this girl a D? Bring her in, force her to do more work that gives her the C that keeps her in the school.”

The level of familial care, attention, passion, and proactiveness that Alvaro described seemed like a non-negotiable for collaborators working at both colleges. If faculty and staff did not operate in this way, “they gotta go,” said Alvaro.

Furthermore, the cohort-based model of Ágape College and some of Cacique’s academic programs contributed to students being able to create that sense of familia. Ana

(Cacique, student) talked about how professors encouraged exchanging phone numbers and making friends, using class time to help establish community among students. She expressed: “We are like a family, like a group and not only in the oral hygiene [program], which is a close place and it's a close group. We get in together in the program and we're going to graduate together.”

Embedding Familismo—a Culture That Feels Like Family

Collaborators at the colleges spoke about a few factors that contributed to the family feel of the colleges. Some collaborators spoke about the size of their colleges contributing to the family feel. At Cacique, the smaller class sizes allowed students to experience more one-on-one time with professors and ask questions without feeling like they were being “too much of a burden,” as stated by Cesar. Similarly, Nayda (Ágape College, student) said that the size of the college contributed to feeling valued and not like she was just another student. She stated:

Yo había estudiado en una universidad, y siento que tener una universidad pequeña te hace sentir como que estás en una familia. No soy solo una estudiante más, sino una familia porque todos los profesores me han ayudado en cada paso de mi carrera, no solo en el nivel educativo, sino a nivel personal y profesional, en todo.” [I had studied at a university, and I feel like having a small university is like being in a family. I am not just another student, but a part of a family because the professors have helped me every step of my career, not just on an educational level, but also on a personal and professional level, in everything.]

At Ágape College, which is significantly smaller in scale compared to most colleges, students spoke extensively about feeling more personally connected to their faculty and

classmates, including other students in the focus group. Students at Ágape College also spoke about how some of the faith-based aspects of the college reminded them of home, and the storytelling through “testimonios” shared during Chapel also felt like a family kind of activity. For example, Ulises shared about another student who was in the focus group: “We all went to Chapel. We listened to the stories, we listened to Andy’s story, actually, that day. Yeah, it felt good. Yeah, it felt nice, it felt like it was a family type thing, there.”

Some collaborators spoke about the atmosphere of the college contributing to the feel of family, describing their college as “cozy,” “family-oriented,” “Latino at its heart,” and “warm.” For example, Ernesto (Cacique, community partner/former staff) described the college as “one of the huggiest places you’ve ever seen ... they greet each other, and there’s hugs, you know, abrazos [hugs] all over the place.” Non-Latinx collaborators seemed to also feel the familismo of the colleges. Like Joan (Cacique, faculty), who stated that she missed the physical hugs that were part of their campus culture since the pandemic forced them to be remote. Or Greg (Cacique, staff), who talked about how he had learned about the sense of family and what it meant from Latinx culture, as someone who grew up in a culture where individuals in families operated more independently from one another. He reflected about the familia aspect of the campus’ culture, stating: “They’re just things that I’ve been exposed to being part of the cultural family, that make me appreciate it more, and make me want that more in my own life.”

An additional feature of the embedded familismo was the important role of Latinx comfort foods. Josiane (Cacique, staff) talked about the abundance of Latinx food that could be found at the college, “rice, and beans, and chicken.” There was a Latinx culture of “nobody goes hungry,” as food was shared from campus service workers, professors, and

“everybody passing by.” Food, and some of the other cultural elements of the colleges’ expressed familismo seemed to help build belonging among campus members. Collaborators expressed that this feeling of belonging was notably important for immigrant people. For example, Ana (Cacique, student) asserted, “When you come from your country you don't know nobody. That is my case. I feel good there.” Admittedly, when staff tried to express the embedded culture of familismo of their campuses, it was something I could relate to and imagine as a Latina person who has been part of several Latinx affinity groups. Even so, often collaborators would say, “you have to live it to understand.”

Succeeding Together—Collectivist Definition and Approaches

Part of the Latinx familial culture described in the literature was the collectivist approach to decision making and actions taken. This collectivist culture was revealed through Ágape College collaborators’ comments on the ways they felt they and their college focused on supporting one another and ensuring people were succeeding together. As I discussed earlier in the theme about bilingualism as tool in the classroom, I had the opportunity to observe how students at Ágape College co-learned and assisted each other with classroom activities. This observation was fortified by collaborators’ individual reflections. For example, students discussed how they came to one another for connection and support, regardless of their academic majors. They often talked about how the collectivist culture was found across college member roles. Elías described the collectivist culture and values of the college as a form of unity, stating: “Because everybody here’s just, you know, helping the other person. That’s very rare. I don't just see people throwing people to the side, it’s kind of like your problem is my problem, as well, and we're all here to help each other.”

Staff-faculty-mentors like Francisco shared how the context of poverty and limited resources found in their Latinx community created a desire for improvement and help for one another. He shared how he had spoken to a student who told him how his classmates had shaped his education at Ágape College because he was helped by them. Francisco asserted that their culture made it so that there was “more of our communal desire of how do we get there together. Because if we get there together, we're going to be stronger than that if we try to put the others down so that we can be at the top.” This sense of collectivism was shared not just as Latinx people, but also as people who shared a common struggle with other marginalized communities. Hannah (Ágape College, staff-faculty-mentor) described how there was a “harmonious tight-knit” feeling among Communities of Color at the college because “we all share the same challenges ... we know the hills what we have to climb.”

Engaging Families in Education Processes

Another form of embedding familismo that was prevalent in conversations with staff and some community collaborators was the importance they placed on engaging families in the education process. There was an understanding that many students made decisions as part of a family unit, with some students being responsible for caring for members of their family. Thus, staff spoke about how they actively incorporated families in addressing educational issues. Fatima (Cacique) recognized that, with higher education HIPAA guidelines, she usually sought the student’s consent to “work with the whole family.” At Ágape College, Gemma (staff-faculty-mentor) discussed how being a Latinx institution meant that they had to understand that, with students, there was often a need to engage parents, grandparents and, in their context, also pastors who often had the most influence in decision-making by families in their community. Gemma went on to say that their approach was to ensure that

“we don't isolate the parents” to establish comfortability in education processes concerning the student. Community collaborators like Olinda (Ágape College) counted on the college's family engagement approach because community members also mentored students and parents in the community. Olinda viewed many of her mentees like her own children, and often served as an intermediary for families as they navigated the educational process. She shared the open door that she felt in being included as an extended family member to students in the community, noting: “The past dean was always willing to talk to me and tell me where the kids were. Then I could take that information and help the kids, but no less don't help the parent, money, having money, parents out of work, that kind of stuff.” Collaborators across roles seemed to appreciate the engagement of families and the broadened definitions of family incorporated by the college.

Student Parenting and Family-Oriented Programs and Services

A final subtheme that was most common at Cacique, perhaps because of their larger size and infrastructure compared to Ágape College, related to the myriad of parenting and family-oriented programs and services offered by the college. While several staff collaborators provided examples of the different programs, I had the opportunity to learn plenty about these programs from Mario through my interview and time spent during my site visit of the campus. As a trained social worker and staff member focused on holistic student supports, his perspective on the different programs and services seemed to be the most comprehensive. He explained:

Many of our students are parenting and really looking at like, how do we support them, we have a childcare center on campus, many students go to a child care close to their house, so we have a program specifically to support students that are parents,

connecting them to those resources, from diapers for newborns, to referrals for family therapy, to childcare, to other needs that the family might have. We provide that, and when we support students in the pantry, it's not just them it's also their family members, so it might be an average of five people if one student comes in, that's usually about five people in that household that are getting food through that one student... We have the student parent program, we used to do it pre-pandemic. We were meeting once or twice a month, we called it the student parent meetup, and they would meet up, we'd have lunch, we'd bring in speakers that they'd like to learn about, or you know topics that they were interested in, we'd bring in experts. We built that sense of community within itself where student parents can kind of connect with other student parents, versus kind of feeling isolated. It's so interesting that we have so many student parents on campus, but when students enter the campus, they feel like they're the only one. They don't realize there's certainly other parenting college students in the classroom, so there's some shame that students express comes with that, so when they feel like, oh wow there's a support program for this, and they really want us to succeed.

Mario's description revealed both the student context and desire to eliminate any feelings of isolation that may come with familial responsibilities. The programs he shared also seemed to be in direct response to the needs observed in their population, from childcare, through food assistance for whole families, to family meet ups and educational programs. Students at the college also seemed knowledgeable about some of the college's family-oriented services. Table 6 lists the programs and services uncovered at Cacique

through document and artifact review, and information obtained from informal conversations with collaborators during the site visit.

Table 6

Description of Cacique’s Family-Oriented Programs and Services

Family Program/Service	Description
Family Engagement	Supports parenting students by connecting them with resources and providing individualized case management and an array of services, e.g., counseling, meal vouchers, support groups, workshops, etc.
Childcare Center	Onsite childcare facility run by the college in partnership with a nonprofit, provides free childcare to qualifying students and otherwise reduced childcare options for students, faculty, and staff.
Food Pantry	Serves students and their families, providing \$400 worth of groceries twice a month for students in need; staff at the pantry discussed how students can list a family member to pick up the food in their stead, the food pantry also responds to preferences around food and is attentive to cultural food staples like rice, beans, etc.
Support for Fathers	Offered through the continuation education arm of the college for men in the community who are parents and are looking to pursue their GED or vocational training, these are non-credited, non-college enrollment programs.
Summer Family Program	Summer program whereby students who are parents can take summer classes at HCC with their children (their children participate in an educational day camp at the college while parents are in classes).

Chapter Summary

In summary, the chapter covered the first six of 11 cross-cutting themes of both shared and distinct findings that emerged from conversations with collaborators and a review of documents, artifacts, and research observations. The themes included: (1) *a Targeted but Inclusive Mission*, which explored the colleges’ focus on building social mobility and contributing to the community’s leadership and workforce; (2) *the Importance of Place: Institutions of El Barrio* covered their targeted focus on specific local communities revealing

the challenges posed by el barrio, holistic, community development approaches, and ways that they sought to change the narrative for students of el barrio, this theme also uncovered the impacts of their changing demographics and the gentrification of their neighborhoods; (3) *a Community Relationship of Mutuality and Commensalism* focused on the colleges' presence in the community, the way they sought community feedback, acted in solidarity with communities; facilitated growth for students and the community through community engaged learning; and faced challenges with college–community partnerships; (4) *Naming Strengths in the Midst of Challenges* unveiled how collaborators understood challenges faced by Latinx communities as both assets and challenges, and how students forged ahead despite the challenges; (5) *Normalizing Bilingualism and Translanguaging* uncovered how supporting bilingualism was a form of resistance to assimilation, language use created a vibe in everyday exchanges, they practiced uncoded language-related hiring, and addressed the Spanish language needs of the Latinx community; and (6) *College as Home: Familismo and Familia as an Asset and Practice* illustrated how the colleges built up student families and academic families, embedded a culture of familismo, represented collectivist approaches to success, engaged families in educational processes, and institutionalized programs and services in support of parenting students and families.

CHAPTER 8

LATINX CENTERING AS SHARED AND NUANCED REALITIES—PART 2

Continuing from Chapter 7 (Part 1), this chapter discusses the remaining five of the 11 shared yet nuanced findings. The themes and subthemes were related to which assets the institutions promoted and centered; how they institutionalized and built upon these assets as part of their organizational identity, culture, and praxis; how the institutions and Latinx communities contributed to and supported each other; as well as how and to what extent the Latinx-founded institutions built counterspaces to normative realities in higher education. The overarching remaining five themes include: (7) *Student-Centering: More Than a Catch Phrase*, (8) *Role Models and Mentors*, (9) *Arts and Culture as Staples of Institutional Identity, Culture, and Practice*, (10) *Tensions and Challenges to Living out the Mission and Values*, and (11) *“We Just Are”*: *Counterspaces and Counternarratives to Normative Realities*. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

Student-Centering: More Than a Catch Phrase

College collaborators talked about how their colleges centered students as a value, culture, and practice. Collaborators seemed to consider their student-centered approach as one feature that made them distinct from other higher education institutions that claimed to be student-centered. Elsa (Cacique, staff) critiqued other colleges and asserted that part of their distinction was in how they prioritized the needs of students over that of administrators,

stating: “When you compare to your peers, and what you get is much more money goes to support students, and academics and student support, than it goes into administration, then you know they’re doing a good job. So, it isn’t about supporting bureaucrats, it’s about putting the money for the students.” At Ágape College, collaborators talked about a similar distinction, and added that the culture of focusing on teaching and student development over other normalized academic responsibilities made them different. For example, Alvaro (founder) described the expectations of faculty at the college not falling within the norms of higher education by making the following comparison:

If you're on a traditional faculty, you have to produce articles, you have to produce books, you have to go to so many professional places, do presentations, and dialogues, and reflections. You don't have to do that here. You take all that time and invest it in the needs, the needs of the students, which may well be, “Listen, son. I know you went to a local school. I need to show you how to write a sentence.” And so I'm very militant about that, because that's what makes us different.

Collaborators like Alvaro and Ivan (Ágape College, faculty) described a founding commitment that pushed them to go above and beyond to ensure students were supported and successful at the college. Ivan posited: “We try to center it around the student, because that's why we're here, if the student doesn't show up, we don't exist, so incorporating students, supporting students, encouraging students, that's the value that we've been using from day one.” In talking to collaborators, the acknowledgement of their existence being tied to the wellbeing of their students went beyond a financial concern. More often, the narrative of student-centering was tied to a community empowerment strategy and mission requirement. I took away from conversations with collaborators that the colleges were trying to prove

through actions like their decision-making and hiring practices, their holistic supports, and contextualized education, that they were focused on students. The following subthemes focus on their actions to better understand the colleges' student-centered culture and praxis.

Student-Centered Decision-Making

Collaborators illuminated some of the ways they thought student-centering was approached through decision-making processes related to curriculum and new academic program review, course and admissions scheduling models, academic advising, and choices around remedial courses. Regarding curriculum and program review, collaborators at Cacique discussed frequent meetings among faculty that lent themselves to constant revision of curriculum and evaluation of courses that needed to be added and subtracted from the curriculum to ensure that they were meeting the needs of students. One faculty member also discussed how the college was exploring a more comprehensive first-year experience course, which was a self-recommendation coming out of their recent accreditation process. Manuel (faculty) shared that the college was applying for resources to strengthen the first-year experience recognizing that it was a vulnerable point in students' academic careers. He noted that, in an effort to support retention and success, the first-year strategy was "a high-impact practice to build that sense of belonging in the student."

Regarding course and admissions scheduling models, Ágape College collaborators talked about how student centering was not "a theoretical" concept for them. They appeared to have made decisions about their college's schedules based on their working adult and parenting populations, and students who may have stopped out of college and were returning to complete at Ágape College. For example, one of the unique features of the college revealed was their block scheduling structure, which included a daytime cohort and an

evening cohort that met for 4-hour course blocks. Elena (staff-faculty-mentor) explained how the block scheduling model evolved to meet student needs:

When I first started teaching, our classes were more like a regular college during the daytime. The evening classes were the only 4-hour blocks. Then the issue that we had was that, let's say a student halfway through the semester, their childcare arrangements changed, or work switched their schedules, or whatever, they had to drop their classes. Even if the same class was taught in the daytime, actually, the way that the classes were structured, they wouldn't be able to switch. So, then, we wanted to make both daytime and nighttime mirrors of each other, so that if a student has to switch, they can. So that is why we switched it to that. The only exception is that our early college students in their first semester, the classes are two hours long.

Staff at Ágape College explained that this kind of scheduling allowed students to work full-time while getting their college education, which was considered important to Latinx households coming from disproportionately low-income neighborhoods. Faculty experienced the block-scheduling with mixed feelings. One faculty member, Rob, thought that the model might work better for the college's adult learners, but with the college attracting more traditional-aged students out of high school, they might need to consider providing more course schedule options to keep younger students engaged. Another scheduling feature at Ágape College that seemed student-focused was how terms were structured. Hannah shared that their college had two cohort-based admissions inputs for students, and two student orientations. She made a comparison to other higher education institutions: "A lot of universities, they have that spring input, but not the way we do it, like,

an entire day one. Some of the new student orientations where it's just, maybe, transfer students that come in the spring or, but we do it all again.”

Regarding academic advising, Ágape College’s founders and staff gave a few examples of how they focused on their students’ needs when making advising decisions in ways that may appear untraditional. For example, Gemma (staff-faculty-mentor) relayed a story about a student with whom she was working who was in her last semester of coursework and was an avid church-goer—attending church four days a week. Gemma explained that due to the courses she needed, she could only offer the student a night course, but it would conflict with her church activities. Gemma apparently sat down and spoke with the student’s family and pastor to discuss the student’s academic need and winded up helping the student transfer into Waterstone University to finish her degree. Gemma stressed that, in student centering, “that’s a decision that maybe other institutions do not have to consider, but we do because we understand what the priorities of their families are.” Speaking of hard decisions that perhaps other institutions would not make, Alvaro also shared a story about how he was in conversations with another college president about their staggering financial aid practices, which he considered were “bait and switch” tactics that harmed students and forced many to take on significant debt. Alvaro said Ágape College made it a policy not to send Ágape College students to that college, stating emphatically: “I’m like ‘no, we’re not sending our... I’m blackballing your school.’ And then, this is the stuff we do that other people in academia won’t because it’s their colleagues. We’re not colleagues, we don’t see it that way. Our commitment is to here, not to academia.”

Finally, Ágape College collaborators also revealed their commitment to students through the way they treated remedial coursework. Ágape College collaborators were

vigilant about critiquing the ways they thought that their local community college failed many of their Latinx communities. As a public institution, the community college may have been less expensive, yet collaborators thought they soaked up students' money through remedial courses that led to significant drop-out rates. With the success of Latinx students and students of the community as their center, collaborators like Benjamín (founder) and a campus administrator discussed how they took a different approach to remedial education. Benjamín assured: "We don't do remedial courses here, even if you need it. We figure out a different way to get into within the structure of the curricular experience so that you don't waste courses. These are the things we do." According to staff members and the student handbook, the college did not offer remedial courses; instead, they offered a free, non-credit bridge course.

Student-Centered Hiring Practices

The subtheme of hiring practices came up multiple times across Ágape College collaborator interviews and, in fewer instances, with Cacique collaborators. Perhaps because Ágape College was a small private institution, there may have been more of a sense of permission to establish uncodified practices and a culture around hiring that focused on the students being served. In contrast, as part of a larger public system of institutions, Cacique followed more established systems and policies around hiring. For instance, Fatima (Cacique, staff) stated that the accreditation recommendations to the campus suggested that they hire a "more representative body there in the academic world that is teaching our students," directed at the need to increase the diversity of the faculty. However, she described the job application and search processes as following the Metro Uni system's standard forms and guidelines so that they were hiring for "credentials" over racial or ethnic background. Like

most colleges, Cacique had a diversity and compliance unit that ensured “the same opportunity” for all candidates. Furthermore, regarding credentials, Joan (faculty) admitted that, as a community college, their focus was primarily on teaching, but the Metro Uni system and Cacique were investing in faculty research and publications, including starting initiatives on campus to increase research productivity. Despite the college’s formal hiring processes, many Cacique faculty collaborators discussed the importance of hiring people with passion for working with low-income, first-generation Students of Color.

Related to passion for students, Ágape College collaborators spoke about how, in the process of hiring new employees, they sought a clear alignment with their students. One of their hiring managers stated: “I’ve had people come in and do the mock class and you’re like, ‘Well, they know their stuff, but they’re not going to be good for students, so we will not invite those people to come,’ ... by ‘people like that’ that won’t identify with our students to come in and teach.” Elena’s statement revealed a commonly cited uncodified practice at Ágape College that emerged from conversations with collaborators. Collaborators discussed how they “need people who have that understanding, who have that second mile mentality, who understand we may need to work a little harder to get that paper to meet the standard that’s required from that student,” as stated by Benjamín (founder). He and others seemed to recognize the importance of students seeing themselves in the faculty and staff of the college and having people at the college who understood their lived experiences. He expressed:

... which is one reason we don’t use majority institution faculty. Even if they want to help, when they help, they don’t because they don’t realize they have a certain level of prejudice relative to the capacity of a student that might not, in fact, demand what is

required of them. And they dumb it down for them, even though they had what it took to step to the line.

Thus, aside from subject knowledge, some additional uncodified criteria that Ágape College collaborators considered in hiring faculty and staff included “faculty that are in the city, or at least have been serving the community a while” (Ivan, faculty); “understand the mission” (Alvaro, founder); and faculty who will follow the college’s norms around incorporating Latinx and other People of Color in their curriculum (Hannah, staff-faculty-mentor).

Delivering Holistic Approaches

The review of document and web resources, as well as conversations with collaborators, revealed an extensive delivery of holistic supports for students. As mentioned previously, Ágape College was housed within a nonprofit community development and social service agency with multiple services and programs accessed by college students. However, two of their college’s student-centered supports were an online 24/7 tutoring service available to students in all subjects, as well as their supplementary instruction model that placed an extra support person in the classroom. Cacique, on the other hand, had built within their infrastructure an array of supports that focused on student wellness and social needs, to the likes of a “social service agency” as put by Elsa (staff). Mario (staff) suggested that Cacique tried to understand students as whole people with various needs that the college played a role in addressing to ensure their success. He posited:

[We’re] really trying to understand the student from a holistic perspective, not just as a college student, but as a college student that lives in this environment that has these strengths, has this motivation, and just really try to work with that, as they try to help students again get to that ultimate goal of graduation.... We’re a community center in

a way, not just the college, because we provide so much other additional support.

Besides the academic goals, we support from food pantry access to referrals for legal or housing, or mental health counseling and any kind of thing that might impact their ability to be successful.

Building from Mario's comments, other resources offered by the college included counseling, advisement, accessibility services, a wellness center, access to fresh produce through community gardens, "culturally appropriate" workshops on nutrition and health, and campaigns to bolster healthy behaviors. For example, Mario shared a recent "healthy beverage initiative" that sought to increase consumption of water and reduce sugary beverages. Among the list of holistic approaches, Cacique also had leadership development programs, clubs, and services catering to different campus affinity groups, including students with disabilities, LGBTQIA students, veterans, different ethnic groups, and parenting students.

Another notable practice at Cacique was their coaching model, which Greg (staff) discussed at length. He suggested that their coaching model was unique to the Metro Uni system in that they took a "hybrid approach to advisement and advising in a holistic manner, where you're actually helping with life management along with college and college career support." While he admitted that the coaching model was still evolving, he spoke passionately about how coaches provided "wrap-around" support to students. Some of the activities of coaches with students included assisting with time management and providing financial wellness and literacy knowledge on things like "how to earn good credit and maintain good credit, just having a checking account and being able to benefit from some of that kind of stuff." Greg also uncovered that the college implemented an "onboarding script"

that his staff used to learn about student needs and be able to support their learning from day one. This kind of script had allowed the campus to identify and support Dreamers⁵ or students who might need to borrow one of the college's free laptops.

Contextualizing Education

A final student-centering approach that emerged from discussions with collaborators was their emphasis on contextualizing education for urban, Latinx people, and People of Color. Collaborators talked about their commitment to a relevant education, where they “begin where the student is at,” as Elsa (Cacique, staff) put forward. She described education as a process that was complex and began with the following understanding:

Acknowledging who you teach, who they are, where they are, what are their circumstances, what does it mean to be here, what does it mean to be from the poorest [district], what does it mean to be from a school that grew out of the love and activism of the Puerto Rican community, and then other groups that signed up for that, what does it mean to have sustained that involvement with community and meet where the student is?

Similarly, at Ágape College, collaborators discussed how their college's approach was to embrace “who you are in the delivery of [education],” as postulated by Benjamín (founder): “In our case, the imagery of instruction, the examples of instruction, the content that's being delivered and being in flesh with the stories that make them real, are coming from a context you can relate to. That is important.”

⁵ According to the National Immigration Forum: “A Dreamer is an undocumented immigrant who came to the United States as a child. Dreamers often have only known the U.S. as home and identify as Americans” (Benenson, 2020, para. 2).

The colleges both seemed to value their identities and the identities of their students as part of their educational approach. One salient identity was their “sense of urbanization,” which community collaborator Matías (Ágape College) said was “always brought to the table” in conversations among faculty and staff at the college. For Matías, their urban identity was encapsulated in a love for being “people of the city” and that the college both embraced and did not try to change this part of their and their students’ identity. Other ways that the colleges contextualized education for Latinx students and Students of Color were revealed through exposing students to Latinx and People of Color figures, learning through experience, and infusing student assets and lived experiences in the classroom.

Exposing Students to Latinx and POC Figures

Staff and faculty at the colleges discussed how they sought to expose students to Latinx figures and professionals through programming and course content. For example, collaborators described campus events where they brought Latinx people as guest speakers and examples of professionals in the field. Multiple collaborators at Ágape College gave the example of their college’s “minorities in health sciences” program, whereby students meet Latinx medical professionals, scientists, and researchers. Related to course content, collaborators discussed how students were exposed to Latinx people through intentionally inserting literature and assignments that allowed students to explore Latinx figures more deeply. Course content ranged from Latinx studies at Cacique to diverse disciplines at Ágape College. For example, Ana (Cacique, student) shared that she took a Latin American literature class where students focused on “Latin books, Latin culture.” Ana considered the course essential for Latinx students “because sometimes you don't know. You know your Latino origin, but you don't know your culture.” At Ágape College, the study of Latinx

people was more embedded across different courses in different disciplines. For example, Hannah (staff-faculty-mentor) described how her English courses were designed to include a majority of Latinx writers in order to “build up the students.” She noted:

It's almost like being at an HBCU where you get more culture based on the population of the students, and I think that is so needed for students' confidence for representation. For just being able to see themselves in the curriculum and to really build their history of who they are. So, at Ágape College, we have that unique opportunity in the curriculum to really infuse people who look like them, who look like us in the curriculum to really help them, so I love being able to do that.

Similarly, Francisco shared how in media and technology subjects, he contextualized Latinx culture and urban culture by assigning brief reports on leaders in the field. He noted that he gave suggestions on Latinx people for students to research “so that they can see both male and female, that there are people who look like them, who have been on this journey.”

Learning Through Experience

Another emphasis of collaborators was on real-life, hands-on experiences. Pablo (Ágape College, faculty) described why this mattered to them at the college:

I think there's an emphasis on knowing about the people, right, not everyone is more cerebral, and I think that's a Western concept in education. But from a Hispanic perspective, we're real, tangible people. We're feeling people, right, and so we need to know, how does this make sense in a practical lens, right? And so, sometimes classes need to be had under a branch in [adjacent neighborhood] and talking about the individuals that are, you know, dealing with the heroin epidemic and opioids,

right? I think there's a level of balance in terms of content and classroom, but then also what does that look like from a practical learner.

Collaborators, like Pablo, described the importance of “practical” hands-on learning and cited several externally and internally facing student experiences. On the external side, they had activities like internships, getting students certified while fulfilling coursework for real work opportunities, connecting students with mentors in the field, linking with nonprofits to support client-based services, field trips, and working on college-sponsored events, and at Cacique, they also included training in undergraduate research. The exposure through the external-facing experiences seemed invaluable when students shared their personal stories. For example, Tito (Ágape College, student) narrated how he and fellow student Elías felt that the college was constantly offering opportunities for their growth, including giving them the opportunity to staff a fundraising function. He recounted:

I even got numbers for people we met at events where the mayor was talking, or I've worked recently at a fundraising event the school had here. They had a whole bunch of people here just to, essentially, [do] marketing. When they came here for classes. Afterwards, it was all people just trading numbers and organizations and doing marketing.

Regarding internally facing hands-on experiences, collaborators revealed praxis such as explaining course content in ways that felt beneficial and relevant to students. Rob (Ágape College, faculty) shared that he was explicit in teaching so that students could “apply that [class content] to their life.” He gave the example of teaching Microsoft Excel from a “career perspective” relating to students’ current jobs and professional aspirations: “How does this tie into your career? How does this tie into what you're going to do as a business owner, or

what you're doing in an administrative role?" Similarly, Francisco talked about how he tried to relate course content to students, so that they saw how what they were learning could be like job training. He described how many of Ágape College's part-time faculty worked in the field, so he told his students: "Look at this as on-the-job training in the sense that it's not like 'oh I'm going to goof around in school' or 'this is irrelevant to me', but really realize that your professor could hire you someday."

Infusing Student Assets and Lived Experiences in the Classroom

A final subtheme of contextualizing education was how collaborators perceived the colleges instilled the strengths and lived experiences of Latinx students in the classroom. Faculty uncovered how they helped students "capitalize" on their personal journeys by incorporating their life events and experiences in the classroom. For example, Manuel (Cacique) shared how he tried to bring students' backgrounds into the class to help students make connections between their work and life experiences and the course material. He shared:

One of my first-day-of-class exercises. "What are you bringing to this class that make you to be successful in this class? [...] So tell me and let's uncover what is your asset to do well in this class. Even if you don't think that's an asset that could be." So, I try to embrace, or even they have work or job responsibility that is an asset to be on [inaudible] in the class, and help them to propel into a good grade.

Ivan at Ágape College described a similar pedagogical approach by spending the first day of class getting to know students as a way to bring their stories and experiences to the classroom. He noted: "I gotta be knowledgeable of my students, I must, I know where they're coming from. The first day that we get together, it's three hours of let me find out who you

are, you're going to find out who I am.” The examples portrayed by Manuel and Ivan revealed a dialogical approach to calling-in student experiences to make learning more humanized and relevant for teachers and learners.

Role Models and Mentors

One of the ways that collaborators uncovered being in relationship with students and each other was through mentoring and modeling empowering behaviors. Collaborators talked about role modeling and mentoring as a cultural and institutional practice. As a cultural phenomenon, faculty and staff talked about being a “go-to-person” that students could rely on, and a “good steward,” “conduit,” or guide and motivator for students as they sought to fulfill their goals. To be reliable and help students achieve their goals, several collaborators at Cacique seemed to see themselves as having to be “a strong voice to advocate” and liaise for students to access services, resources, and supports. Their campus culture valued the advocacy role of faculty and staff. Fatima (staff) revealed: “It's almost like everyone thinks that they're the biggest student advocate and it doesn't matter what they're fighting about. They're always right, because they're the biggest student advocate at our campus.” Collaborators, like Inez (staff), expressed that modeling advocacy for students “empowers me, but it also empowers the student to advocate for themselves, knowing of course that there's another person on another hand that's reaching out to support them.” Collaborators took this role seriously since it seemed that the issues faced by students were always pressing and had the potential to stand in the way of graduation if left unaddressed.

As an institutional practice, collaborators claimed to have guidelines in place that established the expectations of faculty and staff to fulfill the role of mentors for students at their colleges. While unable to review documents that would establish their claims,

collaborators at both colleges provided examples of their institutional practices. For example, Manuel (Cacique, faculty) asserted that faculty contracts included mentoring alongside advisement, teaching, research, and service obligations, though admitted that it was not obvious how mentoring was taking place at the college. He himself pursued mentoring relationships with students “organically” through classroom interactions and building rapport over time. However, he recalled that, in his academic department, there had been a mentoring program where students were assigned to faculty, but it was not clear from our conversation whether this program still existed. Also, at Ágape College, Alvaro (founder) affirmed that to fulfill their goal of “creating a mentoring institution,” they built the expectation into their faculty contracts. He was passionate in stating that if faculty were not aligned with this priority, then they were not wanted at the institution. He voiced: “I don't want you on our team. We don't ask you to do research, we ask you to mentor students. Right, so you teach, you do your committees, and you mentor. You spend more time mentoring students.”

Additional inputs from collaborators that helped explain the culture and praxis of mentoring and role modeling concerned how faculty and staff related to students and how students saw themselves in them; ideals that expressed role modeling being about “living out” the values of the college, and how faculty and staff also experienced role modeling by having leadership that looked like them.

Relating to Students

Faculty and staff disclosed how they could relate to their students' upbringings, family, and life experiences as Latinx people and people brought up in similar urban contexts. In an exchange among Ágape College faculty collaborators, Pablo, Rob, and Sarita all shared growing up in the same Core City neighborhoods as their students, which was also

true for a few faculty and staff across the two colleges. Pablo and Sarita were also graduates of Ágape College, so they could relate to students from an alumni perspective. Returning to teach or work at the colleges as alumni felt like a “360 moment,” as stated by Pablo. Faculty across the colleges suggested that their ability to relate and connect with students was part of the “draw” to work at their respective colleges and felt personal for them. They carried out this relatability in how they interacted with students. For example, Rob recounted how, on the first day of class, he revealed personal details about himself to further the connection and relatability with students. He noted: “[I] show them a picture of my family to let them know, like, I have two kids, I'm a parent and I'm married. I'm a husband. I have two or three jobs and I have other responsibilities, as well, and I'm setting the foundation to say, ‘look, but I'm still here’, right? I still found a way to be here for you, that really sets the tone.” Relating to students by drawing connections to parenting and familial responsibilities, which students were prone to carry, seemed like an effective strategy.

Students Seeing Themselves in Faculty/Staff

Reciprocally, students also experienced being able to relate and see themselves in the colleges’ faculty and staff, which helped bolster their aspirations for what they could achieve. For example, Eddie (Cacique, student) discussed how common it was to have Latinx faculty and staff at the college, which was different than his experiences in grade school and high school, where most of his teachers were white people. It was not until he came to Cacique that he felt like he had people to “look up to.” He expressed: “When you see your own kind and they’re professors, the adjunct, the four professors, that I think is a humongous motivation, like, ‘Wait a minute. They're like me, I can rise up to become a professor as well’.” There were similar experiences recounted by faculty in their engagements with

students, recognizing that having Latinx educators, scientists, and practitioners with PhDs was far from the norm and an “enormous responsibility, of being a role model for what can be to other young Hispanic[s],” as told by Francisco (Ágape College, staff-faculty-mentor). Yet, faculty and staff embraced being seen by students in this way because of the kind of journeys they lived as immigrants, English-language learners, and people who also had grown up in poverty and experienced similar hurdles as their students.

Living Out the Values of the College Through Role Modeling

In conversations with staff and faculty at Ágape College, the phrase to “live out the values” or similar expressions came up on multiple occasions. It seemed that to “live out the values” of Latinx and faith-based people was a central tenet for role modeling and putting into action the beliefs they espoused at the college. Staff-faculty-mentors at the college shared that they modeled for students through how they came into the classroom and put their best forward as humans who also had “good and bad days,” as stated by Elena. The sense of humanizing the role of faculty and staff at the college seemed important to collaborators; it also came up in a separate conversation with Francisco. He emphasized that “there's people watching you, so it's like, we're humans, we sometimes we fall short, but it's really them looking at you to see ‘okay, how is he going to live out these values’ in the process.” My sense was that collaborators felt a need to be accountable in their behaviors and actions for students and each other. This accountability seemed to help them enact the values they subscribed to. One example of a value put into action through modeling was service to others, which Francisco commented on, saying:

I think I have to live it out, I think I have to provide opportunities for my students.
Help find resources for my students, I give them opportunities to gain real world

experience ... I think if I can live it out, ... if I can inspire others to want to invest resources so that we can make this a reality, help my students grow.

The inspiration that Francisco and others articulated was toward students and colleagues but was also revealed in how campus executive leaders were perceived by faculty and staff.

“The Top Look Like the Bottom”

Faculty and staff often gave praise for their organizational leaders because they were Latinx people who led with qualities that people admired. According to the archives, in the over 50-year history of Cacique, all their college presidents have been Latinx people. Some of the qualities that collaborators mentioned when talking about their current Cacique president was the way she opened up to students and colleagues about her personal, cultural, and educational background as a product of the state’s public higher education system. They discussed her inviting leadership style and the kinds of opportunities she paved for students and colleagues. Staff like Fatima gave examples of the president’s engagement style, for example, that she took an interest in student learning by gifting books to students and asking them to share their ideas upon reading them. Fatima also shared: “She offers [students] an opportunity to come to the table and she’ll say that she will make a flan for them. That’s how inviting she is.” At Ágape College, staff-faculty-mentors spoke about the founder’s influence in the community and with “top influencers in our nation” and, through these relationships, bridged opportunities for the college. In a sense, leaders were role modeling (intentionally and unintentionally) for faculty and staff a different kind of culturally relevant and unapologetically Latinx form of leadership.

The leadership modeling did not stop at Presidents and seemed to provide a visible pathway for staff across the ranks. Mario (Cacique, staff) articulated:

We have a lot of people in leadership that fall in the Latinx identification and that's really important, so I think that helps people feel motivated, you know if they're coming in new, they come in maybe to an entry-level position—to know that there is opportunity for mobility and that they're important to just anyone else in the institution.

The visibility and modeling of Latinx college leaders at the two campuses was in part what collaborators found unique about their campuses. Francisco said, “I think that that makes Ágape College unique in that our top people are minorities, and I think that you can say that it's not just the top people are minorities, as far as race goes and ethnicity, but also from a gender perspective.” He noted several women leaders within the college, which seemed to also inspire faculty and staff.

Arts and Culture as Staples of Institutional Identity, Culture, and Practice

Evident from the review of campus artifacts during the site visits, such as photos, art, murals, theater spaces, as well as publications, and conversations with collaborators, were the institutions' priorities of preserving and highlighting the assets of Latinx communities through arts and culture. Collaborators highlighted their campus' “love of the arts” and saw Latinx people's strengths expressed through campus music and theater productions, art studios and displays, book expos and literary dialogues. I observed the colleges' reverence to Latinx arts and culture during my site visits. It was most visible at Cacique, where arts and culture artifacts were found in nearly every building and spread throughout the campus. Their spaces were filled with colorful art and images of Latinx people, posters, books, and icons demonstrating social movements and activism, and photographic and artistic renditions of the namesake of the college. To illustrate, at the entry way of the president's office, there were

two wall cases with wooden carved saints, which is traditional to Puerto Rican people. There were also works of art and cultural artifacts found in dedicated spaces like an atrium in the main floor of one of their buildings, which was home to display cases of artifacts pertaining to the legendary Latin Jazz music icon Tito Puente. Furthermore, collaborators at both institutions often highlighted their dedication to theater and the written word as expressions of culture.

Making Theater for the People

Both institutions housed beautifully maintained and state of the art community theaters and produced accessible arts and culture programming for campus and local community members. Conversations with collaborators revealed the importance that the colleges placed in bringing the theater to the people of el barrio, rather than succumbing to having to leave the community to go downtown to access arts programming that may not be culturally sustaining. Tito (Ágape College, student) gave his understanding of how the college had approached creating the theater space for the community from the standpoint of empowering the community and changing the narrative about community theater and arts programming. He articulated:

Well, the person [who manages the theater] here, he spoke before saying what he did to get people to come down and perform here. He said he went up to the cities where they had great performers and he told him to come down here, one, to inspire people who paid to come in and decide that's the career they want to take. But he also [sic] saying that we want your very best down here, we do not want to be treated like some second-rate citizens. We don't want your B team; we want your very best down here. And his goal is to make people and other parts of the city come down here to watch

our performances. So yeah, the connections they make is all to basically say that everybody in the neighborhood, “we want to be as great as the people you watch out there. We can help you get to that point, all you need to do is come in.”

The desire to cultivate local artists and bring high-quality performers to the theaters was a shared value of the colleges, as well as their accessibility. Both colleges maintained partnerships with local artists and arts-based organizations. I had the opportunity to visit one of these during my Cacique site observation and community walking tour.

Finally, collaborators noted that theater performances were free or low-cost admissions, often subsidized through grants. At Cacique, Mario (staff) said: “I think a lot of the folks that live in the area love it because they can come in, I think it's \$5 or \$10 and they can get a great show and feel really connected.” Mario’s response was impressive given the array of prominent Latin bands featured in their theaters.

The Written Word

While the campuses produced many of the kinds of publications you would see at other higher education institutions like campus magazines, annual reports, and brochures, conversations with collaborators revealed three additional kinds of publications or written word activities that seemed notable expressions of their organizational identity and culture. One publication was an Ágape-owned and operated bilingual community newspaper whose tagline suggested it was “inclusive,” “multigenerational,” and “intercultural.” According to Hannah (staff-faculty-mentor), the newspaper was free and available in print and online. Upon reviewing a March 2023 online version of the newspaper, it featured local, regional, national, and international news stories, as well as sections that focused on local

entrepreneurs, community agendas, voting information, and occasional stories about Ágape College members.

Two additional activities that seemed to be appreciated at Cacique by collaborators included a weekly bulletin and a monthly literary gathering, both called by Spanish-language names and sponsored by the President's Office. According to collaborators, the bulletin communicated campus happenings as well as statements addressing social justice issues of the times, poetry, and "there are always cultural elements that are connected to a Latinx population and community," said Greg (staff). The literary gatherings emerged from conversations with students who described a monthly cultural convening where campus and community members came together to discuss literary works and poetry. Their website described the gatherings as "culture talks," started in 2021 to mark the birthday and legacy of their namesake to foster "community engagement and learning." Beyond highlighting literary works and authors, the monthly events also featured numerous speakers to discuss contemporary social issues and bring forward Black and Latinx community leaders' voices on topics such as Blackness in the United States and perspectives on gendered leadership, among others.

Tensions and Challenges to Living Out the Mission and Values

There are many tensions and challenges that organizations face when trying to institutionalize and build upon their values, which was true for collaborators at both institutions. Two of the central challenges that emerged from conversations with collaborators across roles were the perceived tensions of moving from community-founded entities to corporate structures, as well as the challenges that existed with, within, and toward Latinx communities as they tried to fulfill their purpose.

Positing the Inevitable Corporatization of the College

Collaborators conveyed that the colleges started and were fueled by passion; however, they were concerned that, with time, their institutions had become (Cacique) or could become (Ágape College) more “corporate” in the way that they prioritized and executed their goals. For example, at Cacique, community collaborators discussed how the college had a history of “defiant” campus leaders who stood up for the distinct needs of the college. They felt that this allowed them to maintain a level of independence from the Metro Uni system and from other community colleges. However, over the years, they felt that the campus had become “far more centralized, far more controlled,” as described by Romero. Despite understanding that managing a college involved many parts, he articulated that the college was “more about key facts, key statistics.” Based on Cacique’s community partners, it seemed that they viewed centralization and a focus on metrics as the kinds of approaches and concerns found in corporate rather than in Latinx-centered community-based work. Collaborators also appeared to define Cacique’s corporatization as linked to an increased focus on fundraising, competition, and what Romero perceived to be “artificial” standards. He further emphasized: “It’s all about budgets, it’s all about raising money.” The foci, as articulated by Romero, seemed to be interpreted as a potential threat to the foundational values of the college and left the impression that Cacique was beginning to function more like a corporation.

Additionally, collaborators discussed how external fundraising added pressures to conform to certain standards which could also present a threat to the foundational values of the colleges. For example, Ágape College collaborators cited examples of pressures from grantors that forced the college and Ágape Inc. to discuss benchmarks and metrics to address

grantors' interests, which did not always fit *Ágape's* context. An example a member provided was funder questions like, "how is your organization or program addressing racial equity," when collaborators considered that *Ágape College* was built for this purpose. They perceived disconnects in language used by outside funders and how it did or did not apply to *Ágape College* and their neighborhood context.

From my observation and discussion with collaborators, it was evident that the resource challenges faced by the colleges seemed to be what was leading to the perceived corporate-like actions (fundraising, competition, and standards) of the colleges. Collaborators across the two colleges felt constraints in managing institutional limitations, such as inadequate financial resources, which had an impact on their ability to deliver the desired level and number of resources and support to students and their communities. At *Cacique*, collaborators also raised the issue of their limited ability to compensate and grow their personnel. Even then, people's passion and commitment to working in the colleges seemed to be maintained despite the resource challenges. One member, Rob (*Ágape College*, faculty), likened the resource challenges of the college to the trials that Latinx people in their neighborhood lived, stating:

You gotta find a way to make it work, and our kids go through it all that time. I had to go through it as a child. It speaks to many of the disadvantages in our neighborhood already. Just an extra obstacle, you know. And we don't notice it because it's just the next obstacle as Latinos in North Core City. "Alright, now I've gotta get through this obstacle to get over there." And so, if you want to say it's part of the norm, it shouldn't be a part of the norm, but it is part of the norm. I am genuinely proud to say that I'm a Latino and teaching in a Latino institution, and the majority of my students

are Latino, and that's cool. But that doesn't take away from some of the disadvantages and obstacles that we still have to go through in order to get a lesson plan, yeah. It seemed that the systemic challenges surrounding the resourcing of Latinx communities and, therefore, their colleges may have been one of the forces behind what collaborators perceived to be the “corporatization” of their institution.

Moving Away from the Grassroots?

Community collaborators and some founding collaborators expressed a sense of their college’s loosened connections with their grassroots base over time as they had become more focused on operations and institutionalizing the colleges. For example, Matías (Ágape College, community partner) reflected on a time when members of the college took an “all-hands-on-deck” and “more activist” approach to addressing social justice issues confronted by students of the community. He discussed how the “institution takes on a life of its own” as it set itself to meet certain deliverables and day-to-day operational needs. He admitted that it was common for nonprofit organizations to “start out with passion,” yet seemed to think the college “need[ed] to revisit bringing that back and re-energize, in that sense.”

While collaborators at both institutions raised this question about whether they had moved away from their base, the level of concern seemed more heightened at Cacique. Despite the obvious love that these collaborators expressed for the institution and their continued value in the community, there were strong critiques about the college’s disconnect from its base over time. For example, Romero (Cacique) questioned whether the college remained the face of the community stating that they had “two different faces, one is institutional, corporate, and held by different standards that are not necessarily the same as the rationale for coming to, for being in existence.” In this more business-oriented identity

framed by Romero, other tensions emerged, including the belief that the college and the city had shifted from their barrio feel. He stated: “That's what Metropolis was about, neighborhoods, Cacique was a neighborhood, now it is an institution.” In this shift of identity, he also seemed to suggest that the college was no longer “Latino centric,” which he explained meant, “it is of having the face of Latino and following the rules. Whatever the [head of the system] has dictated, this is what it's going to be. It's about budgets.”

The concerns and challenges expressed by collaborators for their colleges seemed to imply a tension with co-existing identities of being formalized institutions (with operational and structural needs) and Latinx grassroots-founded entities. The tension of co-existing identities was illustrated in narratives surrounding an associated tension of hiring for qualifications (to meet operational needs) over values (to meet their Latinx-centered missions.)

Hiring for Qualifications Over Values?

As the institutions have had to shift their focus to operations and surviving the landscape of higher education (including enrollment declines, competition for Latinx students, increased pressures to show the value of a higher education, online learning, among others), faculty, staff, and founding collaborators drew tensions between needing to hire people based on operational needs over alignment of values. One of the implications of this perceived tension was the shift in hiring more non-Latinx employees and people from outside the neighborhood, city, and state. Collaborators considered that the hiring shift may be changing the Latinx-centered focus that was core to the colleges. For instance, Greg (Cacique, staff), who was a non-Latinx member, saw the operational hiring focus as part of

becoming more of a business where companies hired for qualifications and people who can “maximize processes” like “enrollment management, marketing, budgets.” He posed:

I mean, it's almost like, are you hiring somebody for fit or are you hiring somebody for being able to do the job and the functional elements of the job best? And from what I've seen from my colleagues and peers, if they're hiring people that they think are going to be able to do the job best and aren't really taking into consideration, the cultural fit as much.

He also suggested that the challenge with hiring for “function” was the potential loss in those “passionate elements of why we're working.” His sense of loss of passion was also a concern to community partner and founding member, Rosa, who seemed frustrated with the college’s perceived lack of proactivity in getting faculty and staff onboard with knowing the community. According to Rosa, the disconnect between personnel and communities was misaligned with their mission and led to hiring new people who may not believe in students who have been systemically disenfranchised in their education. She posited: “This is not just a business as usual, that you’re coming to serve this community. And if you're not happy, and you feel that the students are unprepared and they're not the students that you want to teach, then you need to make another choice. You don't belong in that institution.”

According to collaborators, hiring outsiders to the community was an increasingly normalized practice. Administrators at Ágape College admitted to employing many people who did not live in the zip codes served by the college and that this was different than the past, where there were admissions professionals living in the same neighborhood as the students they sought to recruit. An Ágape College founder seemed to be concerned about hiring people for qualifications over their place-based, Latinx-centered values, and culture of

nurturing and care that were central to their founding identity. He attributed part of the college's decline in enrollment to staff missing connections to the community. He questioned whether the college had the right staff in place and said that his "gut" made him think that something was missing, but would need to investigate it more to confirm.

Collaborators were also concerned about "professionalization," which was a word used by Ágape College collaborators to describe a shift from their mission- and values-based approach to working with the Latinx community to caring solely about qualifications, operational function, and the standard in the industry for certain roles, as described earlier by Greg (Cacique). Founder, Alvaro reflected: "We've professionalized and it's time to unprofessionalize." He noted that their founding mission made it so that they had to consider how they would do things differently, stating: "We're a movement. We own things but owning them doesn't mean we should run them like the traditional, other institutions." Even as collaborators were inspired to hold onto their identity and mission, they appeared to recognize that organizational shifts of this nature were inevitable. Still, they appeared to wonder how Ágape College could balance their operational needs with passion, commitment, and more grassroots approaches used in the past.

Challenges With/Within and Toward Latinx Communities

An unanticipated tension and challenge that emerged from conversations with students and community collaborators in having a college focused on Latinx-centered assets and values, were tensions that existed with, within, and toward Latinx communities. There were four factors that collaborators perceived as contributing to this challenge. The first factor was students' perceived stubbornness of Latinx people, which they considered both a challenge and an asset. Students said that the community's stubbornness made it so that the

college had to increase their effort to get people to accept the support and assistance of the college. Tito (Ágape College) described stubbornness as a “double-edged sword,” stating that Latinx people strived for independence in being able to provide for themselves and show that they were moving ahead. Thus, he considered that Latinx people were averse to being labeled as “people who constantly are on [public] assistance” or need help because of the associated social stigmas. At the same time, Tito articulated that the “headstrong” nature of Latinx people was also what allowed them to keep going: “It’s that stubbornness that once we finally do get started, we’re going to want to continue, we’re going to want to keep pushing ahead, we’re going to want to keep learning, we’re going to keep on trying to improve ourselves.”

The second factor was what students, faculty, and community collaborators perceived to be a “poverty mindset” that forced Latinx people in their community to focus on survival over pursuing higher education. Multiple collaborators at Ágape College, in particular, discussed how higher education was not normalized in their community. Between low expectations and impoverished conditions, Rob (faculty) vocalized: “I feel like sometimes they feel like they’re not deserving, or they’re not a community that is able to” despite all the encouragement that the college and its faculty and staff tried to provide the Latinx community. Students also talked about the efforts of the college to “change mindsets” about the kind of “driving force” Latinx people could be in the Core City community by furthering their education, as suggested by Tito. Aside from feelings of un-deservingness, collaborators revealed the high cost of higher education as another barrier. Even with Ágape College’s generous 50% scholarship for all students for all years at the college, the cost and prospect of debt was a deterrent for Latinx people. Matías (community leader) underscored the

generational cycles of financial strain that caused Latinx people to be in survival mode. He articulated:

The priorities are about, you know, 'Let me support my family. Let's make sure we have the bills paid, a roof over our heads, food on our table', and that has not changed at all. I thought that, by having more second and third generation raised here, right, not thinking about just, you know [survival].

A third factor raised by students and community partners was the outsider deficit perspectives toward Latinx people. Community partner, Nelson (Ágape College), revealed that because Latinx people lived in one of the poorest communities, people from outside the community perceived them to be "a bunch of savages, being the bad lands." However, he considered that the impression of students enrolled in the college was perceived more favorably, stating: "Actually being associated with the college enhances the perception of those people, because you can tell that they have learned some things." Students at Cacique had a different experience with how they might be perceived by outsiders to the college and community. Eddie told a personal story about a time that he felt insulted by a group of people who seemed to criticize or invalidate his experience attending Cacique. He voiced that he felt "looked down upon" when they said to him: "Oh, you went to that Dominican school, you going to that Puerto Rican," to which he responded, "I'm going to a college, what do you mean that Dominican school? This is a Metro Uni school." While the colleges had numerous awards and seemed to have strong reputations in their communities and regions, the deficit narratives were challenges that their members continued to confront.

The fourth and final factor that emerged mostly at Cacique, related to the subtle Latinx intra-group tensions felt by collaborators. A subtle tension was the one noted by

collaborators between Puerto Rican and Dominican communities. As a Latina who has grown up in a region that is predominantly Latin-Caribbean, I recognize a complex and historic relationship between people of the two nations, which is generally known. With the college being founded by Puerto Rican people, there was a territorial sense over the college that was described by collaborators like Ernesto (community partner/former staff):

The Dominican community may feel that they aren't adequately represented, the Puerto Rican community may feel that they're losing their sense of uniqueness within the more heterogeneous Latinx community, so there's a lot of that kind of stuff. In my view, it is tied to individual perceptions of what it should be, rather than, you know. If you go through the cycle, everybody will tell you that the College has lost its true sense and center. And it's probably true, I mean, it is not the same institution that it was in the 1970s. But the 1970s, speaking from somebody who was actually there, it was less about the Latino community than it was about a kind of socially and politically radical faction that was still very much tied into the activism of the 1960s, you know.

Ernesto's emphasis on individual perceptions was nuanced by some of the more environmentally induced and outsider narratives expressed by collaborators. Their combined reflections demonstrated the importance of understanding Latinx lived experiences in working with the population. Furthermore, collaborators had an understanding that the Latinx community was not a monolith and was diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, nationality, U.S. citizenship status, religion, etc. The context of their college's location and local demographic was highly influential in their perspectives regarding the challenges in supporting the

strengths and growth of the Latinx people in their cities -- challenges that the colleges sought to counter.

“We Just Are”: Counterspaces and Counternarratives to Normative Realities

One of the sub-questions for this study sought to learn the extent to which the colleges built counterspaces to normative realities in higher education. I asked collaborators about what made their college distinct or unique as I sought to understand their organizational identities, culture, and practices, but did not ask a question specifically about counterspaces. Rather, I hoped to glean through their stories how they were resisting normative realities and offering a different, more liberated, and asset-based approach to higher education for Latinx people and People of Color.

It is worth noting that, for collaborators, the approach to building counterspaces and counternarratives was personal. Based on their lived experiences, they expressed a desire and commitment to create a different space for students of their barrios. For some like Benjamín (Ágape College, founder), the commitment was for the improvement of the whole barrio. He stated: “It’s not like just because we created new spaces, we don’t see the value of improving the overall system, as difficult as that is.” Still, there was a recognition that the space at the college was an opportunity to be different in the face of a conflictive world, as Hannah (Ágape College, staff-faculty-mentor) stated: “The world can be very cruel and not accepting, and we want to be the opposite of that. You know, as people, again, people of color.” Hannah seemed to describe what could be inferred as a space that offered safety and took control over challenging external forces, at least for the time that students were with the college.

For others, the college was an opportunity to “reinvent what college is and does” in light of the “the old model” of higher education, which “just doesn’t work and it’s fraught with structural racism,” as put by Paul (Ágape College, founding member). The idea of reinvention seemed to also be about capturing the essence of Latinx people by “transferring the cultural values of the meaning of family, and community, *celebración* and *fiesta* [celebrations and parties],” rather than succumbing to standards set by privileged people and the white middle class, as suggested by Matías (Ágape College, community partner). For example, Romero (Cacique, community member) suggested that his college captured the “essence of our island” of Puerto Rico, the struggle, and also took control of education for the community in spite of systemic oppressions. He emphasized that the college “was more than bricks and mortar, it was a state of mind, it was our home, this is our institution, this is the institution where they didn’t want to educate us, we were going to educate ourselves, no one was going to take that from us.”

The personalized sense of resistance by collaborators to normative imposed beliefs, values, and ways of (mis)treating Latinx people seemed to fuel the colleges’ implied identity as counterspaces. The following four subthemes help understand how the colleges engendered counterspaces in higher education, including: 1) rejecting normative narratives about Latinx people, 2) authenticating Latinx expression as second nature, 3) affirming and not just justifying Latinx identities, and 4) their potential role in research about Latinx people.

Rejecting Normative Narratives

The idea of rejecting normative narratives was most prevalent in conversations with Ágape College collaborators. The founders of the college expressed critiques of traditional

academia and discussed how they resisted the norms. Alvaro used an example of issues he saw in local Core City politics where the budget process “still benefits the white power structure” to draw parallels with higher education. Higher education, he said, was not set to meet the needs of North Core City, “nor does it care, and it doesn’t see it as its mission.” He was emphatic about stating that academia had standards for who it considered to be “good enough to get in this box, and compete in this box,” rather than taking responsibility for people in the neighborhood. Thus, Ágape College sought to reject the mentality of having to fit into academia’s box. Similarly, Benjamín spoke of normative narratives imposed by outsiders on North Core City that were reductive and condescending about the assets that they assumed would not exist in el barrio. He explained that when people came to visit their campus, they often commented: “Wow, I didn't expect to find this.” Initially, he considered this a complement, but now considered it disrespectful. He questioned: “Why didn't you expect to find it? What is it that you harbor in your heart and in your mind that makes it difficult to understand that the quality of the work that you are experiencing at Ágape is not something that you should normally accept as basic and understood for any community.” Ágape College and Ágape’s core values around excellence existed in part because they were setting an expectation beyond the normative standard for Latinx communities and communities of el barrio, refusing to accept anything less for their people.

Latinx Expression Is Second Nature

Collaborators at both colleges revealed how the colleges felt “natural” to them as spaces that set a Latinx norm, where the expression of Latinx culture and values was second nature. At the same time, it appeared that the Latinx expression of the colleges held different meanings to different collaborators. Manuel and Luis, both faculty from Cacique, shared

how, as PhDs in the sciences, the normative standards experienced working in higher education were about production of publications, grants, and rising the academic ranks regardless of your race or ethnicity. So, when they arrived at Cacique, they both seemed to be less focused on the Latinx-centeredness of the college. Manuel stated that he had previously worked at a diverse institution where Latinx people were “part of the [melting] pot” of cultures. With time, they both seemed to come to appreciate the second nature of Latinx expression of the college, “of course being Cuban and landing at a place that is mainly serving Dominican and Puerto Rican students, over time, you realized, and when the conversation was more prominent, ‘oh, probably I didn't realize that I was feeling embraced in a way that I didn't pay attention at the beginning’,” stated Manuel.

I found that when asking questions to better understand how they approached their work and how their college valued Latinx assets, it seemed that it was not always easy to answer because “they just were.” My conversation with Benjamín was probably the most compelling example of the struggle to answer how they were Latinx-centered. He interpreted the question as implying a comparison of their college against normative standards, which submitted them as an “other.” In contrast, their Latinx expression was simply “who we are,” but following their own standards. He voiced:

You know, it's funny. The first time I was having, you mentioned something like this to me once before, and I was like, “Wait a minute, what do you mean? We've never thought about the fact.” Oh, I should say, I have never really thought hard about what makes us what we are. Why, because *I am*, and the people who come here are.... For us, it is, period! This is who we are, so when you come in here, I don't have to create

a special day for you. I don't need Black History Month or Hispanic Month. We are 12 months of the year. That. And if it is, it exudes a natural expression of who we are. Benjamín raised how other institutions raised flags, created Latinx student clubs, celebrated a day in September or October of Hispanic Heritage Month because they “have to do that” as a way to show that they were embracing Latinx people. I inferred that he felt that the college did not need to be performative about their embrace of Latinx people, because their institution was a Latinx institution founded by and for Latinx people.

Even non-Latinx collaborators seemed to normalize the Latinx-centered nature of the colleges without question. For example, Carl (Ágape College, founding member) gave an example of artwork on the walls of the college and discussed how decisions about what would go on the walls were second nature because of the college’s Latinx focus and leadership. He illustrated:

We didn't have to think about who the leaders were going to be on the wall, it wasn't like a selection process, I mean we knew who was going to be, there's going to be these Puerto Rican leaders.... We never had a question about what paintings we'll put on a wall, we'll put up paintings that represent us. So, there's a lot of these decisions that they weren't necessarily decisions, it was more second nature.”

While the culture and practices of the colleges appeared to be second nature to collaborators, they also recognized how the colleges took the position to affirm Latinx people’s identity.

Affirming, Not Justifying Identities

Collaborators revealed how the colleges were spaces of affirmation and empowerment for Latinx people in ways that supported, rather than justified their identity as Latinx people. Collaborators felt that their colleges represented a resistance to otherness and

assimilationist ideologies imposed by U.S. dominant culture. For example, Belinda (Ágape College, student) articulated: “Como Latinos sabemos que podemos sentirnos discriminados en algunos lugares y sectores de este país, e incluso de este estado siendo tan Latino. Pero aquí nos dan las herramientas para no sentirnos así y para poder defendernos. [As Latinos, we know that we can feel discriminated against in certain places and sectors in this country. This state with a lot of Latinos, just as well. But here, they give us the tools to not feel that way and to defend ourselves].” Belinda’s reflection aligned with other collaborators who spoke about the power of “stepping into your space” without the need to “justify self as being different,” feeling like a “spiritual release” and “embrace,” as posited by Benjamín (Ágape College, founder). Collaborators talked about the colleges being akin to HBCUs, where Latinx students were not treated like the minority, allowing for freedom from inferiority issues related to ethnicity and language, as described by Carl (Ágape College, founding member).

It seemed that by removing the need to justify the Latinx identity by affirming Latinx people and their strengths, it grew collaborators’ sense of self-esteem and confidence in their ability to contribute. For example, at Cacique, some of the staff discussed how, as Latinx professionals at the college, they felt that they were able to realize their worth. Inez shared that, within the first couple of years of working at the college, she came to own her power: “I realized in myself my capacities and what I’m able to do.” She narrated how she had been able to raise her voice, obtain funding in support of students, and that these efforts were valued. She noted: “It’s what I recommend as a professional, as a Latina, as someone who’s experienced, grew up in the neighborhood and understands the needs of the community. I feel like it’s been accepted, and I’ve been able to produce work, like that’s made change

within the college.” Inez’s reflection on bringing her lived experience to create positive outcomes at Cacique also seemed to speak to the value of Latinx people being at the table to inform educational issues that had an impact on Latinx students.

Potential Role in Research

Matías (Ágape College, community partner) was the only member who brought up the potential role that the college could play in informing the myriad of issues shaping Latinx communities and Communities of Color in Core City. He said he wanted and saw the need for Ágape College to be at the forefront of defining and contextualizing issues shaping their community rather than allowing others to do so for them. He also referenced how local Latinx and Black Clergy were starting to grapple with the issue of defining matters for themselves, but considered dedicated research connected to the college could possibly make a difference. He articulated:

[What] I would like to see more in our College is a stronger focus on research and development. It should consider leading in research and study from within the context of the community right in areas, possibly, such as poverty. Others have defined poverty for us whether it's by income level, whereas we know that poverty is much greater than that. It's gotta do with access, it's gotta do with decision making, and so on and so forth. So the school, I think, should carve out a position, because it doesn't exist here, to research and study in those areas. Same thing with justice, we found others who are constantly defining that for us, and what does justice mean. Well, how do we, so we had a meeting between the Pastores Assembly and Black Clergy because we need to define what justice is, we need to define a solution, for example, for gun violence in our community. Others, especially in politics, define that for us,

other non-Latino institutions define it for us. As well as with youth, what does it mean to grow up as a young person in our community and hear the voices in our community?

The issues that Matías raised and the desire to see counternarratives emerge through community informed and led research, were forms of epistemic justice. Matías seemed to be seeking solutions that were *for us by us about us*. Also, while it was only one member who directly spoke to the college's role in research, most of the participants expressed to me how essential they saw this study. They saw it as an opportunity to create a counternarrative and to influence the creation of more counterspaces for Latinx people and People of Color. They also hoped that it would provide new insights that people leading Latinx-founded institutions and seeking to establish them could learn from.

Chapter Summary

In summary, this chapter continued the previous chapter's discussion of cross-cutting themes. The chapter covered five of the 11 remaining themes of both common and nuanced findings that emerged from conversations with collaborators and a review of documents, artifacts, and research observations. The themes included: (7) *Student-Centering: More Than a Catch Phrase*, which revealed multiple activities supporting student-centered organizational culture and praxis around decision-making, hiring, holistic program and service delivery, and approaches to contextualizing education for Latinx students; (8) *Role Models and Mentors* demonstrated how through supportive relationships faculty/staff and students related to one another, they sought to "live out" the values of the college through role modeling, and the experiences of role modeling by Latinx campus leaders for faculty and staff; (9) *Arts and Culture as Staples of Institutional Identity, Culture, and Practice*,

which showed the importance of arts and culture as forms of Latinx cultural expression through making theater accessible to campus and community members, and the written word; (10) *Tensions and Challenges to Living Out the Mission and Values* were many, but two were most central including concerns about the inevitable corporatization of the colleges and challenges with, within, and toward Latinx communities; and finally, (11) “*We Just Are*”: *Counterspaces and Counternarratives to Normative Realities* revealed collaborators’ ideas and actions toward building counterspaces and counternarratives to normative ways of thinking and being, for example, they illuminated how they rejected normative narratives about Latinx people, experienced Latinx expression as second nature, affirmed Latinx identities, and posed the potential role that their college could play in research on issues impacting Latinx communities.

CHAPTER 9
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS: BUILDING LATINX FUBU-*ABOUT US*
INSTITUTIONS

In this study, I sought an alternative to the white normative realities of higher education which privilege and impose white cultures, values, and requirements, and propagate deficit-based discourses about Latinx people and People of Color (Bernal, 2002; Jones et al., 2002, Cabrera et al. 2017). Therefore, my study looked to Latinx-founded institutions of higher education as transformative alternatives that center Latinx people as part of *who they are*. Through a multi-case organizational study of two Latinx-founded institutions, Ágape College and Cacique Community College, the study explored how these institutions built upon, promoted, and centered Latinx assets through their organizational identity, culture, and praxis. The study also considered what assets were promoted and centered, how assets were institutionalized, how the institutions and Latinx communities contributed to and supported each other, and how the institutions built counterspaces to normative realities in higher education.

As a study focused on centering Latinx people through lifting models that were *for us by us about us* (FUBU-*About Us*), it was important for me to embed FUBU-*About Us* as both a concept and an approach to doing the work. In that process, I found that study collaborators also adopted *for us by us about us* for themselves as they made meaning of the topics

explored during interviews and informal pláticas. From the choices around centering Latinx scholars and Scholars of Color, through the selection of institutions and collaborators, to the approach in the study design, *FUBU-About Us* was an act of resistance and assertion of Latinx people's contributions to higher education and toward the advancement of Latinx communities and Communities of Color. To accomplish these goals, Chapter 3 offered a conceptual framework that informed the design of the study by intersecting organizational theories of identity, culture, and praxis (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Hatch & Schultz, 1997; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006) with the work of Latinx scholars. The conceptual framework was a way to mobilize existing knowledge and praxis to raise Latinx-centered asset-based concepts toward a *FUBU-About Us* framework for higher education. Some of the concepts for the framework were drawn from LatCrit, Community Cultural Wealth, Funds of Knowledge, and Validation and Neo-Validation Theories (Bernal, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Gildersleeve, 2011; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Linares & Muñoz, 2011; Moll et al., 1992; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso, 2005).

Grounded in these theoretical foundations, my dissertation provides several contributions to higher education and people interested in learning about organizations founded by Latinx people. First, Chapter 5 offered stories about the founding of the institutions, as well as contemporary insights about their contexts at the time of the study. Then, through an analysis of the identity, culture, and praxis of the individual institutions, Chapter 6 drew distinct findings for each of the institutions. For Ágape College, these included the significance of ownership as resistance and empowerment, honoring the dignity of the people, integrated roles as a practical and values-oriented practice, and how faith was a driver for its culture and practice. For Cacique Community College, there was an emphasis

on rooting the institution’s historical activism as central to its identity, planning processes speaking to values, and how diversity brought forth new cultural practices over time. Together, Chapters 7 and 8 revealed 11 shared and nuanced findings across the two institutions. These findings included: (1) a targeted but inclusive mission, (2) the importance of place and institutions of el barrio, (3) a community relationship of mutuality and commensalism, (4) naming strengths in the midst of challenges, (5) normalizing bilingualism and translanguaging, (6) college as home, whereby familismo and familia were assets and practice, (7) student-centering: more than a catch phrase, (8) role models and mentors, (9) arts and culture as staples of institutional identity, culture, and practice, (10) tensions and challenges to living out the mission and values, and (11) “we just are”: counterspaces and counternarratives to normative realities. A summary of the findings, including major themes and subthemes, can be found in Table 7.

Table 7

Summary of Study Findings

Individual Distinct Case Findings	
Ágape College	Cacique Community College
<p>1. Ownership as Resistance and Empowerment <i>Subthemes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A philosophy and act of resistance • Focusing on empowering Latinxs is “finally” possible • Voices heard and valued 	<p>1. Rooting Historical Activism as Central to Identity <i>Subthemes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People of the past • Reverence for Namesake • Puerto Rican culture and historical relics • Nostalgia for what was
<p>2. Honoring the Dignity of the People <i>Subthemes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respecting and believing in people and the community as a whole • Demonstrating humility in knowledge and knowledge sharing • Deserving of beautiful physical spaces 	<p>2. Planning Process speaking to values <i>Subthemes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation and inclusivity • Venues for values-based planning • Imprinting the mission everywhere

<p>3. Faith as a Driver for Culture and Practice</p> <p><i>Subthemes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A heart of service”—serving the people • Teaching, a “special calling” • Integrating faith without forcing conversion • Integrating faith into curriculum • Inclusion of all faiths in a faith-based college • (Re)connecting with churches and church community 	<p>3. Diversity Over Time, New Cultural Practices Over Time</p> <p><i>Subthemes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanding considerations • Heritage month celebrations • A hall of flags • Tensions and assumptions about being a diverse campus
<p>4. Integrated Roles Is Practical and Values Oriented</p> <p><i>Subthemes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging equity in value of faculty and staff • Allowing for deeper knowledge of and relationships with students • Fitting part-time faculty as part of the model 	

Cross-Case Shared and Nuanced Findings

<p>1. A Targeted but Inclusive Mission</p>	<p><i>Subthemes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A motivating factor for engagement • “An opportunity institution”, building social mobility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ “College prep” for bachelor’s and beyond • Contributing to community’s leadership and workforce
<p>2. Importance of Place: Institutions of el Barrio</p>	<p><i>Subthemes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeting geographic communities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Living through challenges posed by el barrio ◦ Driving a holistic, eco-systemic community development agenda ◦ Changing narratives for students from el barrio • Changing demographics: changing the us <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Moving away from Spanish-Language dominant, adult learners • Gentrifying neighborhoods: realities and unpredictable futures
<p>3. A Community Relationship of Mutuality and Commensalism</p>	<p><i>Subthemes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presence in community • Looping-in community feedback • Acting in Solidarity • Facilitating growth of students and community via community-engaged and hands-on learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Students of the community ◦ Challenges with college–community partnerships ◦ Expanding educational opportunities beyond college level
<p>4. Naming Strengths in the Midst of Challenges</p>	<p><i>Subthemes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding challenges as both asset and challenge • Forging ahead, not giving up
<p>5. Normalizing Bilingualism and Translanguaging</p>	<p><i>Subthemes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening bilingualism: resisting forced assimilation

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vibing through language: meetings, hallways, relationality • Hiring bilingual staff and faculty – an uncoded practice • Addressing Spanish language needs in teaching and learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bilingualism as a tool in the classroom ○ Curriculum and academic programs
6. College as Home: Familismo and Familia as an Asset and Practice	<p><i>Subthemes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building-up student families and academic families • Embedding familismo – a culture that feels like family • Succeeding together – collectivist definition and approaches • Engaging families in education processes • Student parenting and family-oriented programs and services
7. Student-Centering: More Than a Catch Phrase	<p><i>Subthemes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision-making • Student-centered hiring practices • Delivering holistic approaches • Contextualizing education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Exposing to Latinx and POC figures ○ Learning through experience ○ Infusing student assets and lived-experiences in the classroom
8. Role Models and Mentors	<p><i>Subthemes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relating to students • Students seeing themselves in faculty/staff • Living out the values of the college through role modeling • “The top look like the bottom”
9. Arts and Culture as Staples of Institutional Identity, Culture, and Practice	<p><i>Subthemes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written word—publications • Making theater for the people
10. Tensions and Challenges to Living Out the Mission and Values	<p><i>Subthemes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positing the Inevitable Corporatization of the College <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Moving away from the grassroots ○ Hiring for qualifications over values? • Challenges with/within and toward Latinx communities
11. “We Just Are”: Counterspaces and Counternarratives to Normative Realities	<p><i>Subthemes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rejecting normative narratives • Latinx expression is second nature • Affirming, not justifying identities • Potential role in Research

Together, the cases of Ágape College and Cacique Community College offered many lessons for understanding how Latinx-founded institutions center Latinx people in real life

amid complex realities. This chapter provides a discussion of the findings in light of the literature with a focus on select central findings. The chapter also revisits the guiding conceptual framework for the study in light of the findings, and offers implications for practice and policy, as well as suggestions for future research.

Discussion of Findings

Five years ago, I set out to find organizational models that were FUBU-*About Us* in higher education and learn from them how they self-determined and carried out Latinx-centered assets that disrupted white normative higher education. The focus on assets was never meant to idealize Latinx-founded institutions as having resolved the ails of normative realities but did seek to uncover alternatives to the status quo racist, marginalizing, invisibilizing, and assimilative attributes of U.S. higher education. Through engagement with collaborators and their campuses, my analysis of the data uncovered several insights that add to the body of existing Latinx asset-based literature.

The first major and overarching contribution of this study is the organizational framing of Latinx-centered assets. As found from the review of the literature, Latinx asset-based research has often focused on empirical and conceptual scholarship centered on students and micro-level interventions, with limited published work on organizational meso-level practices for lifting up Latinx organizational members' cultural values, knowledge, and assets as part of the institution's work (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Lopez, 2004; Luedke, 2017; Garcia, 2018; Garcia, Núñez, & Sansone, 2019). Garcia's (2018) typology of Hispanic-servingness of Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) provided definitions of servingness relative to culture and outcomes at HSIs to offer ways to examine HSIs' approaches to serving Latinx students. However, Garcia recognized in her work that the

typology sought to make sense of non-historical, federally designated HSIs and was limited in its application to Historically Latinx Founded Institutions (HLFIs). Thus, this study contributes to research on Latinx-centered approaches at the organizational level, as well as research on the few Latinx-founded institutions in the U.S. mainland.

In an additional major contribution, my dissertation is the first organizational study to examine how Latinx centeredness is manifested at HLFIs. This represents a departure from existing asset-based literature, within which the few past published studies about HLFIs have spoken mainly about their historical journeys, specific programs within the institutions, or focused on individuals served by the colleges. These published studies have been omitted from citations and references to protect the identities of the two institutions, and thus my research collaborators. Following is a discussion of some of my more specific findings and how they compare to the literature, including where there was alignment and nuances, where my work extends existing literature or differs from it, as well as where my findings help fill gaps in the literature.

Alignment with and Nuanced Contributions to Existing Literature

An inspiring aspect of conducting a FUBU-*About Us* study that highlighted scholarship by Latinx scholars and Scholars of Color was to feel how the work of Latinx scholars and my collaborators provided a sense of home for my own work. During my study, I discovered a space, a range of spaces, where I could return and find comfort and opportunity for growth and feel like I could engage openly in literal and figurative conversations with collaborators and Latinx scholars, respectively, as members of the proverbial Latinx familia. When considering the Latinx-centered literature of Latinx scholars, the literature *gets* the extensive beauty and complexity of Latinx experiences in U.S. higher

education. As a return home to the Latinx scholarly familia, I offer some of the central findings that align with and also contribute to existing published literature by Latinx scholars, including strengths in the midst of challenges – challenges as assets, assets as challenges, familismo and familia as an asset and practice, role models and mentors, and counterspaces to normative realities.

Strengths in the Midst of Challenges—Challenges as Assets, Assets as Challenges

While trying to uncover what assets collaborators considered were centered at their institution and how, it was challenging to get collaborators to talk about assets. In fact, recognizing assets for them appeared considerably more difficult than suggested by the published literature (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011; Yosso, 2005). It was nearly two-thirds of the way into conducting the interviews and focus groups when I realized the reason why doing so was difficult for collaborators. What became clear is that, as they thought deeply about my questions related to assets, collaborators had a hard time disassociating from the daily challenges they and their communities faced. They understood that the challenges were the result of systemic barriers and environmental factors that existed outside the boundaries of the HLEFI, such as institutional racism and discrimination against Latinx people and People of Color, poverty and underemployment, underfunded and poor-quality K–12 public schools, and ingrained mindsets about people from urban communities and of people living in them about their potential to achieve.

Collaborators also understood that these challenges had forced Latinx people and People of Color to develop strengths, which collaborators seemed to reframe through a conceptualization of “challenges as assets.” For example, being a Latinx parenting student and having to multi-task obligations for their families, work, and school was seen not only as

a challenge, but also as an asset. Collaborators recognized that assets could also be challenges, in that responsibility, life management, and hard work could be barriers to parenting students' success. At the same time, parenting students were understood as bringing a sense of responsibility, determination, resilience, hard work, and life management that contributed to their success. Importantly, it was this layered, contextual, complex view that gave rise to an authentic understanding of how parenting students navigated their experiences overcoming challenges through a continuous application of their strengths.

Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth and Moll et al.'s (1992) Funds of Knowledge theories around the forms of capital that Latinx students bring to institutions provide an important conceptual framing for how students employ different forms of capital to survive through life and their educational experiences. In the example of parenting students, Yosso's and Moll's framing helps understand the navigational, aspirational, and symbolic capital that students employed to succeed at the colleges. What my study's findings contribute to the work of these scholars is that the framing of challenges as assets detaches from individual and theoretical understandings of people's experiences and becomes part of the institutional soul and praxis of the colleges, also highlighting that assets and challenges are in continual interaction with each other.

In relation to the institutional experience, *Ágape* and *Cacique* took the assets of the students and embedded them into the institutional life of the college. In addition, connecting the theoretical and practical, the institutions adopted the assets of Latinx people and did not shy away from understanding them as both challenges and assets. The two institutions centered assets through language; contextualizing education; representation through arts,

personnel, and connections with external partners; and holistic student supports, including the integration of families as part of the life of the colleges.

Furthermore, the asset-based theories by scholars discuss how Latinx people are holders of accumulated social and cultural wealth, which dispels deficit-based narratives (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011; Yosso, 2005). However, in application, *Ágape* and *Cacique* did not seem to consider their view of Latinx people's accumulated wealth as both assets and challenges to be a deficit-based narrative or form of praxis. Instead, reframing assets and challenges helped support the wholeness of a Latinx urban experience, allowing the institutions to be able to better support, honor, and balance the realities of assets as challenges, and challenges as assets. Another difference from theory to application is that the literature on assets suggests that Latinx students employ their individual assets to survive the institutions of higher education that they are attending as a way of countering the negative experiences presented by the institutions (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Pérez & Taylor, 2016). However, at *Ágape* and *Cacique* the assets were employed by collaborators to survive societal challenges and systemic barriers imposed on Latinx people, not necessarily the colleges themselves. Instead, the two HLFIs allowed Latinx people to put down their guards while in the college and created whole spaces of belonging where Latinx people could *just be*.

A final layer of the conversation around assets in the midst of challenges relates to how challenges as assets and assets as challenges were part of *Ágape*'s and *Cacique*'s identity, culture, and praxis. The institutions themselves, as alternative educational spaces, reframed their own contextual challenges as assets and vice versa as they sought to maintain their existence. As HLFIs they, like their students, were also faced with challenges presented

by normative realities and were resilient and determined. As suggested by the asset-based theory for individuals, the institutions, on the level of the organization, also aspired to, resisted, and found ways to bring together their various forms of capital to leverage the best educational and community development opportunities for Latinx people and did not see themselves as different from the communities that they served. An example seen from the findings includes the relationship of the institutions to the local community and their cherished connection to el barrio. The findings revealed the challenges and assets of el barrio and of being an institution of el barrio, and how the institutions remained steadfast in building plans and leveraging local community organizations and actors as resources to maintain and strengthen the colleges' institutional identity, culture, and praxis.

Familismo and Familia as an Asset and Practice

The colleges' culture and identity were wrapped in a feeling of home where collaborators discussed that college members were family, providing a sense of comfort and belonging. The colleges also recognized that Latinx students needed built-in supports to sustain their families, and that families were centrally part of the students' ecosystem and must be included in the activities of the colleges. These findings align with a key theme of the literature regarding familismo and the significance of familia for Latinx student success (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Lopez, 2006; Rendón et al., 2014). The literature suggests that familismo includes the family and extended family-like relationships, while also encouraging collectivist orientations and desire to give back to the community (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Lopez, 2006; Rendón et al., 2014). Regarding collectivist orientations, my study offers nuanced understandings of how Ágape and Cacique, and their members, defined and approached collectivism as a way for Latinx people and the local community to succeed

together. For example, the findings showcased how students helped each other in the classroom as a form of collective learning and how the colleges weaved Latinx community issues as part of the hands-on learning experience to contribute to Latinx people, such as *Ágape*'s work on diabetes prevention in the Latinx community.

The literature often discusses familismo as something individual students enact to translate their values for family to their colleges as a form of capital to succeed in higher education (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Pérez, 2017; Pérez & Taylor, 2016; Rendón et al., 2014; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). In the case of *Ágape* and *Cacique*, the enactment of familismo was bi-directional from individual students to the college-level and its members, and from the colleges toward their members and students. Together, college members (faculty, staff, students, community partners) created cultures of familismo that manifested through deep acts of care and “hand holding” through their educational journey, physical acts of affection, and incorporation of Latinx food. The colleges also built in familismo as praxis at the institutional level in the way families were included in educational processes and supported through programmatic efforts reflected, for example, in *Cacique*'s inclusion of families in accessing the college's food pantry, development of parent support groups and services, and educational programs for children and families.

The colleges also lifted familismo as an organizational praxis in the way that founders, faculty, and staff saw their role in supporting students. For example, a founder at *Ágape* discussed how the dean of the college should be like a mother to students to ensure that they are fully wrapped around with encouragement, support, and love when needed. This finding helps contextualize the theory of familismo as a system of co-parentage, enacted on the organizational level, that exists in Latinx communities, suggesting that educational actors

can act as “academic families” taking on a co-parentage approach in their relationship with students (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007). In practice, collaborators across both institutions also saw faculty and staff as advocates, role models, and mentors with deep investments in the personal, professional, and academic success of their students. The role and deep investment from faculty and staff were not just an individual approach to doing the work, but also an organizational understanding and expectation that further nurtured the colleges’ culture and praxis of familismo.

Role Models and Mentors

Collaborators at both colleges discussed the value of mentoring and relationship-building. While it was difficult to obtain documents to verify claims that the institutions embedded mentoring as a responsibility within faculty contracts and role descriptions, collaborators spoke about how the colleges sought to hire people who were expected to act in this capacity (Ágape) and cited department-level structured programs that existed to support faculty-student mentoring relationships (Cacique). The attention to mentoring revealed through the findings is supported by empirical literature on how Latinx students find sense of belonging and validation when involved in faculty mentoring initiatives and informal mentoring relationships with college faculty and staff, even as few Latinx students are able to access these kinds of relationships in their colleges (Pérez, 2017; Rendón et al., 2014; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). As an organizational study, the case of Ágape contributes to our understanding of how, through institutional praxis, all students could benefit from mentoring relationships. For example, Ágape’s integrated roles of staff-faculty-mentors and faculty-mentors made it so that there was a shared understanding, expectation, and praxis of integrating mentoring as part of the responsibilities of all personnel working at the college.

This built-in mentoring relationship allowed for deeper knowledge and understanding of student experiences, which further strengthened faculty and staff's ability to support students.

Also, role modeling played a significant role for collaborators at the colleges and took on many forms. Role modeling was discussed as relating to students, as well as students seeing themselves in faculty and staff, including faculty from the neighborhood and faculty who were also alumni of the colleges. While not specific to role modeling, Castellanos and Gloria's (2007) work suggests that effective mentoring relationships for Latinx students integrate culture as part of their personal and professional experiences. Role modeling was also demonstrated to be effective at *Ágape* and *Cacique* because it integrated identity- and culture-based assets. For example, students, faculty, and staff often shared similar backgrounds and experiences, for example, Latinx heritage, urban context, first-generation, societal marginalization, and more, and also shared similar values, for example, familia and community empowerment, among others.

In this area, an important contribution to the literature relates to the way that role modeling shaped not only student-faculty and student-staff relationality, but also how faculty and staff looked up to their Latinx campus leaders. *Ágape* collaborator Francisco used the phrase, "the top look like the bottom," to illustrate how Latinx-centering through role modeling was seen at the upper levels of the administration. In addition, at *Cacique*, collaborators spoke at length about the Latinx cultural values that their president brought to her leadership style, and how many admired these attributes as key expressions of role modeling. These findings demonstrate that role modeling and mentoring can be part of an organization's identity, culture, and praxis when intentionally built through representation at all levels of the organization and through role responsibilities.

Counterspaces to Normative Realities

A fascinating aspect of conducting this study was examining the ways that the two institutions functioned as counterspaces and counternarratives to normative realities in higher education. Some of the founders were adamant about describing their HLFIs Latinx-centeredness as rejecting normative realities and seemed to consider normative standards as almost irrelevant to defining their institutional identity. In essence, *they just were*. To say “we just are” in itself, I felt, was an act of resistance to normative realities, though collaborators experienced it as their way of existing as centered, non-othered, and affirmed Latinx people regardless of normative realities. Critical scholars have discussed counterspaces and counternarratives as ways in which Latinx people have created places or sites of resistance where they can continue their home communities, while challenging deficit-based discourses and creating positive racial climates (Solórzano et al., 2000; Yosso, 2005).

My study provides a real-life context for theories that discuss sites of resistance (Solórzano et al., 2000; Yosso, 2005), as the colleges were built to counter deficit narratives about Latinx people’s deservingness for high-quality educational opportunities located in their local neighborhoods and their ability to succeed in higher education. Moreover, in a distinctive contribution, my study depicts how HLFIs as a whole can act as sites of resistance. This represents a departure from literature that expresses counterspaces in education as programs or groups of individuals formed within institutions of higher education (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Lopez, 2006; Pérez & Taylor, 2016). An additional central consideration is that *Ágape* and *Cacique* were created by and reside within their home communities (e.g., Latinx populations/neighborhoods with majority Latinx people) and,

therefore, are extensions of their home communities, rather than a place where they seek to continue home communities that are disconnected from the institution. This is in sharp contrast to literature that describes counterspaces in education as places of continuity from Latinx people's home communities and help emulate the home as a way to resist marginality experienced in the institutions (Yosso, 2005).

Additionally, the HLFIs in this study depict how counterspaces that are embedded in Latinx communities through a FUBU-*About Us* ethos express Latinx identity as second nature, rather than as resistant to a normative reality that is traditionally embedded in higher education institutions. For example, the colleges' deep commitment to strengthening el barrio and outcomes of people living in it differentiated from the normative view that people need to be "good enough" to "fit" the higher education "box," as described by Alvaro (founder, Ágape). The colleges chose to focus on their own realities of el barrio and its Latinx cultural understandings, values, and affirmations over trying to meet normative standards that take little responsibility for people of el barrio and would otherwise force justification of *who they are*.

New Contributions to the Literature

One of my major goals during this study was to discover new knowledge and experiences related to HLFIs, thereby expanding the literature and nurturing my desire-centered (Tuck, 2009) quest for Latinx FUBU-*About Us*. My research makes several new contributions to our understanding of HLFIs, filling major gaps in our existing knowledge related to these institutions, particularly from an organizational perspective. Some of the new contributions offered to the literature reviewed include findings related to the importance of place; arts and culture as staples of institutional identity, culture, and praxis; and ownership

as a philosophy, resistance, and empowerment. Together, these findings offer new insights to the discourse on assets. The findings also uncover unnamed assets in the literature and a real-life application of these assets through the HLFIs experience.

Importance of Place

One of the central findings of this study involves the significance of place to the identity, culture, and praxis of *Ágape* and *Cacique*. Since both HLFIs were created to address educational needs in specific geographic communities, place was defined by the neighborhood(s) where the campuses were located. These places were predominantly Latinx urban communities that were either home to the founders or resembled the kinds of communities from where founders came. The connection to the local neighborhoods of Latinx people, referred to as “el barrio” by collaborators, inspired their reference to themselves as “institutions of el barrio.” El barrio was a personal identifier, an ontology and epistemology, that drove the institutions’ goals around changing the narratives for students of el barrio and driving holistic change for el barrio.

Collaborators also revealed how demographic changes and gentrification of el barrio had immediate and foreseeable impacts for the colleges’ futures and the communities they served. This finding matters because the inextricable ties of HLFIs to place has implications for how scholars and practitioners define community and community engagement in a Latinx-centered context. In the literature, there was often an emphasis on community engagement as an activity that was meaningful to Latinx students and beneficial to their learning through courses, projects, and student clubs (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Pérez, 2017; Pérez & Taylor, 2016). The literature also discussed community engagement at HSIs as providing a service or program for external constituents through community outreach

(Garcia, 2018). While these examples were also evident in the findings of my study, the colleges were founded as being of, by, and for the community and therefore saw their responsibility to be beyond higher education's traditional forms of community engagement via outreach and student benefit. Instead, they saw their existence as tied to their place and therefore were contextualized and informed by benefits to their place and local Latinx communities. Community engagement in a Latinx-centered context, as seen from the cases, was embedded and interdependent to their identity, culture, and praxis rather than an add-on activity.

Finally, this finding also contributes learning about place-based colleges that are rooted to locations with high proportions of Latinx people and Communities of Color. While many HSIs are located in proximity to Latinx populations, much of the literature on HSIs focuses on their service to students, with fewer focused on their context and connection to place (Garcia, 2018; Rosenbaum et al., 2020). Also, the literature discussing HSIs' connection to place focuses on quantitative measures, such as census data that do not factor more immediate localized contexts or provide the depth of experience involved in HSI Latinx-centered community transformation and/or social, political, economic, educational, and justice-based outcomes (Rosenbaum et al., 2020). This finding also contributes to understanding the kinds of assets that are afforded through a special commitment to place. For example, my study illuminated the long-term relationships of the colleges with community actors who had several roles in the college and community's life. At both colleges, there were community partners who served on advisory boards, who worked at the college as staff at one point, who had played a role in the founding years and maintained a deep connection since, and people who continued to develop relationships and historical

archives for the college in their retirement. Other assets that emerged from the study that were afforded by their commitment to place included the ability to attract workforce development partners because of their place, to accumulate social and political capital that increased their institutional strength and legitimacy, as well as their ability to mobilize with community partners for needed resources for the colleges and their local communities.

Arts and Culture as Staples of Institutional Identity, Culture, and Praxis

Going into this project, I did not anticipate the centrality that Latinx arts and culture would have at the colleges. Latinx art and culture were highly valued assets at both HLFIs and were activated as a vehicle to further illuminate and strengthen the assets of Latinx people. At the colleges, arts and culture were prioritized through programming, state-of-the-art theater spaces that invited Latinx cultural performances, art galleries and prominent displays of Latinx art and cultural relics throughout the institutions, the use of poetry, language, and print publications to disseminate Latinx culture and create connection to Latinx-centered issues, as well as partnerships with artists and arts institutions. The asset-based literature reviewed did not discuss arts and culture as an asset employed by Latinx people toward their educational success (Carales & López, 2020; Rendón et al., 2014; Yosso, 2005). From a holistic framework, arts and culture tapped into the humanities -- valuing people and the way arts and culture can shape the human spirit and intellectual growth. Thus, the contribution of this finding lies in the significance of investing and promoting Latinx assets through arts and culture via multiple modalities as staples to a Latinx-centered institutional identity, culture, and praxis.

Ownership as a Philosophy, Resistance, and Empowerment

As a Latina researcher and practitioner seeking FUBU-*About Us* models, one of the most compelling findings came from my individual analysis of Ágape. Through the founding story and conversations with collaborators, the centrality of ownership of the Latinx-centered institution by Latinx people informed how they thought about their educational and community work, as well as how they sought ownership through praxis and used ownership as a way to focus on the empowerment of Latinx people. The concept and praxis of ownership help understand how ownership can anchor Latinx-centeredness. For example, taking the findings around ownership together, the theme of ownership contributes to what is known about how Latinx people enact their agency in higher education by gaining control over decision-making and structures, their representation, narratives, and how they use ownership to mobilize, invite participation, and transform communities. I took away from the study that ownership is about community-owned assets as much as it is about a mindset related to how Latinx people become the holders and cultivators of assets. Latinx-centered ownership is the power of being owners, rather than being owned by the oppressor and oppressive systems. Ownership is a call to action and mechanism to be victorious over the racist ideologies and systemic oppression that negate Latinx people from success and opportunity on their own terms.

From Conceptual to Real Life

Chapter 3 presented a conceptual framework that gathered several Latinx asset-based theories such as LatCrit Theory (Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001); Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005); Funds of Knowledge (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011); and Validation Theory (Linares & Muñoz, 2011; Rendón, 1994), as

described in the literature review, with Organizational Identity (Albert & Whetten, 1985), Culture (Hatch & Schultz, 1997; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006), and Praxis (Bradbury & Mainemelis, 2001) theories, to frame *what should be*—a Latinx FUBU-About Us for higher education institutions. To shift from the theory to application, Chapter 3 also featured a conceptual guide which served as a broad tool for organizing the research design for the study, without mentioning specific indicators of Latinx-centered higher education that had previously been informed by the Latinx asset-focused theory base. To remind the reader, Figures 6 and 7 feature replicas of the conceptual and guiding frameworks for the study.

Figure 6

Latinx FUBU-About Us Conceptual Framework for Higher Education Institutions

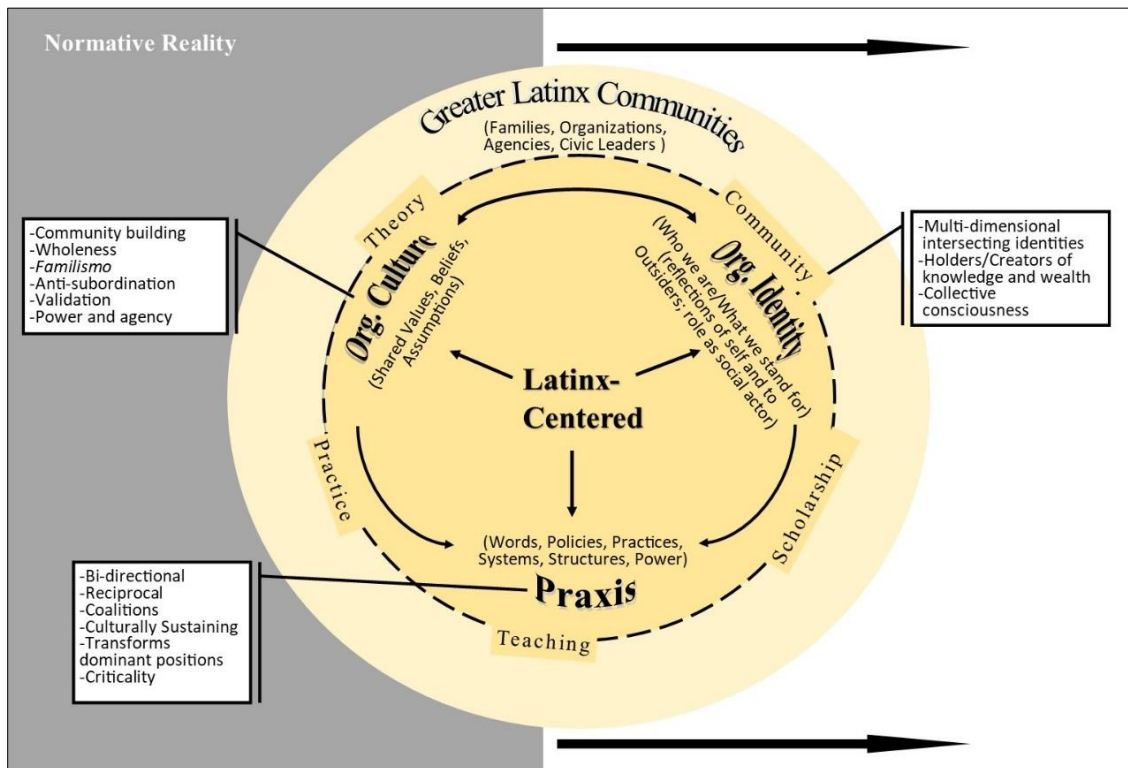
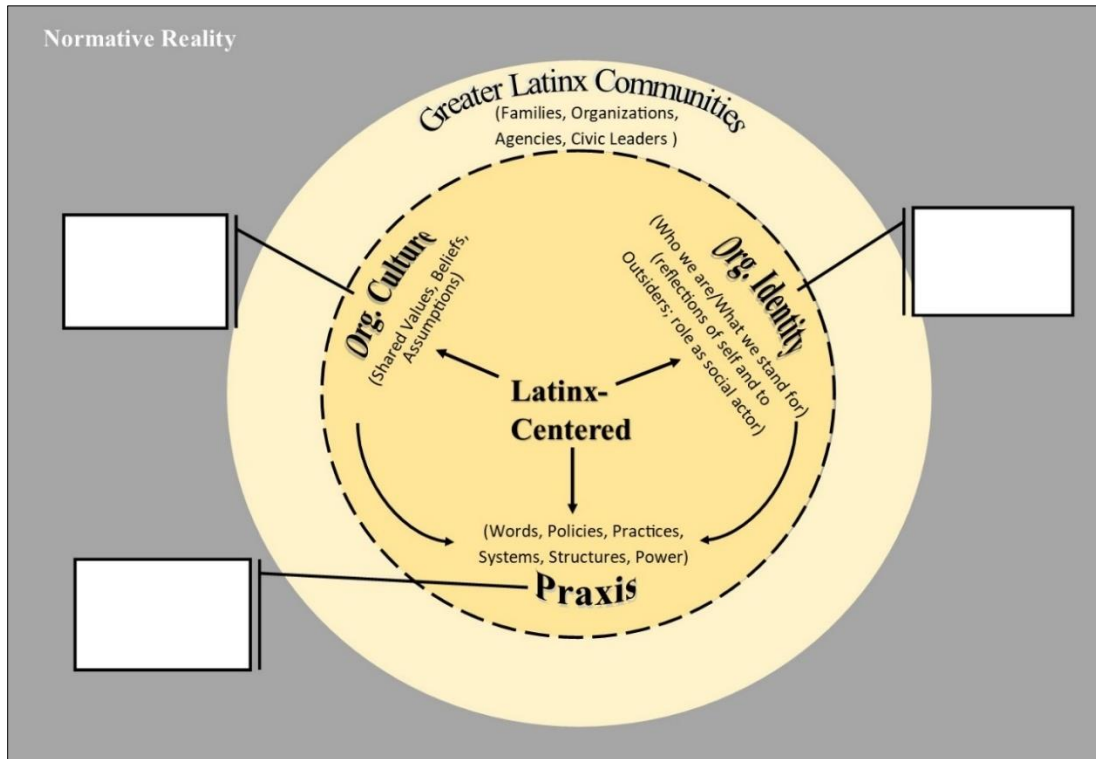


Figure 7

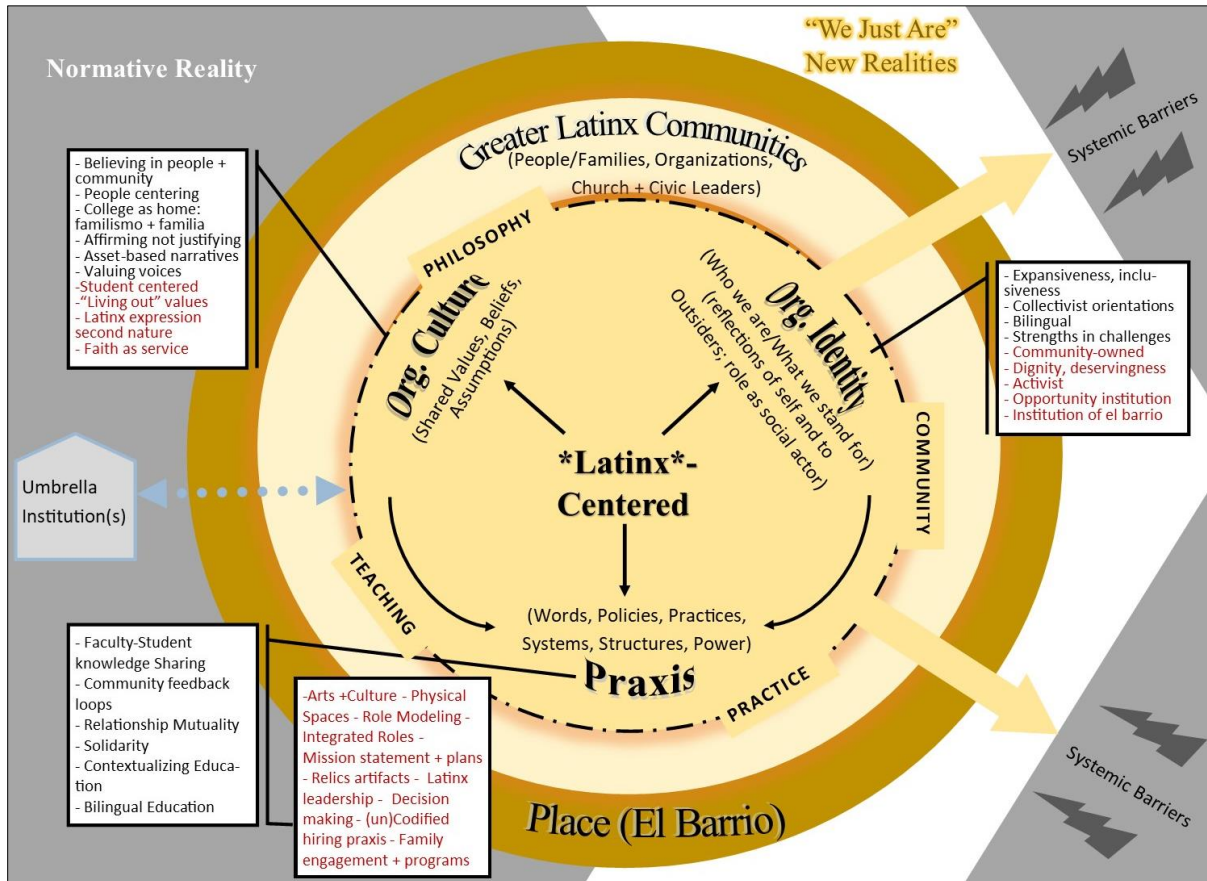
Conceptual Guide for Latinx FUBU-About Us Study



The framework was never meant to be prescriptive but, rather, a way to field the knowledges that exist through Latinx scholarship. It was always the intention of the study that the cases will help inform inductively what a desire-centered (Tuck, 2009) framework looked like in real life, based on the experiences of Latinx people who have founded and are constructing institutions for, by, about Latinx communities. Following is a discussion of how the framework moved from conceptual to real-life based on the findings of this study. A revised visual representation of the framework can be found in Figure 8.

Figure 8

Latinx FUBU-About Us Framework Revisited



As I revisited the Latinx FUBU-About Us Framework, a few features of the conceptual framework remained consistent in practice. First, core to the framework was the Latinx-centeredness of the HLFIs, which drove their organizational identity, culture, and praxis. While this core feature remained central to the Latinx-founded institutions by virtue of their founding histories, embedded cultures, and (un)codified praxis, and Latinx majority leadership, the reality of demographic changes of their local communities require an ever-

more expansive notion of Latinx-centeredness than what may already naturally exist as part of their *ways of knowing*.

As discussed in the opening of Chapter 6, Latinx-centeredness centers Latinx people, but is also inclusive of all marginalized peoples whose experiences are deeply influenced by normative realities of white supremacist ideologies, cultures, and systemic oppression. Latinx people also hold multidimensional, multicultural identities that build pluralistic skills and a lens for seeing their interconnectedness to others (Rendón et al., 2014). The shifts in demographics were more prominent at Cacique Community College; however, its history of being founded by Latinx people in coalition with Black people, and its institutional goals around diversity seemed to suggest that its Latinx core had been inclusive of Black and other communities from the start. Thus, the changes provided a nuance to their foundationally Latinx core, while also complicating college members' understandings of who they thought they were (Puerto Rican) and who they might be as changes in demographics continue into the future. That said, the Latinx-centeredness of the framework remains a key feature of the revisited framework with asterisks around **Latinx**, representing the expansiveness of Latinx-centered institutional definitions.

Second, the normative realities in which the institutions were founded and continued to live through, more broadly, also remained consistent and pervasive. The case studies highlighted the way the institutions were founded within the context of systemic barriers and educational inequities brought on by normative realities. The original conceptual framework suggested that the Latinx-centered institution moved away from normative realities. However, in practice, through their self-determination and Latinx-centeredness, Ágape and Cacique represent a resistance and breakthrough to normative realities, as highlighted by the

yellow arrows bursting outward from the colleges through the white figure that breaks up the grey (normative realities). As depicted in the revised figure, the yellow arrows show a push against the normative realities, constructing new realities that collaborators described as “we just are.” In the new reality, as seen in the findings, instead of justifying their Latinx-centeredness, the HLFIs affirmed and normalized Latinx assets and created their own standards for excellence for Latinx people. As breakthroughs attempting to move away from normative reality, the institutions were also confronted by external/systemic barriers as represented by the dark grey lightning bolts, which attempt to shrink and force the institutions to shift their Latinx-centered models. For example, as seen in the findings, some of the systemic challenges included significant resource constraints that yielded concerns around corporatization and the gentrification of their communities.

Third, LatCrit suggested a link between theory and praxis, as well as between the academy (teaching and scholarship) and the community, which remain in the revised framework with some adjustments. *Ágape*’s case revealed the philosophies of ownership that guided their praxis as forms of resistance and empowerment of Latinx people. The two cases also had strong philosophies around deservingness and educational justice for Latinx people. To illustrate the links in application, the revised framework replaces the conceptual framework’s focus on theory with philosophy, while keeping teaching, practice, and community as all interconnected pillars that surround the work of the college, as seen against the dashed lines around the institution. The revised framework also removed LatCrit’s focus on scholarship, as the institutions were less oriented toward formal academic research. Instead, *Ágape* and *Cacique* were teaching institutions focused on relationship building and relationality with campus and community members.

There are also new features to the real-world version of the framework. While the conceptual model included the greater Latinx community as a lighter yellow circle surrounding the colleges, I did not anticipate the centrality that place—el barrio—would have to the HLFIs. The darker gold circle surrounding the Latinx community circle represents el barrio, which is where the colleges are located and where the Latinx communities they serve also live. El barrio and the Latinx community played important roles in the institutions' reason for existing and influenced who they were, along with the programmatic interventions enacted by the colleges. The orange glow around the college and the Latinx community circles is meant to convey the dynamic and interconnected relationship of el barrio, the greater community (which, in real life, included residents, families, organizations, people of mixed immigration status, church and civic leaders) and the colleges. Furthermore, I interpreted the conversations with community partner collaborators as viewing the Latinx-centered institution as one that has few boundaries, where its institutional actors are also members of the community, and the community sees the college as their own. The dashed lines around the institution are now dashes with dots, representing complex yet fluid and open relationships between the institutions and the greater community.

Also new to the framework is understanding the Latinx-centered institutions' link to umbrella institutions. The cases revealed a forced link to institutions not created for, by, about Latinx people because of systemic barriers, such as access to capital and accreditation. The cases were different in that one was a private nonprofit branch campus of a PWI and the other was a public campus part of a system of public higher education colleges. In the founding stories, we learned how these links to umbrella institutions were necessary for their creation. While this study is limited to just two cases, it is inevitable for HLFIs to be linked

to external umbrella institutions to achieve their accreditation and, thus, legitimacy, through institutions (like boards of higher education, systems of colleges, accrediting agencies, and/or partnership affiliations) that are part of normative realities. The figure conveys the link with a light blue dashed arrow that goes in both the direction of the umbrella institution(s) and the colleges, as they both have the potential to inform each other's cultures and praxis as uncovered in my study.

Finally, I revisit the white boxes that described some of the conceptual indicators for Latinx-centered organizational identity, culture, and praxis. The theoretical ideas conveyed in the conceptual framework's white boxes were all in alignment with the study, even if they could be described by different names in real life. The figure shows concepts that were aligned with study findings in black text and new concepts emerging from the study in red text. For example, within organizational identity, the findings aligned with some of the conceptual indicators for Latinx-centeredness, including Latinx expansiveness and inclusiveness (multi-dimensional intersecting identities), collectivist orientations of succeeding together (collective consciousness), bilingual, and strengths in the face of challenges (holders/creators of knowledge and wealth). Some of the new contributions of the study to our knowledge of Latinx-centered organizational identity indicators, featured in red text, include the institutions as a community-owned asset, Latinx dignity and deservingness, historical activism, opportunity institution via social mobility, and institutions of el barrio.

Within organizational culture, the findings suggest alignment with conceptual indicators such as believing in people and the community as a whole (community building), people centering (wholeness), college as home: familismo and familia (familismo), affirming not justifying (anti-subordination, validation), asset-based narratives (validation), and valuing

voices (power and agency). Some of the new contributions of the study to knowledge of Latinx-centered organizational culture indicators include student-centered, “living out” values, Latinx expression is second nature, and faith as service.

Within organizational praxis, the findings aligned with conceptual indicators such as humility in faculty-student knowledge sharing and community feedback loops (bi-directional), relationship of mutuality (reciprocity), community solidarity (coalitions), and contextualizing education and bilingual education (culturally sustaining). Some of the new contributions of the study to knowledge of Latinx-centered praxis indicators include arts and culture, dignified physical spaces, role modeling, integrated roles, mission statement, cultural and historical relics/artifacts, Latinx leadership, decision making (e.g., block-scheduling), student aid, values-based planning and (un)codified hiring practices, and family engagement/family programs.

The revised framework provides a critical snapshot informed by the two HLFIs on what Latinx-centered institutions look like in application. The framework contributes to the asset-based, HSI, and limited scholarship on HLFIs by providing an institutional view of Latinx-centeredness and real-life indicators for how this is expressed. The institutional view adds knowledge in accounting for the pressures of normative realities and the permeability of local contexts that influence institutional and individual-level inputs and outcomes. The revised framework also demonstrates the complexity and beauty that comes with making Latinx-centering an intentional organizational decision from the founding to the development of its core identity, culture, and praxis, which contributes significantly to the existing published literature. Finally, the revised framework provides nuanced hope, but critical hope

nonetheless (Duncan-Andrade, 2009)—even with all the challenges—that hope for breaking through normative realities is possible.

Implications

The unique attributes of Latinx-founded institutions, vis-à-vis the realm of federally designated HSIs and higher education as a field, provide compelling implications for understanding Latinx-centered asset-based approaches to serving Latinx people. As Latinx populations continue to grow across the country, and higher education grapples with enrollment, retention, and success issues, this study has broad practical and policy implications for organizational actors, local communities, policymakers, professional associations, and systems of higher education. Following is a discussion of the implications of this study for furthering Latinx-centered institutions of higher education.

Practical Implications

As the researcher who is also a practitioner, one of the exciting parts of conducting this study concerns the many practical implications for people interested in constructing Latinx-centered higher education institutions and beyond. While the central focus of my study is on higher education institutions, there are also implications for other institution types, thus, I use the term “institution” when applicability is broader than higher education. More specifically, there are implications for organizational actors cutting across different roles, as well as for local communities who may be looking to advance the work of foundationally created FUBU-*About Us* institutions or, at a minimum, to create better outcomes for Latinx people within existing HSIs. Following is a discussion of some of the practical implications for consideration by organizational actors and place and community actors.

Organizational Actors

The study engaged collaborators who had different roles within and with the two institutions, e.g., founders, staff, faculty, students, and community partners and there is much to be learned from their experiences. There are three central implications for organizational actors, particularly for higher education professionals and educators, to consider. The first, when considering constructing Latinx-centered higher education institutions, there must be an intentionality in how Latinx-centering is defined and approached by organizational actors. At *Ágape* and *Cacique*, their historical context and founders set the initial commitment to Latinx communities and ensured that their mission and values statements explicitly named Latinx people and the assets the institutions sought to draw from as part of the educational enterprise. Likewise, it is recommended that organizational actors consider developing organizational mission, vision, values, and goals statements that make explicit their focus on the strengths they seek to maximize from Latinx people.

Beyond mission statements, organizational actors must also study and articulate how the institution's identity, culture, and praxis align with its stated mission. Alignment in this way pays attention to the affirmation, belonging, and empowerment of Latinx people, ensuring that Latinx-centeredness is embedded in the institutional life of the organization. A recommended approach is for organizational actors to codify the organization's Latinx-centeredness through written guidance and plans, such as strategic plans, academic plans, job descriptions and hiring plans, communication tools (web, media, publications, speeches, etc.), community outreach and engagement plans, and observation of Latinx community historical milestones and celebrations, among others. Additionally, organizational actors could pay attention to how culture and praxis are preserved through written, artifactual, and

oral histories to help protect the longevity of institutional Latinx-centeredness. Examples include maintaining a robust archive of contributions of Latinx people in the community and the college, and maintaining and featuring Latinx cultural, photographic, and artistic renderings of significance to the communities served by the institution. Given the lessons from the colleges, alignment of identity, culture, and praxis is also likely to counter the marginalization and invisibility of Latinx people that have been normalized in higher education writ large.

Based on the experiences of the two colleges, it is also important for organizational actors to check how they are maintaining fidelity to their Latinx-centeredness over time as they encounter potential shifts in demographics, workforce development needs, local community contexts, and the funding landscape. One approach is to include the question of how the institution is addressing and strengthening its Latinx-centeredness, considering their past, present, and future contexts as part of an ongoing agenda item in planning meetings, campus discussions, and campus-community initiatives, and as they approach new workforce and funding opportunities. Organizational actors might also incorporate this question as a pedagogical tool so that students and faculty can engage in action-based discussions and experiential learning to help grow the ownership of the fidelity of Latinx-centeredness across the institution.

Second, study collaborators revealed the dynamic nature and co-dependency of professional roles within the two colleges in helping construct Latinx-centered institutions. While organizational executive leadership, in other words, the founders, presidents, and administrators, played a significant role in the decision-making and setting of organizational culture, the choices around personnel and structuring of professional roles within the

institutions were important to enacting Latinx-centered organizational missions and values. The central example of this role structuring was reflected in *Ágape*'s trifold roles of staff-faculty-mentors and faculty-mentors, which contributed significantly to fulfilling the need for deep commitment, passion, and identification with the student population to be able to serve them effectively and with genuine care. In creating these professional role structures, collaborators also considered functionality of roles from the perspective of increasing access to the colleges for students and families and cultural congruence through linguistic assets and multidimensional supports through role consolidation. For example, as noted in the findings, collaborators discussed the importance of having bilingual staff to facilitate educational processes and increase relationality. Having bilingual staff also took the responsibility off students to have to interpret information to their families and members of the community. Cultural congruence in terms of Latinx cultural values, traditions, and practices also allowed for holistic support of students at the personal, academic, and professional levels, which was more in line with an integrated role structure.

Given the financial and human resource constraints faced by these Latinx-founded institutions, the need for integrated roles that supported access and cultural congruence was essential and helped them weather the challenges faced by these constraints. As organizational actors at institutions of higher education seek to develop Latinx-centered culture and praxis, hiring and role structuring are important considerations for enabling the success of Latinx people. Organizational leaders might consider whether traditional professional roles in higher education (e.g., full-time tenured faculty or full-time academic administrators without teaching or mentoring expectations) fit the needs of Latinx students or

if Latinx-centering provides an opportunity for thinking creatively about professional roles, as demonstrated at the colleges in my study.

It is also important for organizational actors to consider the non-negotiable attributes that they seek in hiring personnel to ensure faithfulness to the institutional mission and values. For example, collaborators at both colleges felt it was essential for personnel to be able to identify with the experiences of students. They also articulated the need to be caring, a willingness to go above and beyond, and being an advocate for students as essential to working at Latinx-centered institutions. At *Ágape*, mentoring students and having a heart of service for students, families, and the community were also essential. The colleges also expressed the importance of hiring personnel across functions with bilingual Spanish-English language skills. Thus, it would be important for organizational actors to be able to articulate and document via job descriptions, contracts, and hiring guidelines the qualities that they seek to further align with their institutional mission.

Third, organizational actors might also consider the approaches drawn from the case studies in constructing Latinx-centered teaching and learning cultures and practices, with specific attention to how the curriculum intentionally embedded Latinx people's knowledges, contributions, and contexts across the disciplines, and how teaching practices opened opportunities for relationality and knowledge co-construction. As academic professionals (e.g., academic support staff, administrators, and faculty) seek to build asset-based programs, curricula, and pedagogies, they might also consider lessons from the colleges in how they embedded course requirements that spoke to the colleges' values. For example, *Cacique* had a first-year and senior-year capstone course requirement aligned with their place-based focus, which was also a majority Latinx and Black community. Another instance involved

curricular interventions that invited bilingualism and translanguaging in the classroom and inclusionary academic pathways for English Learners, as seen at Ágape. Academic professionals can also take away approaches for enhanced student agency and voice in the educational process through bi-directional sharing of personal narratives, learning about and helping them implement their funds of knowledge in the classroom (Moll et al., 1992; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011), and engaging student expertise in the classroom as co-teachers.

Place and Community Actors

An important contribution of this organizational study was how it highlighted the centrality of place (e.g., the neighborhoods and cities where the colleges were located) and Latinx community (e.g., local residents, nonprofit and civic leaders and organizations, churches and clergy people) to the existence of the institutions. The study revealed how Latinx communities in specific localized contexts mobilized and brought forward the construction of the institutions and maintained connections to the institutions. Thus, the study offers implications for local geographical communities, community actors, and institutions on the role that communities can play in driving agency and opportunity for Latinx people in higher education.

Regarding local communities and community actors, while the study offered examples of institutions built in an urban neighborhood-based context, worth considering is the potential leverage of locally concentrated efforts. The local focus allowed for targeted, long-term investments that solidified the role of the Latinx-founded institutions as part of the neighborhood ecosystem. Local communities and the populations within them can help inform and hold accountable higher education institutions' commitment to communities and engage them in embedded approaches to working with and in communities. One of the

lessons from this study is that the neighborhood- and city-based identity of the colleges also influenced and made unique their institutional identity, so much so that they were colleges of, for, by, and about those local communities with high concentrations of Latinx people.

Practitioners involved in neighborhood-, town-, and city-level organizations should feel empowered to work with Latinx-centered institutions, including the creation, nurturing, and maintenance of these institutions. Recognizing that the viability of many educational institutions is dependent on their local context, locally based practitioners should conduct fearless outreach and develop connections with educational leaders and community change agents to ensure that local community needs and wants are addressed through the culture and practices of the higher education institution. Community actors, including individual residents, as well as civic, business, and nonprofit leaders, contribute and can further contribute significant assets to higher education by ensuring that they are engaged in place-based issues, providing real-time opportunities for real-world teaching and learning, and informing the future directions of the institutions. Community actors should also be empowered to evaluate whether their contributions to institutions are reciprocated and make decisions based on the existence of sufficient mutual benefits within the relationship.

Institutions of higher education, in turn, must consider the strategic opportunities that place-based work affords and the benefits that they can draw for and from local communities. The interdependence of place and Latinx-centeredness may have a variety of manifestations for non-HLFI HSIs but, nonetheless, reveal a different dimension of meaning-making and praxis that Latinx-centered institutions might consider in their development and goal setting. For HSIs, and MSIs more broadly, there must not be a presumption of community benefit just because they are serving Students of Color. Rather, institutions must be vigilant in

checking whether their engagement is also mutual and increases, rather than extracts, capacity from communities. To this end, it is essential for institutions to build sustainable mechanisms for community idea generation, feedback, and responsiveness to issues brought forth by local contexts and actors. In this study, the colleges included advisory boards as one vehicle for community engagement although, in the case of Cacique, the presidential advisory board had mixed reviews due to its large size. Institutions looking to engage Latinx communities and local communities in organizational processes must define clearly their purpose and right-size the venues for engagement so that voices are heard and communities can better influence and support the institution. As stated earlier, intentionality of engagement is also important, as well as recognizing the diversity of Latinx and local communities when looking to constitute such groups or to solicit feedback.

Furthermore, institutions could learn from the attempts of the two colleges in this study to build permeable boundaries with communities so that there is fluidity of movement from community to college and college to community. This permeability seems to be best accessed through policies around use of campus space as extensions of the community, co-ideation with community groups about academic programs, and symbiotic workforce-related relationships, to name a few. For example, building synergies where community agency personnel are also students and students work within community agencies, and the work is centered around common goals. The findings also revealed a focus on areas of mutual interest to the institutions and communities, such as the need for more Latinx people in health professions to address local health disparities and shortages in the healthcare workforce, while also attending to the need for increased social mobility of Latinx communities through higher-paying jobs.

Policy Implications

My study also contributes expansive policy-related implications that are related to systemic factors influencing the existence of Latinx-centered institutions, such as system financing, and the co-dependent relationship of Latinx-founded institutions to systems. For this discussion, “systems” are defined by larger entities (e.g., boards of higher education, parent organizations and partnering higher education institutions, accreditation agencies, the field of higher education) concerned with policy and financing of higher education institutions. These policy implications may be of interest to policy makers, professional associations such as the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU), the Alliance of Hispanic-Serving Institution Educators (AHSIE), and higher education system-level practitioners, such as board members, presidents, chancellors, commissioners, secretaries, and accreditors. Three related areas for consideration include financing of Latinx-founded (HLFIs) and other Latinx-centered institutions (possibly HSIs), alignment of values between Latinx-centered institutions and systems, and capacity-building of HLFIs.

Financing

The context for the founding of the colleges, as described in Chapter 5, revealed challenges around financing of the establishment of Latinx-founded institutions, and Chapter 7 also uncovered contemporary challenges around resources that created tensions around the possible corporatization of the colleges. In relation to the former, Ágape had the original intent to be an independent institution—free from white normative educational impositions—until its founders learned of the multi-million dollar undertaking that it would need to fulfill their state’s requirements and build all the necessary infrastructures to be considered a fully functional college. Their state’s higher education system and lack of capital in the Latinx

community at that time made the dream of becoming 100% FUBU-*About Us* impossible. Thus, they sought out a partnership with a PWI, through which they received their accreditation while negotiating their ownership and certain autonomies over their college. Cacique, on the other hand, chose to advocate for a community college within their public higher education system with the idea that public dollars should resource the education of Latinx communities, though they had to conform to system-level policies, such as changing bilingual education. Celia, a founder at Cacique, tried to fund a private independent college as an act of resistance to succumbing to system dominance, but the college did not last due to financing issues.

These examples from the colleges' founding point to how startup capital needed for Latinx communities to build their own institutions is a significant issue that calls into question how investors, philanthropic organizations, and system offices consider seeding capital for Latinx educational enterprises. In particular, how can policy makers and investors construct wealth-building opportunities within Latinx communities to be able to seed these efforts? Additionally, how can policy makers and investors review their financing and administration processes for systemic, racialized barriers impeding the ability for alternative higher education solutions for Latinx people? Higher education policy-making and policy-implementing bodies hold the power to set the bar for what is considered legitimate higher education and can act (un)intentionally as gatekeepers to funding, resources, and other supports. Therefore, it would be important for policy and funding practitioners to examine their current practices and consider deconstructing financing and policy schemes that prevent the creation and strengthening of Latinx-centered institutions.

Regarding contemporary resource challenges, collaborators spoke about HLFIs needing to fundraise and fulfill system-defined metrics, while stretching the capacity of their limited personnel. The contemporary challenges faced by HLFIs were aggravated by the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic, as was the case for most MSIs and associates-level colleges at the time of this study (Bulman & Fairlie, 2022; Franco et al., 2023; Gasman & Jones, 2020). However, the resource constraints faced by the colleges created a tension that collaborators considered might have an impact on the Latinx-centered and values-based focus of the colleges in the long run. System offices might consider studying and developing differentiated metrics for success for HLFIs that are informed by the HIFI experience. Federal and state legislators might also consider establishing a special designation for the few HLFIs currently in existence and offer special funding that considers their unique founding and institutional contexts. Legislators might also consider commissioning a study of HLFIs with the goal of strengthening their capacity. Such a study could also yield promising asset-based Latinx-centered practices that could inform the broader work with HSIs and MSIs, as well as broader efforts to support Latinx college students' success.

Alignment of Values

As discussed previously regarding the establishment choices of the two colleges, in these choices and contemporary contexts, the co-dependent relationship that the Latinx-founded institutions have with parent organizations or systems was revealed (e.g., in this study, these were nonprofits and/or PWIs and public systems of colleges). In order for Latinx-founded and other Latinx-centered institutions to co-exist with parent organizations and systems, there must be an alignment of values. Where there is misalignment, at minimum, there must be an opportunity for deep engagement and flexibility on the part of

parent organizations and systems to re-evaluate their policies and practices. System leaders seeking to increase access, success, and opportunity for Latinx people, whether as an economic imperative and/or a social justice issue, must be willing to consider negotiating, compromising, and changing traditions that have predominantly served the dominant culture. System leaders might also consider hiring Latinx professionals to help inform the work of system offices and parent organizations, in addition to engaging in learning and development to build their understanding of Latinx communities and the assets they bring to higher education.

Capacity Building of HLFIs

Finally, between Ágape and Cacique, there is a 3-decade difference in the colleges' founding years even as they both were established as part of activist, civil rights ventures. In the case of Ágape, while the college was founded more recently, their work through the clergy, the nonprofit Ágape Inc., and the charter school space developed over a decade after Cacique was first proposed; thus, together, they have nearly 90 years of accumulated experience in centering Latinx assets, cultures, values, and experiences. Bringing together these two HLFIs, as well as the others still in existence, could yield significant learnings that would support the growth and capacity of HLFIs and could also provide promising practices for consideration by other institution types looking to bolster Latinx-centered approaches. Their approaches to Latinx-centering in higher education included some similarities (e.g., integration of arts and culture, embedded familismo, and place-based), as well as several differences and nuances (e.g., private-nonprofit versus public, differentiated responses to gentrification, traditional higher education organizational structure versus flatter more

integrated roles) that may only be understood by others experiencing similar goals and journeys.

Professional associations, especially those concerned with Latinx educational issues, could find a mutual benefit in supporting the cross-organizational learning and sharing of HLFIs. For example, professional associations supporting HSIs and Latinx educational issues could create a community of practice specifically for HLFIs. Such a community of practice could also reveal issues and praxis with policy implications for existing and emerging HSIs. Also, bridging, building, and bonding across HLFIs could create an environment for collaboration and policy advocacy that could help address some of the resource constraints faced by HLFIs. Cross-HLFI capacity-building might also help unpack core systemic issues ingrained in higher education's white normative culture and praxis that could produce transformative outcomes for Latinx people and Communities of Color.

Future Research

While my study makes several contributions to existing literature, scholars might consider engaging in additional research areas beyond this study to grow our understanding of Latinx FUBU-*About Us* in higher education. Some recommended research paths include examining (1) challenges and opportunities in institutionalizing Latinx-centered higher education institutions, (2) Latinx-centering considering organizational changes over time, (3) Latinx-founded institutions as anchor institutions for Latinx communities, and (4) conducting a comprehensive study of existing HLFIs. These four research areas are discussed in more detail below.

Challenges and Opportunities in Institutionalizing Latinx-Centered Higher Education Institutions

The data collected for this study were voluminous and the findings extracted for the dissertation helped answer only part of the question about what it takes to institutionalize Latinx-centered assets in higher education through institutions built for, by, about Latinx people. Hence, one area that further research could more deeply explore includes the challenges and opportunities faced by Latinx-founded institutions in fulfilling their Latinx-centered mission, values, and praxis. Such a study may reveal some of the deep systemic barriers organizational actors and organizations confront in realizing unapologetically Latinx-focused agendas, as well as the external factors that organizational actors negotiate as they institutionalize Latinx-centered assets.

Latinx-Centering Considering Organizational Changes Over Time

A second area for further research focuses on exploring how Latinx-centering is influenced by changes in leadership at the organizational level and as generations of founding members transition from the organization. Such a study might help understand how Latinx-centering is protected, fortified, and transferred, as well as how it evolves through changes in organizational actors and set institutional structures. A study on organizational change in light of Latinx-centeredness might reveal lessons about Latinx leadership, decision-making, and inter-generational transfer of knowledge as a form of asset-building within Latinx-founded institutions. An approach to consider would be a longitudinal study of changes over time to uncover factors influencing Latinx-centered organizational leadership and outcomes related to associated changes.

Latinx-Founded Institutions as Anchor Institutions for Latinx Communities

Since the role of place and community is a central feature of Latinx-founded institutions, a third consideration for research involves deepening understanding of Latinx-founded institutions as anchor institutions in their locations and in their local Latinx communities. Sladek (2017) defines anchors as institutions that commit to purposely applying their localized economic power, influence, and human capital with communities to reciprocate welfare and benefits for both. When colleges and universities serve as anchors, they are able to yield powerful outcomes for their neighboring communities through resource and business alignment with community goals (Sladek, 2017). As seen in my study, to some extent, Latinx-centered institutions attract and engage in economic and urban development. As anchor institutions, their place-based roots have the potential to fill essential gaps in neighborhood investments, especially considering the gentrification experienced by urban communities (Ehlenz & Birch, 2014). Such a study might further examine the role of Latinx-centered institutions in enacting transformative changes in their local communities, and how the institutions' agendas to achieve these changes connect with Latinx community needs and wants.

Conduct Comprehensive Study of Existing HLFIs

Finally, this study focused on two of the five existing Latinx-founded institutions identified through the literature and research on the Internet. The term Historically Latinx-Founded Institution (HLFI) is a contribution of this study, but there is little published research on the individual institutions, let alone published research on this segment of the HSI family. To advance knowledge about Latinx-founded institutions and the ways they center Latinx people's cultures, values, and assets through an organizational lens, a fourth

research area would cover the breadth of Latinx-founded institutions through a multi-case cross-analysis of the five such institutions that exist in the United States. A study of this kind might address the limitations of this study in terms of covering the diversities of the Latinx communities across regional differences and increase understanding of HLFIs institutional types. Such a study could build upon and add significant knowledge to the HSI literature. Worth noting, during my research, I found an additional HLFIs institution that was established in 1981 but closed in 2015. A study of all HLFIs might more comprehensively reveal institutional threats and lessons for their continuation.

CHAPTER 10
FINAL REFLECTIONS

La niña [Antonia Navarro Huevo] jugaba poco con muñecas, su interés era la naturaleza: las estrellas, la luna, los volcanes, las fumarolas del volcán de Izalco... Sus padres le permitían que hiciera preguntas curiosas. Ella quería saber cómo eran las cosas más allá de la Tierra, en la bóveda azul del cielo. [The girl [Antonia Navarro Huevo] played little with dolls, her interest was nature: the stars, the moon, volcanoes, the fumaroles of the Izalco volcano... Her parents allowed her to ask curious questions. She wanted to know what things were like beyond Earth, in the blue vault of heaven.] (Salamanca, n.d.)

I started my dissertation journey with a lot of built-up frustration over a lifetime of feeling alone in going against the grain of normative realities. As I shared in the opening chapter for this study, I have nearly always been one of few Latinx people within my organizational contexts and have taken on roles that were supposed to yield transformative change. While I can say that I have contributed toward transformative moments in my roles, I cannot say that the institutions themselves have moved toward widespread transformation for Latinx people and Communities of Color. Thus, the work of delivering racial equity and social justice has been limited to individuals and groups of people rather than changes at scale. Aside from frustration, I also started this study with an unequivocal belief in the

beauty, power, knowledges, and strengths of Latinx people and People of Color. I have been guided by a belief in a third or even fourth space, as la paperson posits—where an alternative to what has been historically known to be higher education could exist and flip it on its head. That deep belief is also why the experiences and ideas of Latinx people’s powers being suppressed by the endemic racism and racist policies, systems, and institutions of the United States have also caused un constante retorcijón en el estómago [a constant sharp cramp in the stomach].

The discomfort in my belly also comes from living in my skin and being in constant need to resist those things that feel wrong and unsettling. At first, I was deciding between two potential topics for my dissertation. I met with people in my inner circle to tap into their wisdom to help me process my thinking toward a final topic. One of my mentors and members of extended familia, Jose C. Massó III, said to me that one study was of *what I do*, but FUBU-*About Us* is *who I am*. That conversation with Mr. Massó was the turning point for me as I committed to conducting a study of who I am. As I concluded the study with this final reflection, I think of how my collaborators saw FUBU-*About Us* Latinx-centered institutions as just *who they were*. Finding that sense of unapologetic identity and matter-of-fact outlook on Latinx-centeredness also brought the study full circle from where I began.

FUBU-*About Us* in higher education is about models at scale that center the needs, wants, visions, and assets of Latinx people because they are informed and implemented by, for, about them. I have said before that I did not expect to find idyllic institutions but yearned to find something different enough from my experiences in higher education and beyond to fuel me up and lead me to future endeavors. As a practitioner with a diverse background in community development, policy and civic engagement, cross-sector partnership

development, and higher education administration, I hoped the multi-case approach would provide a wider-lens for learning about Latinx FUBU-*About Us* institutions that could be translated beyond higher education. What I found was bittersweet.

From the start, I was humbled by the support that the leaders of the institutions demonstrated. I felt a personal sense of investment from them in my success as one of the statistically few Latinas pursuing a PhD. Collaborators from the faith-based college even offered prayers and blessings for me at the end of our pláticas. The title of this study and the values and personal nature of it also seemed to catch their attention. As mentioned earlier in the dissertation, my collaborators quickly latched on to the title of FUBU-*About Us* as their own and it seemed to open an understanding and new language between us that allowed us to convey unapologetic Latinx-centeredness and love for our people—the people in our communities, Black and Brown people, immigrant people, our ancestors, and people of the past.

Once I dove into the study, the realities of COVID-19 set in quickly. While the world seemed to have been remote since the pandemic hit in 2020, my engagement with the campuses in fall 2021 and data collection in spring-summer 2022 proved to be challenging beyond a question of modality. The lived experiences of these Latinx-centered campuses created real-life challenges for them and the communities they were in, which were some of the most disenfranchised, economically impoverished zip codes in the country. Yet, the familismo, people-centering, activist, and community-based nature of the campuses showed a second nature resilience and collectivist approach to making it through the pandemic with the least possible casualties. That sense of ultimate care and on-the-spot knowledge for what was

needed in the community was part of my first impression before any formal gathering of data occurred. This impression only grew throughout the course of the study.

One of my collaborators spoke about how Latinx people and people in their community “gotta find a way to make it work” and how the disadvantages that the community experienced were just an extra obstacle—a part of the norm. This sense of resolve was sobering and resonated with me because of how I have also had to overcome barriers as part of the norm. Like Latinx people, the *Ágape* and *Cacique* Colleges also weathered the norms imposed by systemic inequities and sought to “make it work” despite the challenges. More than making it work, I got to see what it could feel like to be in a context that fully supported the wholeness of Latinx people for all the challenges and assets that they bring to the proverbial table. Another sobering aspect of making it work for the HLFIs was related to the kind of resources needed to get the institutions started that seemed to only be available in white communities and systems, leading to choices that required compromises to create an institution for, by, about the people. The way the two institutions held onto their identities and self-determination in the face of those obstacles was the work of s/heroes in love with their people, and they continued to grapple with these issues in contemporary times.

Alvaro (founder, *Ágape*) said to me: “I think people find what they want to find. You needed to find us? You did.” I hope that people look for, find, learn about, and support the HLFIs in this country and use this study to consider alternatives to normative realities. I hope the study helps people see beyond the traumas of living while Black and Brown in this country and focus on the power of what ownership over one’s education can do for entire communities. *FUBU-About Us* is possible, but there will always be some limitations so long

as racism and systemic disenfranchisement are endemic, as suggested by CRT (Bell, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). I hope that we start seeing more Black and Brown economic wealth to fund Black and Brown enterprises for a truly FUBU-*About Us* model. Until more of that wealth is developed, I hope that more co-conspirators join FUBU-*About Us* as a movement toward racial and social equity, allowing themselves to be guided by “the people closest to the pain [as they] should be closest to the power,” as my Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley has stated time and again. In the spirit of being guided by the people, I developed a *Guidance from the People*, which can be found in Appendix F, drawing from collaborators hopes for the future of their colleges and their guidance for others who may want to establish Latinx-centered institutions of higher education.

I hope the reader takes away that Latinx-centered institutions span institutional boundaries; are multi-dimensional and complex; require intentionality and embedded Latinx-centered identities, cultures, and praxis; and have long-term commitments that face a myriad of uncertainties with the shifts in higher education and localized contexts. Finally, Latinx FUBU-*About Us* in higher education requires an authentic and non-negotiable belief in the assets of Latinx people and does not stand for band-aid solutions, but rather to transform, liberate, and grow the power of generations of Latinx people toward a new normal.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS AND QUESTIONS

Protocol I: Interview Protocol and Questions for Founders

Interview Protocol Opening

*First and foremost, thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. My study explores institutions that were founded by Latinx communities, as I am interested in knowing how Latinx people and People of Color build their own institutions based on their knowledge, experiences, and specific identified needs and desires. Your college is one of a few Latinx-founded institutions in the country built through the activism of Latinx people, and in some cases in solidarity with Black communities, who wanted an educational institution that sustained Latinx cultural and linguistic identities. Therefore, the purpose of this interview is to further my understanding about your college and to learn about **your experience with and insights about founding and building a higher education institution developed for and by Latinx people and Communities of Color**. The opportunity to learn from you is truly an honor.*

*The interview should last approximately **90 minutes**. During this time, I will be asking a series of questions to help me understand how you think your institution builds from and promotes Latinx-centered values and practices, as well as how communities—such as different Latinx ethnic communities and local communities (leaders, families, organizations, residents)—are part of your institution. There are no right or wrong answers, or desirable or undesirable answers. I would like you to feel comfortable saying what you really think and how you really feel. Also, please feel free to skip any questions that you don't feel*

comfortable answering. You also can let me know if you would like to go ‘off the record’ at any point, which means that what you say will not be used as quoted data.

Finally, if it’s okay with you, I will be audio recording our conversation since it is hard for me to write down everything while simultaneously carrying an attentive conversation with you. Everything you say will remain confidential, meaning that only I will be aware of your answers. My dissertation advisor will only have access to transcripts without any personal identifiers. Also, confidential responses may be displayed in written and oral reports but without any personal identifiers. However, because of your unique role with the college, it is possible that your responses could be identified by those reading the final study, so I want to make sure you are aware of this potential risk. Are you ok to proceed? Do you have any thoughts about your identity possibly being recognized by readers? Do you have any questions for me before we dive in?

Interview Questions

1. Can you describe what community(ies) you represent and what role(s) you play within or on behalf of the(se) community(ies)?
 - a. Can you describe what is your current relationship to the college?
2. When you hear the phrase For Us By Us About Us, what comes to mind?
 - a. Can you tell me how your college defines who is the “us”?
 - b. Who was involved in building this definition and who is helping carry this focus forward?
3. What do you see as the strengths of the populations served by your college?
 - a. Can you give specific examples of the ways in which these strengths are centered at your college, if any?

4. Let's go back to the founding days of your institution, can you describe the processes you underwent to get the institution off the ground from the beginning to when the college was officially launched?
 - a. Who was involved and what motivated you to get the institution started?
 - b. What was the response from the greater community?
5. Building from the founding, what do you they think are the college's values and mission?
6. Can you provide some examples of how the college has been able to uphold its values and mission as you described them?
 - a. Are there any values the college was not able to uphold– which values and what happened?
 - b. Have there been constraints or pressures to conform to values or practices outside of your own college's approach to the work? If yes, can you give me an example of a pressure or constraint?
 - c. To what extent and how has the college been able to manage this pressure or constraint?
 - d. Have there been any internal tensions or challenges in being able to carry out a Latinx-centered institutional focus?
 - e. What opportunities have these challenges presented for the college?
7. Can you tell me what kinds of knowledge or experiences are considered valuable at the college when implementing teaching and learning activities on campus?
8. I'm going to pivot a little to talk about your college's relationship to the community. Can you name and describe the community/ies that are most important to the college?

- a. I am wondering if you can describe what is the relationship of the college with this/these community/ies and the local Latinx community?
 - b. Have there been changes in your local demographic community context? If so, how are these changes impacting who and how the college serves the community?
 - c. Are there ways in which the community influences and/ or supports the work of your college?
9. From your perspective, what makes your institution unique or distinct from any other?
- a. Can you give me an example of what this uniqueness looks like when it is put into practice? (For example, when decisions are made?)
10. I am wondering what your thoughts are about the future of the college?
- a. How can the college remain grounded in its mission?
11. What guidance would you give to others who are interested in creating institutions that are centered around Latinx experiences?
- a. What resources need to be in place for Latinx-centered models to succeed in higher education?
 - b. What specific values or beliefs need to be in place at the institution to be able to uphold a living, breathing model that is truly for, by, about Latinx people?
 - c. What would you do differently if you had the chance to re-do some of the work that you did in founding the institution?

12. Thank you so much for your time, I've learned so much from this conversation.

Before we close, is there anything else that you want to add that we didn't get to cover? OR Is there a question you wished I had asked but didn't? Thanks again.

Protocol II: Interview Protocol and Questions for Staff

Interview Protocol Opening

*First and foremost, thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. My study is interested in looking at institutions that were founded by Latinx communities, as I am interested in knowing how Latinx people and People of Color build their own institutions based on their knowledge, experiences, and specific identified needs and desires. Your college is one of a few Latinx-founded institutions in the country built through the activism of Latinx people, and in some cases in solidarity with Black communities, who wanted an educational institution that sustained Latinx cultural and linguistic identities. Therefore, the purpose of this interview is to further my understanding about your college and to learn about **your experience and insights as a staff member** at a higher education institution developed for and by Latinx people and Communities of Color. The opportunity to learn from you will be invaluable.*

*The interview should last approximately **60 minutes**. During this time, I will be asking a series of questions to help me understand how you think your institution builds from and promotes Latinx-centered values and practices, as well as how communities—such as different Latinx ethnic communities and local communities (leaders, families, organizations, residents)—are part of your institution. There are no right or wrong answers, or desirable or undesirable answers. I would like you to feel comfortable saying what you really think and*

how you really feel. Also, please feel free to skip any questions that you don't feel comfortable answering. You also can let me know if you would like to go 'off the record' at any point, which means that what you say will not be used as quoted data.

Finally, if it's okay with you, I will be audio recording our conversation since it is hard for me to write down everything while simultaneously carrying an attentive conversation with you. Everything you say will remain confidential, meaning that only I will be aware of your answers. My dissertation advisor will only have access to transcripts without any personal identifiers. Also, confidential responses may be displayed in written and oral reports but without any personal identifiers. Do you have any questions for me before we dive in?

Interview Questions

1. How long have you been at the college and what drew you to work at the college?
2. What has your experience been like as a Latinx staff member at the college?
3. Have you been able to bring your voice to the table and how has that been received by others, leadership?
4. If I wanted to come work at the college as a Latina staff member myself, what would be important for me to see and know?
5. The premise of my study is thinking about institutions that are quote: For Us By Us and About Us. It is what led me to want to learn about your college.
 - a. When you hear the phrase For Us By Us About Us, what comes to mind?
 - b. Can you tell me how your college defines who is the "us" and who has a role in shaping and carrying out that focus?
6. How would you describe the college's values and mission?

- a. Can you provide examples of ways through which the values and mission are expressed?
 - b. How do you see your role in relation to the values and mission you described?
 - c. Have there been constraints or pressures to conform to values or practices outside of your own college's approach to the work? If yes, can you give me an example of a pressure or constraint?
 - d. To what extent and how has the college been able to manage this pressure or constraint?
 - e. Have there been any internal tensions or challenges in being able to carry out a Latinx-centered institutional focus?
 - f. What opportunities have these challenges presented for the college?
7. How do you view the strengths/assets of the populations served by the college?
- a. What are your views about how the college considers those assets?
 - i. How do you think the assets *should be* addressed by the college?
 - b. How do you consider those assets in your work?
8. From your perspective, what makes your institution unique or distinct from any other?
- a. Can you give me an example of what this uniqueness looks like when it is put into practice? (For example, when decisions are made?)
9. Can you share a story or anecdote about a alumni of the institution as the outcome of attending a Latinx-founded institution of higher education?

10. I'm going to pivot a little to talk about your college's relationship to the community. I am wondering if you can describe what is the relationship of the college with the greater community (Latinx people and more broadly)?
- a. Have there been changes in your local demographic community context? If so, how are these changes impacting who and how the college serves the community?
 - b. Are there ways in which the community influences and/ or supports the work of your college?
 - c. Would you say you and colleagues are connected to the local community, if so how?
11. I am wondering what your thoughts are about the future of the college and how it can remain grounded in its mission?
12. What guidance would you give to others who are interested in creating institutions that are centered around Latinx experiences?
- a. What resources need to be in place for Latinx-centered models to succeed in higher education?
 - b. What specific values or beliefs need to be in place at the institution to be able to uphold a living, breathing model that is truly for, by, about Latinx people?
13. Thank you so much for your time, I've learned so much from this conversation. Before we close, is there anything else that you want to add that we didn't get to cover? OR Is there a question you wished I had asked but didn't? Thanks again.

Protocol III: Interview Protocol and Questions for Faculty

Interview Protocol Opening

*First and foremost, thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. My study is interested in looking at institutions that were founded by Latinx communities, as I am interested in knowing how Latinx people and People of Color build their own institutions based on their knowledge, experiences, and specific identified needs and desires. Your college is one of a few Latinx-founded institutions in the country built through the activism of Latinx people, and in some cases in solidarity with Black communities, who wanted an educational institution that sustained Latinx cultural and linguistic identities. Therefore, the purpose of this interview is to further my understanding about your college and to learn about **your experience with and insights as a faculty member** of a higher education institution developed for and by Latinx people and Communities of Color. The opportunity to learn from you is truly an honor.*

The interview should last approximately 60 minutes. During this time, I will be asking a series of questions to help me understand how you think your institution builds from and promotes Latinx-centered values and practices, as well as how communities—such as different Latinx ethnic communities and local communities (leaders, families, organizations, residents)—are part of your institution. There are no right or wrong answers, or desirable or undesirable answers. I would like you to feel comfortable saying what you really think and how you really feel. Also, please feel free to skip any questions that you don't feel comfortable answering. You also can let me know if you would like to go 'off the record' at any point, which means that what you say will not be used as quoted data.

Finally, if it's okay with you, I will be audio recording our conversation since it is hard for me to write down everything while simultaneously carrying an attentive conversation with you. Everything you say will remain confidential, meaning that only I will be aware of your answers. My dissertation advisor will only have access to transcripts without any personal identifiers. Also, confidential responses may be displayed in written and oral reports but without any personal identifiers. Do you have any questions for me before we dive in?

Interview Questions

1. How long have you been at the college, and what drew you to work at the college?
2. What has your experience been like as a Latinx faculty member at the college?
3. If I were interested in becoming faculty at your college, what would I need to see and know?
4. The premise of my study is thinking about institutions that are quote: For Us By Us and About Us. It is what led me to want to learn about your college.
 - a. When you hear the phrase For Us By Us About Us, what comes to mind?
 - b. Can you tell me how your college defines who is the “us” and who has a role in shaping and carrying out that focus?
5. What do you think are the college’s values and mission?
 - a. Can you provide some specific examples of how these values and mission are expressed at the college?
 - b. How do you think these values translate/are expressed through the work of the faculty?
 - i. How about your own work as a faculty member?

- c. To what extent do you see the values and mission translated through the curriculum at the college?
 - d. Have there been constraints or pressures to conform to values or practices outside of your own college's approach to the work? If yes, can you give me an example of a pressure or constraint?
 - e. To what extent and how has the college been able to manage this pressure or constraint?
 - f. Have there been any internal tensions or challenges in being able to carry out a Latinx-centered institutional focus?
 - g. What opportunities have these challenges presented for the college?
6. Can you tell me what kinds of knowledge or experiences are considered valuable when implementing teaching and learning activities on campus?
- a. What is your view about how these values knowledges and experiences get translated through teaching at the college?
 - b. What teaching philosophy would you say guides your approach to education?
 - c. How does this approach compare to what you have seen with other faculty at the college?
7. How do you view the strengths/assets of the populations served by the college?
- a. What are your views about how the college considers those assets?
 - b. How do you consider those assets in your own practice as a faculty member?
8. From your perspective, what makes your institution unique or distinct from any other?

- a. Can you give me an example of what this uniqueness looks like when it is put into practice? (For example, when decisions are made?)
9. Can you share a story or anecdote about alumni of the institution as the outcome of attending a Latinx-founded institution of higher education?
10. I'm going to pivot a little to talk about your college's relationship to the community. I am wondering if you can describe who are the community(ies) the college engages with and how?
 - a. Have there been changes in your local demographic community context? If so, how are these changes impacting who and how the college serves the community?
 - b. Are there ways in which the community influences and/ or supports the work of your college?
 - c. Would you say you and faculty connected to the local community, if so how?
11. I am wondering what your thoughts are about the future of the college and how it can remain grounded in its mission?
12. What guidance would you give to others who are interested in creating institutions that are centered around Latinx experiences?
 - a. What resources need to be in place for Latinx-centered models to succeed in higher education?
 - b. What specific values or beliefs need to be in place at the institution to be able to uphold a living, breathing model that is truly for, by, about Latinx people?

13. Thank you so much for your time, I've learned so much from this conversation.

Before we close, is there anything else that you want to add that we didn't get to cover? OR Is there a question you wished I had asked but didn't? Thanks again.

Protocol IV: Interview Protocol and Questions for Community Partners

Interview Protocol Opening

*First and foremost, thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. My study is interested in looking at institutions that were founded by Latinx communities, as I am interested in knowing how Latinx people and People of Color build their own institutions based on their knowledge, experiences, and specific identified needs and desires. [Name of college] is one of a few Latinx-founded institutions in the country built through the activism of Latinx people, and in some cases in solidarity with Black communities, who wanted an educational institution that sustained Latinx cultural and linguistic identities. Therefore, the purpose of this interview is to further my understanding about [name of college] and to learn about **your experience with and insights as a community member and partner** to a higher education institution developed for and by Latinx people and Communities of Color. The opportunity to learn from you is truly an honor.*

The interview should last approximately 60 minutes. During this time, I will be asking a series of questions to help me understand how you think the college builds from and promotes Latinx-centered values and practices, as well as how communities—such as different Latinx ethnic communities and local communities (leaders, families, organizations, residents)—are part of the college. There are no right or wrong answers, or desirable or undesirable answers. I would like you to feel comfortable saying what you really think and

how you really feel. Also, please feel free to skip any questions that you don't feel comfortable answering. You also can let me know if you would like to go 'off the record' at any point, which means that what you say will not be used as quoted data.

Finally, if it's okay with you, I will be audio recording our conversation since it is hard for me to write down everything while simultaneously carrying an attentive conversation with you. Everything you say will remain confidential, meaning that only I will be aware of your answers. My dissertation advisor will only have access to transcripts without any personal identifiers. Also, confidential responses may be displayed in written and oral reports but without any personal identifiers. Do you have any questions for me before we dive in?

Interview Questions

1. It would first be helpful to know how long have you been affiliated with the College?
 - a. How did your work with the college begin?
2. Can you describe the community that you represent and what your role is in that community?
3. What has your experience been like as a community leader/partner in working with the college?
 - a. What is it that motivates you to continue building upon this relationship?
 - b. What has been challenging about the relationship?
 - c. What kind of relationship would you like to see between the college and the community looking to the future?
4. What role does the college play in the greater community?

5. Have there been changes in your local demographic community context? If so, how are these changes impacting who and how the college serves the community?
6. Are there ways in which the community influences and/ or supports the work of the college?
 - a. Now vice versa, are there specific ways that the college influences and/or supports the community?
7. The premise of my study is thinking about organizations and movements that are quote: For Us By Us and About Us.
 - a. When you hear the phrase For Us By Us About Us, what comes to mind?
 - b. Can you tell me how you think the college defines who is the “us” and who has a role in shaping and carrying out that focus?
8. I want to pivot and talk about the college’s values and mission, what do you they think these are?
9. Can you provide some examples of how you think the college has been able to uphold its values and mission as you described them?
 - a. Are there particular values that the college has not upheld, and can you provide examples of how?
 - b. Have there been any particular tensions or challenges in being able to carry out a Latinx-centered focus in your work with the college?
 - c. What opportunities have these challenges presented for the community’s work with the college?
10. How do you view the strengths/assets of the local community served by the college?
 - a. What are your views about how the college considers those assets?

11. I am wondering what your thoughts are about the future of the college and how it can remain grounded in its mission?
12. What guidance would you give to community members who are interested in creating institutions that are centered around Latinx experiences?
 - a. What resources need to be in place for Latinx-centered models to succeed in higher education?
 - b. What specific values or beliefs need to be in place at the institution to be able to uphold a living, breathing model that is truly for, by, about Latinx people?
13. Thank you so much for your time, I've learned so much from this conversation. Before we close, is there anything else that you want to add that we didn't get to cover? OR Is there a question you wished I had asked but didn't? Thanks again.

Protocol V: Interview Protocol and Questions for Student Focus Group

First and foremost, thank you for taking the time to participate in this focus group. The purpose of the focus group is to get more in-depth feedback about your experiences as a student at [Name of College]. My study is interested in looking at institutions of higher education that were founded by Latinx communities, as I am interested in knowing how Latinx people and People of Color build their own colleges and universities based on their knowledge, experiences, and specific identified needs and desires. [Name of college] is one of a few Latinx-founded institutions of higher education in the country built through the activism of Latinx people, and in some cases in solidarity with Black communities, who wanted an educational institution that sustained Latinx cultural and linguistic identities. Therefore, again, the purpose of the focus group is to further my

*understanding about [name of college] and to learn about **your experience and insights as a student** at a higher education institution developed for and by Latinx people and Communities of Color. The opportunity to learn from you is very valuable.*

The focus group should last approximately 60 to 90 minutes. During this time, I will be asking a series of questions to help me understand how you think the college builds from and promotes Latinx-centered values and practices, as well as how communities—such as different Latinx ethnic communities and local communities (leaders, families, organizations, residents)—are part of the college. There are no right or wrong answers, or desirable or undesirable answers. I would like you to feel comfortable saying what you really think and how you really feel. Also, please feel free to skip any questions that you don't feel comfortable answering.

Finally, I will be audio recording our discussion since it is hard for me to write down everything while simultaneously carrying an attentive conversation with you all. I want you to know that I will not identify the responses with the person who made them. Everything you say will remain confidential, meaning that only I will be aware of your answers. My dissertation advisor will have access to transcripts without any personal identifiers. Also, confidential responses may be displayed in written and oral reports but without any personal identifiers. Do you have any questions for me before we dive in?

Discussion Questions

1. What made you decide to come to [Name of College]?
2. Tell me about what your experience has been like as a Latinx student attending [name of college]?
 - a. What about the college has resonated most with you as a Latinx student?

- b. What about the college has been most challenging for you as a Latinx student?
3. If I wanted to come here as a Latina student myself, and you were to give me a tour, what would I need to see and know?
4. The premise of my study is thinking about institutions that are quote: For Us By Us and About Us. It is what led me to want to learn about [Name of College].
 - a. When you hear the phrase For Us By Us About Us, what comes to mind?
 - b. Can you tell me how you think the college defines who is the “us” and who is part of shaping and carrying out that focus?
5. What do you they think are the college’s values and mission?
6. Can you provide some specific examples of how you think the college has been able to uphold the values and mission you described?
 - a. Are there particular activities—could be anything from learning activities, the classroom experience, cultural activities, campus assemblies, events, etc.—where these values are most prevalent? How so? Please give examples about your experiences.
7. Have there been any tensions or challenges that you’ve perceived on campus that make it difficult to carry out a Latinx-centered focus?
 - a. What opportunities have these tensions or challenges presented for students and other folks on campus?
8. I’m going to pivot a little to talk about the college’s relationship to the Latinx and surrounding community.
 - a. In what ways have you seen the college involved in issues related to the surrounding community? Please give examples.

- b. In what ways have you seen the college involved in issues related to the Latinx community specifically? Please give examples.
 - c. What is your engagement like as a Latinx student with the community?
9. I am wondering what your thoughts are about the future of the college and how it can remain grounded in its mission?
10. Please use your perspective as a Latinx student as you answer the following questions about what it takes to create Latinx-centered colleges.
- a. If you had the opportunity to participate in the creation of a college that is grounded in Latinx experiences, what would you bring to that process?
 - b. What would you stress as important as the founding values of the institution?
 - c. What kinds of resources need to be in place for Latinx people to succeed?
11. Thank you so much for your time, I've learned so much from this conversation. Before we close, is there anything else that you want to add that we didn't get to cover? OR Is there a question you wished I had asked but didn't? Thanks again.

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE FOCUS GROUP FLYER

ARE YOU A CURRENT LATINA/O/X ESPERANZA COLLEGE STUDENT WHO'S TAKEN AT LEAST 4 COURSES AT THE COLLEGE?

Participate in a focus group!



LOOKING FOR PARTICIPANTS FOR A RESEARCH STUDY ABOUT LATINO/A/X FOUNDED COLLEGES LIKE YOURS!

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCES AND INSIGHTS AS A LATINA/O/X STUDENT ATTENDING A LATINA/O/X FOUNDED COLLEGE AND RECIEVE A \$25 GIFT CARD

Date | Time Location

Study conducted by Cynthia K. Orellana, PhD candidate at the University of Massachusetts Boston as part of her disseration research

For more information, contact Cynthia at: ckorellana@gmail.com with subject line: "Esperanza Focus Group"

APPENDIX C

PROTOCOL FOR OBSERVATIONS

- Site:**
- Place:**
- Purpose:**
- Date/Time:**
- Visual Depiction:**

General Prompts – adapted from (Merriam, 1998a, pp. 120-121):

Prompts	Description	Direct Quotes (if applicable)	Comments (Feelings/Reactions/Interpretations)
<p><i>Physical Setting:</i> What is the physical environment like? What objects or resources are in the setting? What kinds of behavior is the setting designed for? What sounds, smells, and visual characteristics are prevalent?</p>			
<p><i>The Collaborators:</i> Who is in the scene and what brings these people together? What language are they speaking? What are the relevant characteristics of the people and how do they organize themselves? What key words/phrases are being used that speak</p>			

to their values and identity?			
Activities & Interactions: What is going on? How are people and activities connected? What organizational norms structure the activities and interactions? How is Latinx-ness being expressed?			
Subtle Factors: Less obvious things (symbolic and connotative meanings of words, non-verbal communications, physical clues, what isn't happening)			
My Role: What thoughts do I have about what is going on?			

Summary of Field Notes:

APPENDIX D

PROTOCOL FOR DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

Site:

Document #:

Date Produced:

Author:

Source:

In this Document...	Text	Thoughts/Interpretations
1. Who is the intended audience?		
2. How is the population served by the college described?		
3. Is there a specific reference to Latinx/a/o or other Latinx ethnic groups? If so, in what context?		
4. Is there any reference to Latinx cultural or linguistic offerings/programming/inclusion?		
5. Is there any reference to specific Latinx assets and how they are recognized?		
6. What values and beliefs are expressed through the text?		
7. Is there bilingual text? How is it presented and in what context?		
8. Who is featured? What are their roles? Possible identities?		
9. Is there any reference to the relationship with the broader community?		
10. What is the overall message about the identity of the college?		
11. What is the overall message about values and beliefs of the college?		

APPENDIX E

DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY FOR STUDY COLLABORATORS

Survey Introduction

(Note: created and distributed using UMass Boston Qualtrics)

Thank you for your interest in this research study. The purpose of this study is to explore institutions of higher education that were founded by Latinx communities, as I am interested in knowing how Latinx people and People of Color build their own institutions based on their knowledge, experiences, and specific identified needs and desires, and how these manifest through the college's organizational identity, culture, and practices.

Please answer the demographic questions below. All of your responses will remain confidential. If you have any questions, please email Cynthia K. Orellana, Ph.D. candidate in the Higher Education program at the University of Massachusetts Boston, at cynthia.orellana@umb.edu. You may also email her faculty advisor, Dr. Katalin Szelényi, at katalin.szelenyi@umb.edu.

Thank you! Gracias!

Survey Questions

First name:

Last Name:

Pronouns:

College Name:

Email Address:

Your age:

Do you identify as Latina/o/x or Hispanic? Y/N

Describe your racial identity/ies:

- White or European
- Black or African American
- Indígena/a/x or Pueblos Indígena/o/x (from Latin American/Caribbean
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Other

Country(ies)/places of origin/ethnic identity(ies):

Gender identity/ies:

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary/third gender

- Other
- Prefer not to say

Sexual orientation:

- Heterosexual
- Homosexual
- Bisexual
- Other
- Prefer not to say

For Students, number of courses taken at your current college:

- 1-3
- 4 or more

For Students, academic major(s) (if undeclared, please share your interests):

For Students, Immigrant generation:

- 1st generation (you were born in Latin America or the Caribbean and came to the U.S. for college)
- 1.5 generation (you were born in Latin America or the Caribbean and came to the U.S. mainland as a young child)
- 2nd generation (you were born and raised here in the U.S. mainland)
- 3rd generation (your parents were born and raised here in the U.S. mainland)
- 4th generation (your grandparents were born and raised here in the U.S. mainland)

For Faculty and Staff, what is your title/role at the college:

For Faculty, discipline(s) taught at the college:

For Faculty and Staff, length of time teaching/working at the college:

- Less than 1 year
- 1-2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6-9 years
- 10-15 years
- More than 16 years

For Faculty, Staff and Community Partners, are you an alumnus of the college: Y/N

APPENDIX F

GUIDANCE FROM THE PEOPLE—SUPPLEMENTAL TOOL

Handout created for dissertation presentation on May 18, 2023.



FUBU-*About Us* is a way to deconstruct and challenge what we have come to accept as normative – that is, western philosophy and white supremacist systems of knowledge and practice in higher education. To this end, my study centered the importance of uncovering real-life cases where FUBU-*About Us* for Latinx people in higher education is represented. A goal of my study was to document, learn from, and disseminate ideas that might activate a movement of Latinx FUBU-*About Us* enterprises across education and beyond. Thus, my study sought to deepen understanding, invite a discourse, and interrogate how FUBU-*About Us* in higher education could look with specific focus on the level of the organization.

My study collaborators shared their thoughts about the future of their colleges and how they could remain grounded in their mission. I also asked them about what guidance they would give to others who are interested in creating institutions that are centered around Latinx experiences. For example, what resources need to be in place for Latinx-centered models to succeed in higher education, and what specific values or beliefs need to be in place at the institution to be able to uphold a living, breathing model that is truly for, by, about Latinx people? This *Guidance from the People* draws a series of five lessons interpreted from what collaborators considered for the future of their historically Latinx-founded institutions (HLFIs). It also takes the experiences, wisdoms, and hopes expressed by collaborators in constructing Latinx-centered institutions for others wanting to build similar institutions through eight key themes.





A Future Dependent on Circumstance

Study collaborators expressed their views on the future of the colleges, which I have interpreted as lessons for current college leaders at the two HLFIs in this study and beyond to consider when thinking about how to maintain Latinx-centered mission alignment.

1 *Confidence in Mission and Legitimacy*

Study collaborators expressed a lot of confidence in the mission and values of the institutions in my study. There was a feeling among collaborators that the colleges had done a decent job engraining their mission and values into their culture and practices. While collaborators did not feel like their colleges will change from a mission or values perspective, the shifts in demographics raise some questions about the future identity of the Latinx-centered institutions and the way that they will need to adapt to some of these changes in the communities being served.

Lesson: Pay attention to shifts in community demographics and pull in the campus community for conversations about institutional identity and mission alignment.

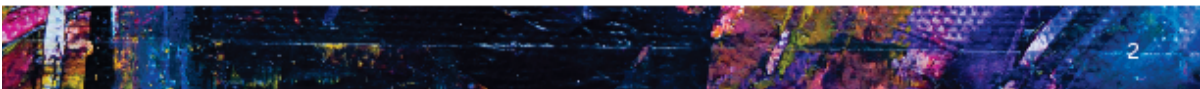
2 *Depending on People*

The colleges shared an understanding of the importance of the people working within and with the institutions to maintaining their mission, values, and strengthening their practices. As with any organization, there is a turnover of founding members and a need to bring in new hires and cultivate the college's current and future leadership. In speaking with students at Cacique, the quality of the faculty was also important when making decisions about personnel.

Lesson: Ensure that internal and external hiring plans match the mission and values of the institution and have intentional measures for evaluating the success of these plans.

“The college is on track with its mission, and I say this with a lot of pride.”
Josiane, Cacique, staff

“I don't think there's any way to avoid the fact that every time you bring in a new person, you have to do some rebuilding. And unless you promote somebody from within who happens to already kind of get it. [...] I think whoever we hire in these transitions has to be a person that understands the need to advance the standing and the dignity of People of Color in our society. And if they don't get that, don't hire them.”
Larry, Ágape, community partner





3

Maintaining Marketplace Alignment and Relevance

Some of the issues raised included the changing landscape of higher education and marketplace, e.g., the rise of online education, changing demographics, decreases in enrollment, and rising cost of higher education. Collaborators spoke about the need for the colleges to increase their ability to be innovative, align with industry and workforce needs, and compete for Latinx students that are also increasingly being pursued by Predominantly White Institutions (PWI).

Lesson: The competition is severe and the need to maintain relevance is only likely to grow, so invest further in enrollment and marketing efforts, grow partnerships with industry, and assess strengths and areas for improvement, while continuing conversations about alignment with values.

“ I think there is a fundamental fear that the College, as it exists, may look and feel different because of forces beyond its control. ”

Ernesto, Cacique, community partner/former staff member

4

Achieving Financial Sustainability

The shifts in higher education funding and delivery (e.g., enrollment decline and increased online learning) and socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 on the communities the colleges served have left both institutions looking to the next few years to see how these shifts and impacts will be resolved. While collaborators suggested the colleges were committed to the sustenance and growth of their institutions, there were some uncertainties about how to achieve financial sustainability if the current trends in higher education continue. There may be difficult choices related to enrollment strategies and financial models that might need to be made while still maintaining mission alignment.

Lesson: Latinx-centered institutions straddle the practical financial realities associated with running an organization and their commitment to address the needs of economically disenfranchised communities. Thus, their financial models and priorities need continuous examination to evaluate (in difficult and prosperous times) the non-negotiables that must remain the same and the changes that are needed. In evaluating their models, they must also consider how to financially sustain the institution without compromising their mission and values.

“ The question is that window of time where you have to see the growth that's commensurate with the investments that are being made. ”

Benjamin, Ágape, founding member



5

Institutionalizing Values and Practices

There is an underlying tension about what is the next phase of the Latinx-centered work of the colleges beyond the current leadership and in light of retiring long-term holders of the founding years of the colleges. Collaborators seemed to contemplate, without resolve, how to better pass Latinx-centered values and practices to the next generation of college leaders. As relatively young institutions, there is a fear of eventual loss of identity and culture that may take place decades in the future, when the holders and creators of the institutions have passed on.

Lesson: Historically Latinx-founded institutions (HLFIs) do not have specially designated status like Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Tribal Colleges and Universities. HLFIs must be intentional about preserving their institutional identity, culture, and praxis through codified values and practices, and memorialized oral, written, and visual histories.

“So, the next iteration of what we need to do is to write in academic terms what we've done, what we've learned, and then what we want to keep, and what we want to develop. That's what's next.”

Alvaro, Ágape, founder



Guiding and Visioning the Latinx-Centered Institution

Based on their experiences with founding, partnering with, and working and studying at a HIFI and as majority Latinx people, study collaborators envisioned what elements they deemed important in building a new Latinx-centered higher education institution from the beginning. Drawn from their responses, the following emerged as the top eight themes of what must be considered in constructing Latinx-centered institutions.

4



Theme 1 *Intentionally and Unapologetically Latinx*

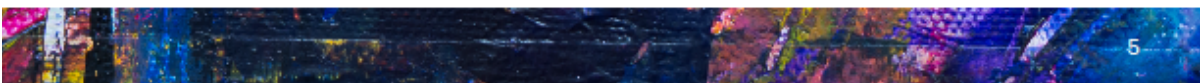
FUBU-*About Us* spaces have to be intentionally created. This involves purposely and primarily targeting Latinx people, versus defaulting to serving all people without differentiating Latinx people's experiences. Collaborators like Matías (Ágape, community partner) encouraged those seeking to center Latinx-people to not be "ashamed about it." Collaborators believed that being intentionally and unapologetically Latinx did not preclude the ability to be inclusive of others. Instead, intentionality helped create a focus on the unique needs and contributions of Latinx people that then allowed for the emergence of Latinx expression in the life of the institution. Intentionality requires deliberate decision-making about how the institution represents the interests, experiences, and knowledges of Latinx people, including Latinx businesses, community organizations, and arts and cultural institutions. Intentionality also involves integrating customs and cultural elements, e.g., art, language, food, music, among others, as part of the fabric of the institution. In essence, intentional and unapologetic Latinx-centeredness is a basis for how other aspects of the Latinx-centered institution unfolds.

Theme 2 *Listen, Learn, and Know your Target Audience*

Understanding the context of the physical location and the ethnic, racial, and other identity-based diversity of and within Latinx communities and their needs is important. Ernesto (former staff, community partner, Cacique) suggests asking questions like, "Where are you, what is the context, who are you serving specifically, what do they look like, what do they need? Not what you need, what do they need." Upon understanding the need, it is also about evaluating what other work is happening and "making yourself a space in the need instead of competing," as stated by Olinda (Ágape, community partner). Collaborators discussed the need for a serious commitment to listening, learning, and getting to know the people and issues from the ground up and building a culture that allows people to know that "they're here for us," as put by Ivan (Ágape, faculty.) Collaborators also considered that having a mindset of continuous improvement was an important feature for institutions to stay fresh on their knowledge of Latinx people and issues impacting them.

“ I would consider where the people who are in the community want to go. [...] What kind of careers are they looking towards? What don't they know about that we can teach them about? ”

Cesar, Cacique student





Theme 3 *Ensure Alignment of Institutional Offerings with Latinx-Centeredness*

“Who is your student? And the reason that’s important is because financial models inform your capacity, we have always seen ourselves for the poor. But between you and I, a financial model based on the capacity of the poor is a challenge, relative to educational delivery. Right, so you better directly need to own that on the front end and understand how you compensate for this in the present.”

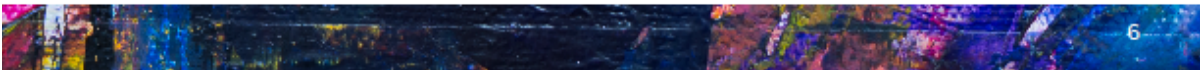
Benjamin, Ágape, founding member

Latinx-centeredness should include aligning the various institutional offerings to meet the Latinx-centered mission and values of the institution. Among these offerings is the need to address affordability of higher education for Latinx people through alignment with Latinx people’s socio-economic and home contexts. Alignment of affordability offerings for Latinx people includes establishing considerate costs of a college education, offering grants, scholarships, paid work-based learning, and resources that go beyond traditional aid that “can help with life management,” as put by Greg (Cacique, staff), such as childcare and transportation. A Latinx-centered alignment in offerings also involves normalizing and including dual language programs, flexible schedules and course offerings, and “curriculum that focuses on exploring history [as well as] that can fuse history and culture as a way to learn empowerment,” as put by Josiane (Cacique College, staff.) Latinx-centered aligned offerings also focus on the students’ household and support their ability to be children and parents, as well as facilitate employers’ understanding of the household and other assets Latinx people bring. Additionally, collaborators suggested that Latinx-centered institutions should pay close attention to trends in the market, workforce, and higher education as an industry to strengthen their alignment with areas of opportunity and ensure their viability and continuity.

Theme 4 *The Right and Most Identified People*

“We [People of Color] know it best. We know the stories, we know how we learn, and not to say that someone white can’t come in and just be the best, you know. It’s not saying that, but we know it, we know our stories best. So, in order for it to succeed, you need us. You need a good representation of us running it correct. Creating it, being seen in the community. [...] That matters, and it can’t be denied it matters, and if we’re going to do it, it has to be us, the majority of us doing it.”

Hannah, Ágape, faculty-staff-mentor





It is essential in building a Latinx-centered institution that the people leading and working in and with the institution have shared identities that reflect the students and communities served, and have a shared vision, mission, and values. It requires long-term investments in the empowerment of Latinx leadership and bringing in people that can ensure the continuity of the mission, e.g., personnel, board members, external partners, etc. “People that are really invested or really believe in the mission that you’re putting forward,” as Rosa (Cacique, founding member, community partner) suggested. Collaborators did not suggest that only Latinx people could contribute to a Latinx-centered institution, but that Latinx people needed to be predominant in its leadership. Non-Latinx people needed to have a shared love, passion, and commitment to the communities served by the institution. Shared life experiences were especially valued.

Theme 5 *Garnering Resources*



I think they need to have resources of relationships, okay, at all levels: government relationships, business relationships, media relationships, faith or church-based relationships. I think those relationships are vital to success. Those relationships lead to other opportunities.



Francisco, Ágape, faculty-staff-mentor

Unequivocally, a priority for anyone establishing a new Latinx-centered institution is the question of resources and how to garner them for the highest value and impact. First, and foremost, money matters, and one must find the funding for any new (and ongoing) enterprise. Alvaro (Ágape, founder) suggested, “The first commitment needs to be economic, what’s on the table, what is not.” Some of the suggestions from collaborators in garnering resources included increasing awareness and knowledge of the funding landscape and what is available, specifically for Communities of Color. They also suggested partnering with others who know how to navigate and can help acquire various kinds of resources, including government grants. Additionally, “There’s an advocacy component,” suggested Nelson (Ágape, community partner), whereby Latinx communities and organizations must help industry leaders understand the “rich pool of talent” found in immigrant-Latinx and urban communities that could guarantee a return on investment. Second, relationships matter, and people interested in creating Latinx-centered institutions can leverage relationships as a valuable resource. Collaborators spoke of the wealth of long-standing organizations, grassroots leadership, and networks that exist in Latinx communities and the potential for cross-sector collaborations in support of a Latinx-centered enterprise. They spoke of the importance of a range of relationships that can offer reciprocal partnership opportunities and saw people as one of the biggest assets to mitigate financial needs, as well as to add to the wealth of thinking that should inform building the Latinx-centered institution.





Theme 6 *Take Responsibility for Students and Community-at-Large*

“You really have to understand the community that the physical structure is standing on, not to say that the students are going to come from that community only. But if you don't understand that community, you know, [...] there's a lack of education there somewhere.”

Santiago, Cacique, community partner

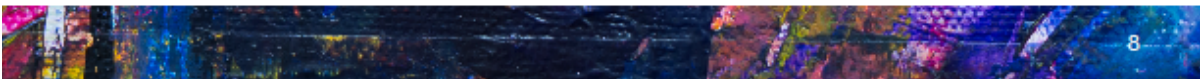
According to collaborators, a Latinx-centered institution takes responsibility for the vitality of students and the communities from which they come. “Ser responsable no solamente en el área de educación, sino ser partícipe de los problemas que hay en la comunidad [Being responsible not only in the area of education, but also to be an active participant in the issues that exist in the community],” as put by Nayda (Ágape, student.) There was also an emphasis on needing to build sincere community engagement and have respect for the community and what they have to offer. Additionally, collaborators offered that the Latinx-centered institution must be a bridge between the local Latinx community, the Latinx family structure, and the broader societal contexts to create understanding of where they all meet and how they come together.

Theme 7 *Strengthen Latinx Civic Engagement and Political Power through Higher Education*

“You know what would be great if the school can find a way to create a link to a lot of government agencies where we can provide our knowledge of a second language, our culture, plus a two-year degree. Because I feel like as Hispanics, we're not exposed to a lot of these government agencies where we can apply. And I feel like if there's a school we make up right now that caters to that, I think that would be very beneficial. That's an idea.”

Eddie, Cacique, student

Students and community partners felt strongly that one of the roles of the Latinx-centered institution is to increase the civic engagement and political power and influence of Latinx people. Since many of the issues confronting Latinx communities were understood to be systemic and linked to policies (or lack thereof), collaborators cited the need for more involvement by Latinx communities in elected office and other policy-making roles. One suggestion was for the Latinx-centered institution to have an explicit focus on building the public service of Latinx people and increase their representation within public agencies via curricular and co-curricular programs, exposure to and support with entering careers in public service.





Theme 8 “To be, or not to be” Independent from PWIs



I think for me, and it's one of our burdens, is if the institution could be academically and financially independent as our PWIs. Like, why can't we have our own institution without being systematically attached to something? We have this institution [that] has to depend on a PWI. Why? And so, and I can only imagine whether Hispanic institutions around the nation are, how many of them are actually fully independent like any other school in the state or in the country, right? Why can't we be the umbrella to something else? And so, I would like to push for that mindset even more.

Rob, Ágape, faculty-mentor



Collaborators at both colleges only experienced being part of institutions that were connected to PWIs, so thinking of full independence and what that would look like was challenging but chartered territory. Collaborators from Ágape had the most to say about this theme and noted that, as a first step, it is important to understand the context and requirements of the state's higher education authority. In Ágape's case, being fully independent was “not economically feasible” and was less about capacity than about “having the money” to “buy capacity,” as put by Alvaro (Ágape, founder). Buying capacity can involve hiring whatever the number of full-time PhDs required by the state and being able to have all the administrative pieces such as offices like bursars, registrars, financial aid, and all the technological infrastructure to maintain records. Unless there are millions of dollars available, collaborators recommended partnering with another higher education institution as an option. In the case of partnerships, collaborators suggested that it was important to find partners with similar values and who will be in full solidarity. It is important to establish a Memorandum of Understanding or similar affiliation agreement that outlines the needs, wants, and non-negotiables of the Latinx-centered institution. According to Carl (Ágape, founding member), “For folks who want 100% ownership, I would say number one, if you don't have it, it's not the end of the world,” suggesting that those interested in establishing institutions should reach an affiliation that includes a financial arrangement that is affordable for students and allows for meaningful curriculum and ability to hire their own faculty. In addition, it would be helpful to make clear to your start-up and longer-term members the risks and benefits of independence and to build, like Ágape, considerations for independence if the institution wants to explore the path to independence in the future.





Final Thoughts on Latinx-Centered Organizational Features

Finally, to close this *Guidance from the People*, collaborators offered the following list of organizational cultural features (which includes values) and practices that they think should guide a newly constructed Latinx-centered institution.



CULTURE

- Inclusion
- Respect
- Unity/coming together on issues
- Uplifting role of family
- Resilience/sticking to it
- Relationships/relationality
- Emotional empathy
- Love
- Dignity
- Trust
- Genuine Care
- Excellence
- Belief in people
- Creativity and innovation
- Authenticity
- Trust

PRACTICES

- Supporting whole wellbeing of students and family
- “Community over money”
- Student-centering
- Job descriptions matching mission and values
- Representing the characteristics of the students
- Valuing and compensating bilingualism
- Being strategic
- Language access
- Being trauma informed
- Confronting structural racism



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