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Para la Comunidad: Centralizing Latinx Scholars at an Emerging Hispanic-Serving Institution

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Abstract

This study highlights Latinx student experiences, through storytelling, to identify existing services and resources aiding Latinx academic success at the University of San Diego (USD), while also exploring what additional resources are needed to aid Latinx scholars' belonging and mattering at a Catholic, predominantly White institution (PWI). Latinx student enrollment rates at colleges and universities have increased nationwide, leading institutions to consider the Hispanic -serving Institution (HSI) federal designation to gain access to discretionary grant opportunities. For HSI designation, institutions must have at least 25% of their student population categorized as Hispanic, and 50% of Hispanic students must be Pell grant eligible. Naturally, USD has become an emerging HSI with increasing Latinx scholar enrollment rates. With this demographic change, this research is guided by the following questions: what resources, policies or practices has USD implemented to support Latinx students? Which existing resources are aligned with the expressed needs of Latinx students? In what areas can USD improve on to better support Latinx students? My findings reveal how multifaceted the concept of Latinx comunidad is, explores a refinement of existing resources, and uplifts HSI commitment to be Latinx-serving instead of Latinx-enrolling.

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Para la Comunidad: Centralizing Latinx Scholars at an Emerging Hispanic-Serving Institution

Students from underserved communities encounter various challenges on their educational journey. The lack of resources, services, representation, and sense of belonging can hinder student performance, creating more barriers than what non-marginalized communities encounter. Many of these students have been able to thrive in higher education through their resistance, resiliency, strength, and community. However, others have not thrived and seized their journey at a higher educational institution. As a first-generation, Latinx, womxn of color, I know the struggles very well and would like to shed light on the experiences of others in my community to teach, empower and cambiar[1] the way we serve Latinx students at institutions with and without the HSI designation.

Leaving home to pursue a post-secondary education was not only a milestone for myself, but also for my family and community. Their aspirations for a better life in the United States than in México fueled my desire for success. My parents instilled in me from a young age that a way to break the cycles of oppression and poverty in the United States is through education. Since then, I have valued formal United States education more than any other forms of knowing, which ultimately led me to internalize many parts of my social identities. As I entered Humboldt State University, a PWI in 2012, I did not feel like I belonged. There were many instances when I was the only womxn of color, or my professor profiled and tokenized me as a spokesperson for all so-called fiery Latinas. The profiling, microaggressions, curriculum dissonance and cultural starvation served as reminders of the brown womxn I am, navigating a PWI. These reminders invigorated introspection of the impact my social identities had on life.

[1] Cambiar: Loosely translates to shift or change.

In my attempt to reclaim who I was, where I come from and what I know, I sought community in various student organizations who helped me make sense of my experience. Through storytelling, sharing knowledge and informal/formal mentorship, the chingonx[2] I was taught to hide, broke through. I met my support system in Latinx Peer Mentoring (which ended in Spring 2013), student organizations and Latinx Center for Academic Excellence (first opened in Fall 2015). Although the formal Latinx structures within the institution played a role in my academic achievements, I attribute my dedication to complete my undergraduate career to my peers who I referred to as familia[3] ("Humboldt Fam"). Without their narratives, insights, challenges, and comida[4], I would not have graduated. It is important for me to create a space for other Latinx students to find what they need in their educational journey through institutions.

In February 2019, during the USD University Senate meeting, President Harris acknowledged USD's emerging HSI status and called for USD to be proactive in "gearing up to support students sooner and more effectively" (University of San Diego, 2019). According to USD's federal report, 21% of all students at USD are Hispanic or Latinx identified. How is USD preparing to serve Latinx students in the years to come? With the rise of the Latinx population and their resiliency to find access to higher education, institutions are naturally quickly becoming emerging HSIs. While some institutions organically fall into the emerging HSI designation due to their geographical location, other institutions proactively recruit prospective Latinx students, to gain access to funding. However, if an institution does not have the capacity to provide the necessary resources, tools, support, faculty, or staff to aid Latinx academic success, then institutions should reconsider the HSI designation or critically investigate institutional strategies

[2] Chingonx: Non-binary Spanish word for a person who is "fighter" or very dedicated.
[3] Familia: Spanish word for family.
[4] Comida: Spanish word for meals.

for Latinx student success in academics, professional development, belonging and mattering, identity development, and other aspects of student life.

If USD decides to be proactive in the HSI designation, we must assess their current strategies and resources to determine where they are in their process. Franco and Hernández (2018) use *Latinx-enrolling, Latinx-producing, Latinx-enhancing, and Latinx-serving*, a four-dimensional framework, to assess the capacity of institutions to be Hispanic students serving: "(1) an institution's historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion, (2) structural diversity, (3) the psychological dimension of climate, and (4) the behavioral dimension of climate" (Franco & Hernández, 2018, pp 60). The historical legacy of inclusion and exclusion is important to review considering many of these institutions began as PWIs and continue to operate as such despite an HSI designation. An example of this is how higher education institutions practice mentorship and academic advising, by employing a color-blind approach, promoting a false narrative of meritocracy and individualized success (Figueroa & Rodriguez, 2015).

The purpose of my study is to highlight Latinx student experiences to identify the existing and desired support resources at USD to aid their success academically, personally, and professionally. What resources, policies or practices has USD implemented to support Latinx students? Which existing resources are aligned with the expressed needs of Latinx students? Throughout my research, I use the term Latinx as it is a non-binary and gender non-conforming term used in academe to describe people who hold the Latino/a/x social identity.

In conceptualizing my action research, I had trouble finding a label for the population I wanted to work with because of the wide range of social identities that influence the way peoples with Latinx ancestry choose to identify ethnically. I demonstrated the complexity of labeling people with Latin American ancestry as we are not a monolithic group, culture, or hold the same

experience in navigating higher education through the exploration of Hispanic, Chicanx, Raza, and Latinx terms. For this research, I employed the Latinx term throughout the study. It is not to say that Latinx student experiences are all in the same, but rather to recognize people from Latin America or Latin American descendants, including genderqueer, nonbinary, trans*, and gender-fluid folks (Zamudio-Suarez, 2021). I also utilize Latinx to include the indigenous experience.

Literature Review

This literature review explores the Latinx students' educational attainment, HSI historical background, HSI designation and funding, and HSI challenges that guided the research.

Latinx Students' Educational Attainment

According to the 2019 US Census, Hispanics, or Latinx, makeup 18.3% of the population in the United States and are the largest non-White group. Despite large population numbers in the United States, Latinx has one of the lowest educational attainment rates. In 2018, Latinx educational attainment was 18.3%, in comparison to Asian and Pacific Islanders with 56.5% and White, non-Hispanic with 35.2% (Duffin, 2020). Yet, more Latinx students are enrolling in higher education institutions, contributing to the rise of emerging and established HSIs around the nation. Why is the academic achievement gap if more institutions are seeking Hispanic-serving institutions? In April 2021, *Excelencia*[5] *in Education* released HSI data in April 2021 for the years 2019-2020, there were a total of 569 institutions that enrolled 67% of Latinx students (Excelencia in Education, 2021). HSIs have increased 94% increase in the last 10 years. Over half of the HSI's are 4-year institutions, and two-thirds are public institutions.

Latinx students were enrolling in higher education at a higher rate than other racial and ethnic groups (Mangan, 2021). However, the pandemic has impacted the Latinx community and

[5] Excelencia is Spanish for "excellence."

caused a 20% decrease in college enrollment in the Fall of 2020 from Fall 2019 (appendix A). Deborah Santiago, chief executive of *Excelencia in Education*, attributed the decrease in enrollment to the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on the Latinx community (Mangan, 2021). She shared many college-age students' parents work blue-collar jobs and may have lost their jobs due to the pandemic, causing familial financial responsibilities to fall on work-age children or people in the household (Mangan, 2021).

Latinx student enrollment has increased over the last few years at USD (appendix B**)**. Data from Fall 2020 depicting Latinx student enrollment at USD has not been released, however, I do suspect that the national trend of decreased enrollment will be reflected in USD's enrollment as well. Hispanic/Latinx students are the second-largest ethnic/racial group at USD (Appendix B1). The retention of Hispanic/Latinx students at USD has been measured in the complement times of 4-years, 5-years, and 6-years from Fall 2008 to Fall 2016 (appendix B2). This data illustrates a spike of 4-year graduation increase in 2016 of 11%.

Hispanic-Serving Institutions: Historical Background

When exploring Hispanic-serving institutions (HSI), we must understand how they came to be. Hispanic-serving institutions were not created to serve the Latinx community or a specific demographic, but, rather, are 2-year and 4-year institutions that adopted the designation due to being in a geographical location with a high Latinx population that gained access to their institutions (Laden, 2001). Apart from Hostos Community Colleges, Boricua College, and National Hispanic University, Hispanic-serving institutions are not conceived with the focus on supporting Latinx students (Laden, 2001). This is a major difference between Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and Tribal Colleges as they have a specific demographic to serve. Most HSIs are PWIs who later applied for the federal designation, meaning the dedication

to serve Latinx students is not built into the institution's mission or strategic goals. Nonetheless, HBCU's, Tribal Colleges, and Hispanic-serving institutions are categorized under minority serving institutions in the Higher Education Act (1998).

The HSI designation was influenced by the Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s. During the Civil Rights Movements, many advocates highlighted the importance of improving college access for historically excluded populations. College became more accessible for historically excluded populations with the creation of federal and state grants and student loans, which were developed in response to the Civil Rights Movements (Justiz et al, 1994). HSIs also came into fruition because of the advocacy from the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU). Established in 1986, the HACU is dedicated to uplifting the Latinx needs in social, economic, and educational institutions, with a focus on improving access to quality education (Laden, 2001). Through strategic relationship building with educational policymakers, HACU advocated for Hispanic-serving institutions to be included in the Higher Education Act in 1992 (Laden, 2001). The Hispanic-serving institution (HSI) federal designation was officially recognized by Congress in 1992 (Garcia & Taylor, 2017). The HACU continued to lobby for HSI's event after the designation was federally recognized. In 1998, HACU advanced the HSI designation to fall under Title V, where there was greater funding (Basinger, 2000).

Hispanic-Serving Institution Designation and Funding

Hispanic-serving institutions can apply for three discretionary grants from the United States Department of Education: Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions (DHSI) Program, Hispanic-Serving Institutions –Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics (HSI STEM) and Articulation Programs, and Promoting Postbaccalaureate Opportunities for Hispanic Americans (PPOHA) Program (WHHPI, 2020). Federal discretionary grants are different from

mandatory, formula, or block grants because their process is more competitive, and funds serve specific interests (Lowry & Potoski, 2004). In the grant application process, an institution would provide an outline describing how the funds are planned to be spent (Lowry & Potoski, 2004).

The Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions (DHSI) Program supports the increase of educational achievement opportunities for Latinx students as well as augmenting academic courses, programs, and overall quality of education (WHHPI, 2020). DHSI also serves to support "institutional stability" (WHHPI, 2020). The Hispanic-Serving Institutions – Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics (HSI STEM) and Articulation Program centers degree attainment in the STEM field for Latinx and other low-income students (WHHPI, 2020). The HSI STEM program also encourages institutions with this grant to expand transfer paths and build articulation connections with 2-year and 4-year institutions in STEM (WHHPI, 2020). The other grant program, Promoting Postbaccalaureate Opportunities for Hispanic Americans (PPOHA), increases post-baccalaureate programs, strengthens academic programs' quality, and aids degree completion efforts for Latinx and low-income students (WHHPI, 2020).

Hispanic-serving Institution Challenges

There are some areas of growth that could strengthen the HSI process. As more institutions become eligible to apply for an HSI designation, the federal legislature should examine current policy implications on what it means to be Latinx-serving, how success is measured, and reassess the guidelines used to award funding (Garcia, 2017). Every HSI actualizes different outcomes. For example, an institution may be able to foster a Latinx-serving campus culture supporting Latinx student educational experiences, while another may have illustrated an increase in Latinx graduation rates. To remedy the varying interpretations of what it means to be Latinx-serving, it would be beneficial for the federal government to research

Latinx-serving cultural indicators, evaluations, and assessments to measure how successful HSI's are in being Latinx-serving (Garcia, 2017).

Institutions' modes of operations have been evaluated, followed by a lack of action to improve the services and resources to meet the needs of the changing student demographics. Institutional and organizational transformation is a lengthy process. There is no expectation for this change to occur overnight. Yet, with recognition and redistribution of existing resources, institutions can work towards making changes to be better at serving their students. The neglect of students with marginalized identities educational prosperity has preserved biased beliefs on whose achievements are valued in higher education. However, through this action research project, I hope to break any existing cycles of oppression at the University of San Diego and spotlight the needs of our Latinx community.

Context

This study was conducted at the University of San Diego (USD). USD is a private Roman Catholic, non-profit research institution, made up of about 9,000 students in San Diego, CA. The institution is tuition-driven and receives endowments. Leaders at USD have allocated some funding to create space for marginalized communities such as womxn, LBGTQ+, Black students, and Multicultural students. These spaces are all located on the same floor and are collectively referred to as The Commons. I hold a graduate assistantship at the United Front Multicultural Commons (UFMC) where I support diverse student populations on their college journey through different avenues. The UFMC consists of four undergraduate student interns, two graduate assistants, one assistant director, and one director. Some of the services offered are student organization advisement, informal mentorship, computer access, study spaces, and community. In my UFMC role, I advise multicultural student organizations, develop student-centered

programs, coordinate team development training, in addition to serving as an advisor on Latinx Graduation, and Latinx Social committee chair.

Latinx students make up the largest student of color population at USD. There has been a steady increase in enrollment of Latinx students in the last few years and it is projected to have over 25% enrolled in 2024. Although there are affinity student organizations on campus, there is no center or space dedicated to solely serving and supporting Latinx students despite their advocacy for one on campus. I collaborated with Latinx students to centralize their voices to outline desired support recommendations to USD. This study is a response to USD's emerging Hispanic-serving institution (HSI) status and an attempt to stay proactive in sustaining resources for Latinx students. The emerging HSI designation status of the institution is pivotal in defining an institution's dedication to meet the needs of the Latinx population.

The participants and I created spaces to share our experiences as Latinx students navigating USD to emphasize gaps in resources needed to aid our academic journey. In addition to creating critical spaces, we facilitated community building amongst us by generating conversation around our ethnic social identity and application of community cultural wealth framework (Yosso, 2005). Through storytelling, I had a better understanding of which resources are critical to Latinx student success and what are desired resources USD administration should consider if the institution chooses to move forward with an HSI designation.

Needs Assessment

In exploring the Latinidad at USD, I wanted to help Latinx students make meaning of their academic journey while also gaining a better understanding of my own higher education experience. Latinx students at the UFMC shared their dissatisfaction about the limited resources and support offered for them on campus. This was the first time I heard about USD's emerging

HSI status, piquing my curiosity on how the university would move forward with the HSI designation and how USD plans to better support Latinx scholars.

With this information, I started my quest to find a statement about USD's emerging HSI designation on the institution's website but was unable to locate one. I proceeded to seek more clarity on the emerging HSI designation status through conversations with administration and faculty. I learned there was no formal statement from USD and there was HSI designation task force. The lack of knowledge about the HSI task force and uncertainty about the emerging HSI designation was frustrating for the USD Latinx community. It was disappointing to learn that some key Latinx staff members and students on campus did not know about, nor were invited to participate in, the HSI task force. The lack of transparency of the emerging HSI designation exploration fueled mistrust students have with USD administration.

The shifting demographics in student population, transparency, and communication from the institution to the students are crucial in establishing trust and acknowledging the need for change to be better. Since USD is in the beginning stages of exploring the HSI designation for our institution, it allows for a unique opportunity to co-create resources, support services, and spaces con la comunidad, por la comunidad[6]. By including la comunidad in the HSI designation conversation, USD will illustrate that they are valued and are more than an enrollment number.

Methodology I

I honor my values of sharing knowledge, introspection, and inclusivity by conducting research authentically and transparently. I am not the holder of all solutions, but rather will stay curious to engage with others to generate knowledge. I will be using mixed methods influenced by the O'Leary action research method.

[6] Con la comunidad, por la comunidad: Translates to "with the community, for the community."

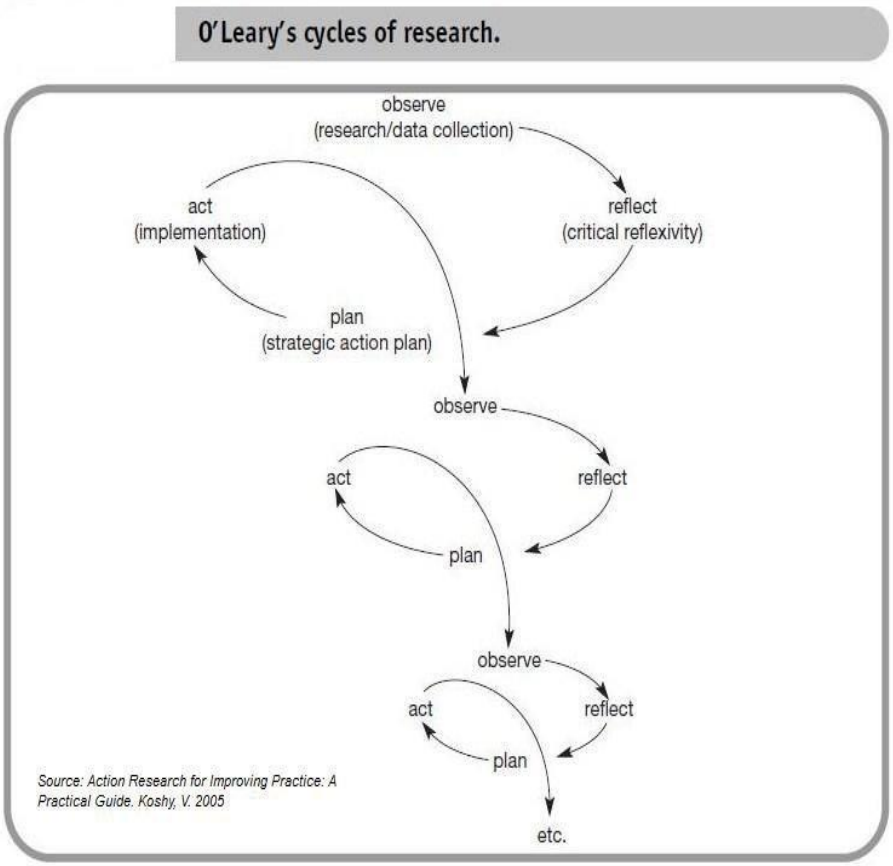
Action research is achieved through stakeholder engagement and collaboration through learning cycles where tangible changes are co-created (O'Leary, 2017, pp 186). The main goal is to improve organizational behavior and education structures where academic elitism between the researcher and stakeholders is dismantled. By utilizing action research methodology, I engaged with Latinx students' evolving experiences at USD and the pre-existing funds of knowledge to enhance support, resources, and their academic journey. Through the implementation of O'Leary's methodology, we critically reflected on how we can be better. With the fluidity of experiential learning to adapt methods and practices, we can better support Latinx students.

The O'Leary methodology (Figure 1) has four stages in each cycle. The first stage is Observation where I conduct research and data collection in my area of interest. After a collection of information on my topic of choice, I moved to the second stage: Reflection. The critical reflection stage is where I make meaning of my observations to understand what I want to improve. In stage three, the planning stage, I outline my intentions for change in the next cycle. In the Act stage, the last phase, I shared my envisioned action for the next cycle. Once I moved through the methodology, I evaluated the action and cycle to inform my next cycle.

The positively inclined nature of O'Leary cycles (2017) brought forth challenges. Although there are structural guidelines I followed for my cycles, each cycle unfolded differently from my assumptions as new knowledge was generated. The collective nature of this research created challenges for how to plan and implement changes without deviating too far from the purpose of each cycle. It was crucial to assess the group dynamics and note the involvement of participants, while also recognizing that the *improvements* between each cycle. However, the adaptability coupled with the reflexive nature of O'Leary cycles creates opportunities for reassessment as new knowledge is created.

Figure 1

O'Leary Cycles (Koshy, 2005)



Gloria Anzaldúa's 7 Stages of Conocimiento

The versatility of the O'Leary method is parallel to the path of *conocimiento* (Anzaldúa, 2013, pp 540-578) framework I employed. As a framework, "Conocimiento is a holistic epistemology that incorporates self-reflection, imagination, intuition, sensory experiences, rational thought, outward-directed action, and social-justice concerns" (Keating, 2006). To honor the funds of knowledge each participant holds, I am abiding by pre-colonial research protocols to defend the value in each of Latinx students' stories. Latinx voices hold immense capital yet, have been silenced by existing epistemologies. Our stories are enchanted by ancestral resiliency and the desire to live a better life and create better for future generations.

Gloria Anzaldúa was a poet, author, activist, theorist, and teacher, in addition to a leading Chicana feminist, and pioneer in lesbian and queer theory to explore identity (Napikoski, 2020). Her writings around navigating the complexities of her Indigenous and Spanish identities in Texas influenced her semi-autobiographical book, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (1987)*. In her book, she pieces together her navigational experiences as a lesbian, Mexican woman in a White, heteronormative, patriarchal world. Anzaldúa documented her meaning-making or as she coined it, the path of conocimiento, to challenge linear identity development frameworks. Anzaldúa details her seven stages of conocimiento in *This bridge called my back: writings by radical women of color (2005)*. I have created a visual (Figure 2) to depict the seven stages of *conocimiento* and described each stage below.

Stage 1: El Arrebato

The metaphorical rupture, or fragmentation, occurs when one encounters an experience(s) that challenges their perspective. El arrebato marks the end of who they once were and the beginning of who they will become. This is an internal, reflexive rupture.

Stage 2: Nepantla

The nepantla phase, or the site of transformation, illustrates the toggle between learned western epistemologies and the discovery of who a person was before assimilation and their White-washed identity. Folks know they have outgrown their previous identities but struggle to name their new identities that encompasses their developing consciousness.

Stage 3: The Coatlicu State

Caotlicu is the Aztec goddess of earth creator and destroyer, and mother of gods and humans. As folks come to realize how they have willingly internalized parts of their identity to

appease White supremacy, they became angry and filled with emotions. Folks move towards reclaiming erased parts of themselves to grow into their authentic selves.

Stage 4: El Compromiso

People in this phase begin to accept the dichotomy of who they were and who they will become. This acceptance does not come easy as folks get pulled into the previous. Folks expand their barriers to hold their new selves while building bridges to their former selves. It is the crossing and conversion, the initiation of change.

Stage 5: Putting Coyolxauhqui Together

In this phase, folks become empowered to piece together their hxstory, the new story of who they are. The reconstruction of how one views themselves and the world leads to a modern-day Coyolxauhqui. Anzaldúa uses the goddess Coyolxauhqui to symbolize the emotional experience involving the division of body, mind, spirit, and soul. Persons in this phase also begin to valorize other paradigms and epistemologies that stray away from normative western ways.

Stage 6: The Blow-Up

In this clash of realities phase, negotiation of new and former identities. Persons share their new envisioned self with the world but find that not everyone or everything in the real world aligns with this new perspective. The contradictions and unpredictable human tendencies cause a clash of realities. Persons are not fully accepted by their communities or groups.

Stage 7: Shifting Realities

With the clash of realities, in the seventh phase, people find the common ground of their realities and shift their perspective. Persons in this stage become spiritually activated and learn to integrate new epistemologies into their lives, fostering healing and strength.

Figure 2

Gloria Anzaldúa's Seven Stages of Conocimiento

The seven stages of *conocimiento* are not independent. In the foreground of Figure 1, I connected the stages of conocimiento with lines to demonstrate the fluidity between stages with no sequential order. Anzaldúa's conceptualization of a person's journey to becoming a new version of themselves accounts for the complexities of mind, body, and soul. By sharing the community cultural wealth model and understanding the Latinx student experience through a conocimiento framework, I hoped to capture the evolving Latinx communal wealth, while challenging deficit perceptions of our Latinx community we have internalized and subconsciously perpetuate.

The initial cycles focused on community building amongst participants and me to support the exchange of honest and vulnerable feedback. My findings in Cycle One, a focus group, will be shared to the HSI designation exploration committee at USD as well as the United Front

Multicultural Commons. It is essential for the voices to the ones we are serving are central in the HSI designation discussions and involve the HSI committee in my action research project to build relationships to explore the designation together.

Listening to Latinx student experiences and applying an asset-based framework, in addition to my validation group, providing a holistic approach in determining the effectiveness of my research. In completion of each cycle, I shared my office hours and email in case any participant wanted to further elaborate on their responses or wanted to connect. Accurately capturing Latinx students' experiences was my priority as their voices and cuentos[7] inspire change, accountability, and advocate for including different ways of knowing into the academic narrative. The critical observations I received from my validation group encourage self-reflection and modifications on my cycles to best meet the needs of participants in the here and now.

Methodology II

Many of the current support services are guided through a deficit framework. Latinx students are seen as needed to fit in the traditional student mold. The values, or rubrics, used to measure Latinx merit and scholastic potential is centered around western epistemologies (Bourdieu & Richardson, 1986), which do not recognize other funds of knowledge from historically excluded communities. To aid our understanding of the Latinx community's social and cultural capital, we plan on centralizing their voices through focus groups, dialogues, storytelling, and self-reflection in four cycles. Each cycle builds on the cycle before, strengthening the comunidad amongst Latinx students, understanding of desired support and identification areas of improvement. The participants need to recognize that the conversations do not end with the conclusion of my study.

[7] Cuentos: Stories

During each cycle, the participants' responses and reactions will be captured through a voice recorder or video and later transcribed. I analyzed the data to identify themes, patterns, and sentiments that should be considered when constituting or adapting resources, services, and programming. Simultaneously as the cycles are conducted, I planned to monitor and participate in any strategies, resources, and meetings regarding HSI designation. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic the HSI designation exploration meetings ceased as much of the Student Life efforts were redirected towards creating and maintaining safe, socially distant learning environments. The findings in Cycle One will be shared with members of the HSI designation exploration committee at USD and the United Front Multicultural Commons. Sharing Latinx student voices and concerns to critical groups at USD is essential to re-center the HSI designation discussions on Latinx student success, not enrollment or funding access.

Pre-cycle: Understanding the Latinx/Chicanx/Raza Positionality at University of San Diego

The pre-cycle took place over my first year as a graduate assistant (GA) at the United Front Multicultural Commons (UFMC) at the University of San Diego (USD). I familiarized myself with USD's culture of care, student demographics, the role of UFMC, programming, and student concerns. The UFMC works to foster spaces where the USD community from diverse cultures and traditions can explore identity, confront barriers, develop leadership skills, and empower students to be change agents for a socially just and inclusive community.

I had the pleasure of working closely with students from various backgrounds and on different stages in their academic journey. As a GA, we encouraged collaboration with a plethora of campus partners, such as the Latinx USD community. I supported the Welcome Latinx Social with Orientation, Virgen de Guadalupe mass and dinner event with University Ministry, and Latinx/Chicanx Graduation 2020 with multiple student organizations. I also mentored and

advised many Latinx students who utilized the UFMC. In my various role capacities, I had the pleasure to work with the Latinx undergraduate student community, informing my perspective on the positionality of Latinidad[8] within USD.

Observations

When I was onboarded to the UFMC, my first project was to collaborate with the Torero Orientation team and Latinx student leaders to create the first Latinx Welcome Social in Fall 2019. I was shocked to learn that this was the first-ever Latinx Welcome Social because of the high Latinx, geographical location of USD. The Latinx Welcome event was headed by a graduate assistant in Orientation and Onboarding who held the Latinx identity. The welcome event was in-person, allowing me to mingle with new and returning students, staff, faculty who identified as Latinx or Latinx allies. Through pláticas, lotería, and antojitos[9], I felt connected to USD and my Latinidad.

After the welcome event, I connected with University Ministry to start the planning for the Virgen de Guadalupe celebración[10]. The bilingual Spanish and English celebración consisted of a cena[11] with live mariachi, performances from the Folklorico and Mariachi Association (FAMA) student organization, followed by a misa[12]. Students from the Association of Chicanx Activists (A.Ch.A.), Movimiento Estudiantil Chicanx de Aztlán (M.E.Ch.A.), and Nu Alpha Kappa fraternity (NAK) were on the planning committee, while I held an advisory role. The celebración created an opportunity for la familia to come together, being the highest attended event by Latinx staff and sus familias.

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[8] Latinidad: Refers to the various attributes Latinx people hold that make up who they are as a community; a term honoring the multifaceted aspects of being Latinx or a descendant of Latin America.
[9] Pláticas, lotería, and antojitos: Spanish for "conversations, bingo, and snacks we craved."
[10] Celebración: Celebration.
[11] Cena: Spanish for "dinner."
[12] Misa: Spanish for "mass or sermon."

To wrap up my first year at the UFMC, I supported the Latinx/Chicanx Graduation. The committee began convening in Fall 2019. We were amid purchasing stoles, reserving courtyards, and gathering catering quotes when the coronavirus pandemic impacted San Diego county, requiring USD to close campus. The committee dwindled to two underclassmen and me. While other affinity graduation celebration committees moved to postponed graduation festivities to the fall, the students on the Latinx/Chicanx committee were dedicated to re-envisioning Latinx/Chicanx Graduation. They wanted to honor our graduates despite the stay-at-home orders and social distancing protocol. The three of us mailed out stoles, along with rose pins, to represent the roses graduates would have received at our in-person celebration. We had envisioned something grander but did what we could. The committee agreed to reconvene in the fall for in-person graduation. Unbeknownst to me, over the summer undergraduate students coordinated with staff and staff to create a congratulatory, later featured on M.E.Ch.A.'s Instagram.

Critical Reflection

Co-creating these various events with the Latinx familia at USD provided me with insight to the challenges, dedication, and resiliency each Latinx scholar holds. The Latinx Welcome, Virgen de Guadalupe, and the Latinx/Chicanx Graduation were each planned with new students and returning students who held one or multiple leadership roles on campus. The Latinx student leaders naturally created a planning committee centered around accountability and learning. The multicultural organizations are intentional about inviting underclassmen to participate and get involved with the event planning and execution. Each event presented its challenges, yet in the face of uncertainty, Latinx students confronted the challenges head-on.

In my participation in the Latinx Welcome planning committee of Fall 2019, I expected there to be more representation in Latinx staff and faculty, as well as a stronger strive towards supporting Latinx students' success at USD from the university. The Welcome Event was a part of orientation week. Orientation week tends to be a high-touch, student-centered event to create opportunities for students to acclimate to USD by connecting them with various departments, peers, and resources. I was puzzled by the lack of initiative on USD's behalf to be proactive in implementing a Latinx Welcome or a targeted resource event considering the rise of Latinx enrollment and national low educational attainment rates. I noticed some parallels between my undergraduate student activism and that of Latinx students. We advocated for a Latinx-centered space which eventually came into fruition 4 years later. USD Latinx students were doing similar work I had been involved in. While I think it is important to have Latinx students to be leading conversations about needs, aspirations, and challenges, and being highly involved in developing resources and services aimed to promote Latinx success, I do not think it is a sustainable model for them to work alone without full-time professional guidance.

The planning of the Latinx/Chicanx Graduation was impeded by the coronavirus and stay-at-home orders. This collaboration with Latinx students was different as we dealt with the usual stress of planning a large event in addition to the uncertainty and fear brought by the pandemic. The Latinx/Chicanx affinity celebration was an important staple in commencement weekend for students and their families. Many did not know how long we would remain remote or the impact the pandemic would have on our everyday lives. USD announced its plans to have an in-person commencement ceremony in October 2020. Other affinity graduation committees also opted to postpone Spring commencement celebrations to the Fall, while the Latinx/Chicanx committee decided to re-envision the celebration and adapt to the new normal.

The three of us on the Latinx grad celebration committee were dedicated to celebrating our community scholars because we understood the importance of graduation to us and our families. We talked about how graduation was not centered around individual recognition, but rather una celebración con la familia, por la familia[13]. I empathize with students who mourned the loss of their envisioned commencement ceremony. I recalled my Latinx Graduation and the sentimental value it had for me, my peers, and familia. We wanted to celebrate graduating students, pandemic, or no pandemic.

The Latinx resiliency to adapt to the current situation for their USD Latinx/Chicanx familia was not new. Latinx students demonstrated aspirational, linguistic, familial, social navigational, and resistant capital for the betterment of themselves and their Latinx familia. Yet, the Latinx students I worked with talked about their abilities from a deficit perspective, reminding me of myself. I wanted our students to depict their experiences from an asset-based perspective while also conveying support and resources to foster the community capital they arrived with at USD.

Planning for Next Cycle

After collaborating, platicando[14], and advising multiple students within the Latinx community at USD, I became committed to amplifying the concerns and challenges Latinx students were experiencing to engage in critical conversation across campus departments for better services and identify areas of growth for the institution. Most of my interactions with Latinx students and supporting the Latinx community at USD were through the UFMC. I connected with the UFMC director to explore collaboration ideas as many of my interests aligned with the UFMC's goals.

[13] Una celebración con la familia, por la familia: Spanish for "a celebration with family, for the family."
[14] Platicando: Loosely translates to "talking or conversing with."

In pláticas[15] with students, I heard chisme around USD's emerging HSI designation. I was surprised to learn about the emerging HSI designation from students and not administration. I investigated further by looking through the Board of Trustee meeting notes to determine whether anything about the HSI designation was ever mentioned. Sure enough, a couple of years ago, President Harris shared USD would be proactive in their emerging HSI designation. There was only one line with very little context, and it seemed like it never really came up again. I asked my supervisor to check with the Assistant Vice President (AVP) of Student Affairs on my behalf to put this rumor to rest. However, the AVP was able to confirm that there was an HSI designation steering committee. The vagueness and lack of communication on the HSI designation exploration process for USD heightened my interest to find out more about the HSI designation and how it could impact our Latinx scholars. My action research project shifted a bit to include the examination of the potential and shortcomings the Hispanic-serving institution federal designation would have on Latinx scholars by centering their testimonials shared through cuentos of how they navigate USD.

Envisioned Action to Inform Action Research Cycles

After determining the topics I wanted to explore with USD and Latinx students, I began to plan out my cycles. With the UFMC, we planned to use our Fall Latinx Welcome to recruit participants for my study. This was the first large-scale social event held as the UFMC team with 118 registrants and about 60+ participants. The social was one of the better-attended events held over orientation Welcome Weeks 2020-21. We wanted to understand what the students' needs were in a remote environment, while also offering new and returning students the opportunity to connect with student peers, staff, and faculty. The UFMC administered a survey to all registered

[15] Pláticas: Spanish for "conversations."

attendees to get feedback on the social. The same survey would be administered a second time in the Spring semester to illustrate our areas of growth and strengths regarding the Social itinerary.

The AVP of Student Life administered a focus group for our Asian American, Pacific Islander, and Desi American (APIDA) students at USD in response to the low scores in sense of belonging at USD shared at the Student Success Summit 2020. I connected with the AVP to get permission to use the questions and activities for APIDA focus group as a guide for the Latinx focus group. The administrative focus group strategies would inform me how to align my data collection with previous Student Life data collection to promote the use of my data collection in administrative conversations around better serving Latinx students at USD.

I also wanted to use myself as a bridge between students and administration. I am in a unique position as a Latinx student scholar and paraprofessional at USD. I had the pleasure of calling administration my colleagues and Latinx students my peers. By using myself as a puente[16], I hoped to foster relationships between administration and students. In this effort, I decided to connect with the HSI committee and sit in on their meetings. Before I reached out, I sought out more information on the HSI designation requirements and process to be better equipped to make recommendations and ask questions at the committee.

Lastly but most importantly, Latinx student voices were the driving force in my action research project. By participating in my research, we cultivated a space where we could process our Latinx student experiences together. My research would serve as the catalyst to connect Latinx students and build a community for us, by us. Por la comunidad, para la comunidad[17]. In my cycles, I modeled behavior and expectations by leading with vulnerability, authenticity, and

[16] Puente: Spanish for “bridge.”
[17] Por la comunidad, para la comunidad: Loosely translates to “by the community, for the community.”

honesty. To create this safe space, I provided opportunities for students to remain anonymous and engage in conversation as they deem fit.

Cycle One: Latinx Focus Group

Cycle One was a focus group held in November 2020 to capture initial sentiments about their student experiences at USD and areas of improvement they have identified. I video-recorded their responses, reactions, and suggestions to inform how to present Cycle Two. I created an outline of questions and activities (see appendix C) to understand participants' experiences and desired support. The questions were influenced by the Asian, Pacific Islander and Desi-American (APIDA) focus group held by Student Life in 2019. The use of similar affinity focus group questions was important to have Student Life and other administrators utilize the Latinx student data collection. The cross-referencing of data between affinity groups would better inform strategies on how to move forward with allocating resources to drive marginalized racial and ethnic groups' academic success and belonging.

Observations

Cycle one took place on November 9, 2020, the Monday before the 2020 Presidential Election results were announced. Although every Presidential Election is emotionally charged, the 2020 election invoked high tensions considering the predicaments eligible voters would have to vote under (mail-in ballot or cast ballot socially distant in California), and movements for social justice, such as Black Lives Matter. To honor all the emotions, we brought with us into the virtual space, I acknowledge the peculiarity of how we were living. I affirmed each students' experience and asked them to engage in whichever capacity they could.

For marketing purposes, I announced my research at the Fall Latinx Welcome and invited the 117 Fall Latinx Welcome registrants via email to participate. I encouraged promoted

participation through the UFMC's newsletter and Instagram. In collaboration with the UFMC, we secured e-gift cards for each participant who showed up to the focus group, cycle one. We had 20 students register with a total of 15 students showing up to the focus group. I was surprised to only know 3 of the 15 participants. Because of the new faces, I thought students would be more guarded in sharing their experiences. However, students yearned for community and easily shared their experience navigating through USD.

Participants held wide ranges of intersecting social identities, such as parent-students, first-generation college students, first-generation American students, transborder students, transfer students, English second language learner students, undocumented students, other nationality students, and returning USD students. Students spoke about their experiences at USD from the intersection of their identities, not just as Latinx. Their experiences of being Latinx *and…* challenged assumptions I had about the Latinx community.

Critical Reflection

In listening to their cuentos, it was natural for me to pick up on their strengths and capabilities even though they told their stories from a deficit lens. This is not to say that additional support and resources are not needed for Latinx students, but rather acknowledging that the strengths and needs of Latinx scholars will look different from traditional college students–White, middle-class men. We cannot pull from the same box of resources that have worked for other student demographics and expect the same result when working with Latinx students. Community cultural wealth had been defined by the dominant Bourdieu (1987) as something privileged groups in society accumulated through networks, skills, and abilities. He explains how the dominant group holds valued cultural wealth, while others are culturally poorer. Bourdieu uses this theory to explain why Students of Color fail academically in

comparison to White students. Bourdieu contributed to the deficit perspective society views Communities of Color and invalidates their cultural wealth. Yosso's challenges this theory and deficit framework in her Community Cultural Wealth Model through six different capitals. I stopped trying to attain Anglo-Saxon or White standards or only valuing western epistemologies once I shifted to an asset-based perspective on my experiences as a Latinx scholar. Through Latinx student empowerment, I hoped to strengthen their confidence to be change agents.

After dialoguing about the first couple of questions, I had for the focus group, we hit the one-hour time boundary and were unable to get through all the focus group questions. Yet, 14 of the 15 participants shared some type of anecdote where they did not feel valued or were targeted due to their Latinx identity. I was not expecting the level of vulnerability participants were sharing considering many of us did not know each other. The desire to share their cuentos was received by the group wholeheartedly by responding with resources available at USD to support academic navigation or simply affirming their experiences by expressing empathy. I did not want to interrupt the organic healing space creation so, I opted to refrain from asking further questions. At our time boundary, I shared my plans to stay behind in case anyone wanted to finish their thoughts or talk more about their experience at USD.

I had 3 students stay behind and continue the conversation with me. I knew 1 of the students, Yvonne, from prior collaborations on programming through the UFMC. This smaller group felt different. Selah, a transfer, parent-student, expressed her gratitude towards me for offering this space for Latinx students. In this interaction, I was healed, seen, and accepted.

Planning for Next Cycle

In the remote environment, I worried students would be disengaged but, it was the opposite. Students were eager to share their USD experiences. Unfortunately, they focused on

their negative experiences at USD, despite my questions around experiences where they belonged, were supported, or celebrated. I was disappointed we spent very little energy on discussing services and resources that were aiding student experiences at USD as these would be areas I wanted to advocate for expansion. Yet, our conversations were insightful and provided a vivid picture of where our students are at in discussing their academic experiences. I was curious to learn if shifting perspective and employing an asset-based framework would reveal new areas of growth and strengths in aiding Latinx students' academic experiences at USD.

Tara Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth Model

To help the *conocimiento* process, I incorporated Tara J. Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth Model (see Appendix E). This model positively impacted my life by shifting my perspective and allowing me to enjoy parts of my educational journey that I had once thought of as burdensome. I detail each capital in the Community Cultural Wealth Model below.

Aspirational capital

The capacity to cultivate hope y suenos[18] for the future despite the encountered and anticipated obstacles. There is a desire to apoyar[19] their children and themselves to dream beyond current boundaries para seguir adelante[20]. Les apoyan[21] without knowing how or where to start, but rather focusing on the capacity to reach their goals one way or another.

Linguistic capital

The skills gained through learning more than one language and/or styles to communicate. This capital can socially be attained by engaging in oral traditions through storytelling, narrating

[18] Y suenos: Spanish for "and dreams."
[19] Apoyar: Spanish for "to support."
[20] Para seguir adelante: Translates to "to keep moving forward."
[21] Les apoyan: Translates to "they support us."

hxstories, listening to dichos[22], parables, art, music, and poetry. Linguistic capital also acknowledges the skills needed for storytelling like vocal tone, facial affect, etc.

Familial capital

The sense of self-regarding cultural community history, memories, and cultural intuition. Family is commonly perceived from a heteronormative lens, however, familia also includes chosen family or extended family who are living or have passed. Familial capital fosters a healthy connection to cultural roots, consciousness, and sources of ethics, values, and morals.

Social capital

The formal and informal contacts, or networks, of people and community resources Latinx and other BIPOC folks know. Communities of color utilize their network to obtain a set goal and sharing information and resources back to their social networks and communities. The union of social networks provides influential and emotional apoyo to navigate social institutions.

Navigational capital

Historically, social institutions are embedded with White supremacist ideologies. Therefore, navigational capital also refers to the inner abilities of a person of color to be resilient when overcoming barriers and applying their experiential knowledge to their everyday lives. People of color's agency leads them to connect with their community and find ways to thrive in social systems such as education, healthcare, local government, and other organizations.

Resistant capital

The legacy passed down through generations to challenge status quos and racism by celebrating cultural knowledge. Despite systemic and social oppressions, resistant capital also

[22] Dichos: Spanish for "saying."

refers to intergenerational cultural knowledge on how racism works, while also instilling behaviors and attitudes that defy the normalization of racism.

In learning and utilizing this model, I hoped to have participants share this framework with their social networks to start shifting the deficit perspective on the Latinx community in our social institutions, such as familia and friends.

Envisioned Action to Inform Next Cycle

As I planned my next cycle, I decided to start the next cycle with time for students to add any final thoughts from our previous cycle, while also extending the time to an hour and a half. The time boundary prevented me from asking all my focus group questions so, by allocating more time, students would be able to answer or engage without feeling rushed. I only invited the participants who showed up to the virtual focus group in Cycle one to participate in Cycle two. I wanted to preserve and foster the community we were building to create a space to unpack our Latinidad and USD experiences.

To encourage a shift from deficit perception of the Latinx community and how institutions evaluate the needs of Latinx students, I wanted to introduce the Community Cultural Wealth Model in the next cycle. I envisioned a virtual workshop where we reflect on our lived experiences and categorize each experience into corresponding capital(s). I wanted us to share our models with each other to foster a comunidad de[23] wealth we can rely on for the remainder of our USD academic careers.

Cycle Evaluation

Cycle one had a great turnout of participants. Due to the unexpected large turnout, we were unable to get through all the focus group questions. I rushed the brainstorming ideas section

[23] Comunidad de: Spanish for “community of.”

in the focus group because we were short on time. Moving forward, I would like to allocate one hour and a half for each cycle and determine the key questions I must ask in the event we run into a time boundary. I also had students rename themselves as a dot for our anonymous chat activity. I did not ask them to rename themselves after we completed the activity. When I received the transcript, all participants were "." so I had to listen to my video recording and change the names to know who said what. Overall, the first cycle was rich in storytelling and content.

Cycle Two: Discussing Community Cultural Wealth and Our Latinx Community

Cycle two was a workshop about how our Latinx community is viewed by USD and others. I introduced Yosso's community cultural wealth model (Yosso, 2005) to engage with students about their college experiences and the complexity of their social identities. I also wanted to identify what stage of Anzaldúa's *conocimiento* (Anzaldúa, 2013) each student was in to demonstrate how development of critical consciousness is not linear and looks different for everyone. This cycle is dedicated to challenging perspectives about USD administration and our Latinx community. Cycle two took place in early December 2020. My Cycle two workshop outline can be found in Appendix F**.**

Observations

Due to the pandemic, the academic year was adjusted to include an additional two weeks in the winter break. The fall semester ended on November 20, 2020. With the truncated semester, I was unable to conduct another focus group before the end of the Fall semester. However, I had mentioned the possibility of having a cycle during intersession (winter break) to the participants from Cycle one and received good feedback about attending. I scheduled my second cycle on December 1, 2020, over winter intersession. The same 15 participants from Cycle one were

invited to participate in Cycle two. I still had leftover funding from the first focus group and decided to offer a second e-gift card for participation in Cycle two. I hoped this incentive would encourage students to partake in the workshop over their break. Of the 15 participants, 7 agreed to participate, with 6 students showing up the day of the workshop.

I opened the workshop with a recap of what we discussed in cycle one and allocated time for participants to share more about their experiences at USD. The guiding questions were: What places at USD do you feel that you mattered? Have you ever felt marginalized or targeted because of your identity? With a smaller group, there was more opportunity to delve deeper into the questions I posed. The dialogue flowed a little bit more naturally like when you are having cafecito[24] with an old friend you have not seen for a long while. The 6 participants all identified as womxn with 3 participants identifying as Chicana (Andrea, Lola, and Rita), one identifying as Latina (Lucy), one identifying as Mixtec (Inez), and Mia did not share her ethnicity. I share more about their story in appendix H.

Andrea shared her difficulties navigating USD as a first-generation college student, transfer student and how she looks, in addition to her Chicana identity. With her tattoos and community college transfer student status, Andrea felt marginalized on campus and in her transfer learning community (TLC). She shared how folks on campus would stare at her when she would go to the Immaculata as if she was a criminal. Lola is a second-year student who highlighted her navigation of surviving stereotypes of Logan Heights and microaggressions in class. Lola stated some comments she would receive from White peers included “There are a lot of gangs there,” and “How did you get out of that community?” Both Andrea and Lola talked

[24] Cafecito: Teatime but with coffee.

about how they and their communities were criminalized by peers on campus, further marginalizing them and keeping them from becoming connected with USD.

Despite SSS and many multicultural student organizations, “I never felt 100% at home.” Inez, a third-year student, is a proud Mixtec womxn. Unfortunately, she pointed out there are limited spaces where she is authentically herself. Her indigeneity has made her feel tokenized in classes and not recognized by student organizations currently on campus. She is consistently navigating USD in the margins of the marginalized. Yet, she felt understood in the focus group and workshop, resonating with the stories shared. Latinx students have very diverse roots. There is no catch-all with terms, nor with student organizations. As we move forward, we must acknowledge the complex hxstories of Latinx people, engage in dialogue around the attempted erasure of indigeneity and Blackness in Latin America, and how these identities interact with the USD’s Catholic identity.

Lucy started the dialogue in Cycle two by sharing her struggle with fitting “the traditional student” mold USD works to support. Lucy is in her late 20’s and started her higher education career much later in life due to personal barriers she had to overcome. Lucy is continuing to explore her Latinidad, yet she was expected to be an expert on Latinidad and explain the difference between Hispanic and Latino in a business class. Lucy was unsure herself but felt as if it was her duty to know. Her professor profiled Lucy by assuming she was a part of the Latinx or Hispanic community. This microaggression also ignited Lucy’s internal struggle with being “enough” to be Latinx and a scholar in the classroom.

Rita is an out-of-state Chicana student, residing in Georgia. For the 2020 Presidential Election, Georgia was in the spotlight. Many students were filled with anxiety as we awaited the presidential results. The night polling ended; Rita had a virtual class where she was the only

Chicana. Her professor opened class by coining her as a “big activist” and assumed she “stayed up all night” to watch the results. Rita was confused by their assumptions and questioned her professor’s intentions. Faculty, staff, and students would benefit from critical engagement around building a community with diverse people and exploring privileged and marginalized identities.

Although we had a smaller group and more space to share, one student, Mia, did not voice or chat responses. Mia is an underclassman and was present for both cycles. Apart from introductions, she did not communicate verbally nor via chat. Her camera was off for the entirety of the study as well. Granted her participation looked differently from the others, it is important to acknowledge we are all in different stages in our conocimiento. She participated in both cycles, leading me to believe she found value in attending and silently listening. Needs do not have to always be verbally shared but can also be demonstrated. Mia’s participation illustrated the importance of community and showing up for one another.

With all these different barriers, the participants of my study found pockets of belonging. Andrea found solace in exploring religion and other salient identities, grounding her in who she is, highlighting her strength and resiliency. Lola is empowered by community organizing in Logan Heights and National City. She fights for environmental justice for low-income communities and plants trees in these neighborhoods—her ‘hood is beautiful. Inez reclaims her indigeneity by wearing more Mixtec traditional clothing. She will no longer be erased or unseen. Lucy found community in the International Student Organization (ISO) and is a co-founder of Women in Business. She connected with international students navigating the borderlands and wanted to find more people like her in the business industry. Rita joined a sorority and is on track to become the organization’s next president. No one will hold her down. Mia supported various events on campus through her student organization. She is a person of action, not words.

Critical Reflection

After having a brief dialogue on our ethnic and racial identities, it was very evident to me the complexities of naming this action research. There was no umbrella term or label that would be able to capture our experiences yet, we are forced to be clumped together anyway. As Andrea shared, “My whole existence is political….” The existence of our students with Latin American and Indigenous ancestry is political. There is no one else like us and the diversity within our community is consistently silenced by dominant, monolithic narratives.

This space was very much needed for all of us. We continued to build community naturally with one another despite our varying levels of conocimiento. In fact, at the end of the virtual call, students shared their social media contact information and invited one another to events and organizations they were a part of. We were healing, seen, appreciated, loved, and inspired. Many participants yearned for spaces where they can be their authentic selves. They wanted resources and services across the university, not just in one room on one side of the campus. They exist in various parts of campus and want to see themselves reflected in all spaces. Some of the resources they shared as areas of growth are the writing center, transfer learning community, financial aid, and cultural competency across campus.

Based on their cuentos, students would benefit from a campus-wide cultural competency implementation plan. USD currently engages in online training where one can easily skip through slides and scenarios. This is not enough. Latinx students experience too many microaggressions in the classroom from peers and faculty. Cultural competency involves critical engagement, so participants understand how their social identities influence their educational experiences and unlearn bias epistemologies that perpetuate White supremacy. Students should

not have to teach faculty about their identities nor worry about being tokenized in the classroom. We need to actualize a teaching pedagogy where all students benefit, not just some.

Planning for Next Cycle

After my second cycle, I felt connected to students' experiences. It was very prevalent to me the desire for community-building opportunities. It has been difficult to make friends and connections with faculty and staff in a remote environment. Representation is essential in creating spaces where students belong. A great way to celebrate Latinidad and create a healing space would be through a virtual Spring Latinx Social. I also knew that not every Latinx student was able to participate in cycle one and Cycle two. For this reason, the UFMC distributed the same survey from Fall 2020 to see if there has been a change in Latinx students' sense of belonging and analyze any additional feedback attendees share.

Envisioned Action to Inform Next Cycle

For a successful social event, I planned to connect with Latinx student organizations to see if they were interested in collaborating. Latinx student organizations have played a major role in fostering spaces for Latinx authenticity. I wanted Latinx student leaders to facilitate the social to promote community amongst staff, faculty, and students. I envision two planning meetings: a brainstorming session and volunteer facilitation sign-up. In collaboration with the UFMC, we will promote the social and distribute the survey to registrants.

Cycle Evaluation

The workshop was not as exciting for the participants as I hoped. We had more fruitful conversations around questions than working on our community cultural wealth models. We did discuss Yosso’s Community Cultural Wealth Model and were able to identify our cumulative wealth. Instead of each participant creating their own, we all worked on the same Jamboard

where we shared our capital (Appendix G). We took a moment to review the wealth which sparked new cuento sharing. We did not talk in-depth about the cultural wealth model, but we were able to implement it in our dialogue. I hoped to have identified which conocimiento stage each student was in, but conocimiento stages are not static. *Conocimiento* is interwoven and fluid, making it difficult for me to identify their stage status.

Cycle Three: Spring Latinx Social and Survey—Reunión de Comunidad

Cycle three was a Latinx Social and follow-up survey that took place on February 4, 2021, to celebrate being Latinx, while also welcoming incoming Latinx students by getting them connected. I incorporated the suggestions shared in Cycle two for more opportunities to connect with fellow Latinx peers, faculty, and staff. The social was an hour long and included three different activities, with each activity being led by different Latinx student leaders. After the social was over, we sent out a survey to all registered participants, even if they did not attend.

Observations

The reunión de comunidad was like the virtual Fall Welcome event. Our planning committee met twice. Our first meeting consisted of a brainstorming session. There was a strong desire to make the Spring Latinx Social more unstructured than the Fall Welcome. We also wanted to support Latinx San Diego business by getting e-gift cards from Artelexia, Por Vida Café, and Límon Símon to be more intentional with where we were spending our event funding. The second working meeting consisted of presenting the itinerary of the event and incorporating feedback. We made a list of roles and created a script with game directions. The Latinx student leaders were very energized by a Latinx Spring Social. There was more of a willingness to volunteer for different roles in the social than there had been in the past. We also included a section dedicated to student organizations to share their contact information. We hope to entice

Latinx students to get involved and continue connections outside of the social. Other things I observed were the low attendance from students, faculty, and staff. We had a total of 68 people register for the social and about 50 people enter in and out of the social day of the event. There were about five faculty and staff members, not including the UFMC team. Seven days after the social, I sent a follow-up email with the UFMC feedback survey and Latinx student orgs' contact information. We received a total of 27 responses (see Appendix H).

Critical Reflection

I participated in the Latinx Spring Social as a game facilitator. This allowed me to connect with students. In the small groups I facilitated, I saw new faces. We were able to have small talk and get to know each other a little better. Connecting with new and returning Latinx students was very empowering and energizing for me. In informal conversations, I am reminded of the importance of representation and of the various reasons I embarked on my graduate school journey.

The general feedback we received from the survey was positive. There were 13 returning students, four first years, one new transfer student, and one other. The remaining eight respondents did not disclose their educational status at USD. In the "Share one thing that the United Front Multicultural Commons can do to support you" section, some of the comments included: having more Latinx Socials for a longer time, weekly community groups, and offering financial aid workshops and tutoring services (Appendix H). The majority of the students enjoyed the games and the virtual space to meet new people.

It was interesting to receive feedback to make the event longer. Many students have shared they were experiencing Zoom fatigue. The survey comments affirm what participants demonstrated in my cycles. Latinx students desire spaces where they can exist authentically.

Whether it was a space to talk about our experiences at USD, or an opportunity to play Millennial Lotería, Latinx students thrive in sharing community. It is important to highlight the plurality of space and not just a space. Latinx students do not exist in one location in USD. Latinx students must find this community in every space they occupy at USD. The HSI designation expresses the commitment to supporting Latinx students and signals to prospective students that the needs of Latinx students are prioritized.

Planning for Next Cycle

After my second cycle, I felt very connected to the students' experiences. They pointed out areas of growth and highlighted the strengths of USD in supporting their belonging and academic success. However, in pursuing the HSI designation, we must include all constituents in the process. In cycles one and two, participants held feelings of mistrust in administration. Despite the various staff members in the UFMC, The Commons, Student Support Services (SSS), and other spaces, students still had a negative perception of administration. I sought to remedy this rift by thinking of ways I could involve administration in the HSI designation. Before the pandemic, I hoped to become a part of the HSI exploration committee, but the HSI committee stopped meeting to support the urgent pandemic impacts on our university. I decided to reach out to a staff member I knew on the HSI committee to see if they would share any insights on the HSI designation and USD.

Envisioned Action to Inform Next Cycle

To understand how to transform an institution for a Latinx-enrolling to a Latinx-serving institution, I planned to attend Gina Garcia’s virtual lecture on March 10, 2021. Gina Garcia is the leading HSI researcher and consultant. Her work outlines strategies for institutions to utilize for successful HSI transformation. By attending this lecture, I looked forward to understanding

the role of administration in the HSI transformation process and learning more about the HSI designation. Students alone cannot transform a Latinx-enrolling into a Latinx-serving institution. To transform USD, I must connect with administrators exploring the HSI designation. I reflected on my social network to identify "Ray" as a potential administrator I could connect with. I had heard from others in my circle that they were on the HSI designation committee. In this conversation, I hoped to understand where USD is in the HSI designation process, and any additional insights that can support my action research study.

Cycle Evaluation

Cycle three embodied community. The Latinx Spring Social required collaboration from campus partners. I was thrilled to see the number of students welcomed and celebrated Latinidad at the virtual event. I had the assumption that many students were virtually fatigued and would prefer a shorter event than a longer event. Based on the feedback, we might have planned too much to do in an hour. The goal was to get the participants in at least three different groups with different people to expand their community at USD and I am pleased to say we were able to provide those spaces. I would have liked more staff and faculty participation. I reached out to Latinx faculty and staff but I could have sent follow-up emails or provided an itinerary ahead of time so they could pop in and out as needed. I would have liked to send out the survey earlier than I did. It is a little more difficult for attendees to recall the event 7 days later.

Cycle Four: Exploring Hispanic-Serving Institution Designation with Administrative Staff

In Cycle four, I connected with a staff member who was a part of the Hispanic-Serving Institution planning committee and participated in an HSI Task Force focus group. The purpose of this cycle was to connect with the HSI Task Force committee members to bridge gaps of communication between students and administration. I video recorded my interview with

committee member “Ray” but did not record the HSI Task Force focus group. In the HSI designation exploration conversation, I participated as a student and will not include what was shared in this focus group. Instead, I will offer my reflections as a result of participating in the Latinx student focus group.

Observations

In the interview with Ray, they shared their perspective on the HSI designation exploration and their opinion on whether USD should pursue it or not. Ray was transparent in their discussion about the HSI designation with me. Ray had first heard about the HSI designation in 2016 from President Harris. There anticipated a steady increase in undergraduate enrollment of Latinx students at USD. I search for HSI conversations at USD before I meeting with Ray and found University board meeting notes where the HSI designation is mentioned but not discussed. After hearing it in 2016, Ray heard the emerging HSI designation in passing conversations from staff, faculty, and students.

The conversations interested Ray in learning more about the HSI designation. Before Ray’s time at USD, they had the opportunity to meet Gina Garcia. Ray describes Garcia as very realistic, direct, and a chingona. I shared my plans to attend her lecture on March 10, 2021. Ray is very motivated to do right by students. They passionately advocate for our Latinx students in various spaces. From their experience, they shared about Student Support Services (SSS), and the positive impact SSS has had on Latinx students’ educational attainment. But what about Latinx students not in SSS? Ray and I naturally engaged in a critical reflection to help me make sense of the data I had collected thus far. I was puzzled on how to move forward with my recommendations since the Latinx students’ experiences are diverse, requiring various recommendations.

I was happy to learn about and be invited to participate in the HSI committee task force. Most of the HSI committee members were in attendance listening to our cuentos about our USD experiences. Many of the committee members present in the focus group demonstrated an interest in learning more about Latinx students and USD. There were a couple of similarities between this focus group and the focus group I conducted. Participants were very willing to share, and we also ran into our time boundaries. We want to share our cuentos because we have been silenced in spaces for so long. We want people to listen to us. Latinx students need more spaces to share their experiences and I hope there are more focus groups in the future.

Critical Reflection

In my conversation with Ray, I felt reactivated. We realized the same students are showing up to events and are being asked to participate in focus groups. While what they have to say is important, how do we reach students who are not well-connected and do not attend events? We must find ways to engage with students who are not vocal or as activated to identify areas of growth for USD. Before USD commits to become an HSI, we must focus on supporting our current Latinx student population before committing to serving more Latinx students. Latinx students are more than an enrollment number.

In a remote environment, community spaces are more essential than ever. As a Latinx comunidad, we value each other's time, presence, and cuentos. Our cuentos serves more than just a story. We use storytelling to heal, inspire, resist, and expand our conocimiento. Many Latinx professionals and students in my network have shared their knowledge to support each other on our academic journeys. These dialogue exchanges are grounded in Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth frameworks. Our existence in the educational institutions, where our people have been historically excluded from, is an act of resistance. I can write pages of how resilient Latinx

students are, but it does not change the fact that they should not have to struggle so much to reach equitable educational opportunities and attainment. The HSI designation offers a transformative opportunity for institutions to dismantle exclusionary processes to support the scholarship of Latinx students and other students with marginalized identities. Latinidad is woven with many social intersectionalites, complex hxstories, and generations of strength. The HSI designation can fund practices and services to liberate historically excluded people from educational institutions.

Action and Future Planning

After gathering my thoughts with Ray, I planned to draft recommendations for the HSI committee. My recommendations' goals are to disrupt the monolithic Latinx culture narrative, convey the need to do more research to capture Latinx student experiences, share the complexities of *conocimiento*, and advocate for a collective effort from constituents to make the HSI designation successful. The HSI designation requires a transformation, not an integration. USD cannot be the same organization with the HSI designation and expecting Latinx retention and graduation rates to improve. To transform USD, high-level administration must understand we cannot mold Latinx students to fit USD, but rather change USD to serve Latinx students. The Latinx community is incredibly diverse requiring multiple people in various spaces dedicating resources and services to aid Latinx success. Lastly, representation in leadership is essential. USD must make changes to their leadership team to reflect the students they serve.

Cycle Evaluation

I was relieved to know Ray and others estan luchando por nostros[25]. I would have liked to have spoken to more HSI designation exploration committee members to get a better grasp on

[25] Estan luchando por nostros: Translates to "fighting for us."

their interests and perspectives. The cycle was successful in demystifying the narrative about the administration refusing to engage with students' concerns. Some administrators are listening and are activated by achieving educational equity for all students. Our dialogue also revealed my effortless toggle between the various roles I held in this research. We are not just Latinx students, we hold various roles in our lives that impact how we know the world and navigate it. Each cycle has captured a small sliver of what makes our belonging at USD.

Study Limitations

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, USD moved to remote instruction in March 2019. Despite efforts to control the spread of the coronavirus, the surge moved very quickly through San Diego, making it impossible to revert to in-person instruction. The uncertainty of what can or will happen next affected students on how present they could be in virtual spaces. With limited person-to-person contact and at-home county orders, many students were living their lives through computer screens, causing video chat fatigue, or more commonly referred to as “Zoom fatigue.” The participants, including myself, were grappling with feelings of mourning what we envisioned our USD experience to be versus the reality of what it was.

The coronavirus also disproportionately affected low-income, communities of color. In San Diego county, Latinx communities were most severely impacted by the virus, affecting the students I was collaborating with on a personal level. It was difficult to recruit and maintain high participation in the study as students were burnt out of online meetings and juggling the impacts of COVID-19. USD also focused its efforts and resources on adapting to the COVID-19 San Diego County guidelines to ensure students, faculty, and staff were safe. With USD’s shift of energy towards keeping up with San Diego County guidelines, the Hispanic-Serving Institution committee ceased their meeting gatherings. This presented a limitation in my research as I hope

to have developed a closer relationship with the HSI committee at USD to bridge the students and administration gap.

Summary of Major Findings

I began on a quest to identify resources and services supporting Latinx educational attainment and student belonging, in addition to brainstorming new resources and services with current, undergrad Latinx students. I also explored the HSI designation to understand USD's positionality in becoming Latinx-serving. I was unable to produce a comprehensive report of USD's strengths and areas of growth on current services and resources. The focus of the cycles shifted to spaces of healing, inspiring, and sharing communal knowledge. The key takeaways from this research are community spaces are places of conocimiento, Latinx students do not fit one mold, and commitment to the HSI designation requires an organizational transformation.

Students expressed their desire for community spaces. The desire for community spaces manifested naturally as participants shared their cuentos of experiences at USD. With varying levels of conocimiento and Latinidad, these community spaces supported the growth of each participant. Cycle one served as a space of liberation. Experiences were affirmed, questions were answered, resources were shared and most importantly, each cuento was wholeheartedly received by the group. Cycle two was more intimate with six participants. Participants challenged shared ideas about Latinidad without silencing the conocimiento process. The conversation served as a call-in to share navigational knowledge and the various labels of our community. We must critically foster community spaces across campus to support Latinx identity exploration and storytelling for healing, inspiration, and resistance.

I identified themes to make my recommendations however when analyzing broad experiences and various intersecting social identities, we must be wary of not molding the

experiences to one size fits most. I am troubled by lumping experiences into themes as I believe this perpetuates a monolithic narrative of Latindad. The number of participants in this study is not a representative sample of Latinx experiences at USD, yet they were so diverse. As more Latinx students enroll at USD, we must periodically investigate Latinx students' needs as they are not static. At the start of the study, I would refer to the Latinx student experience as singular. It may be easier to blend the various cultures in Latinidad into one, but this approach is grounded in the erasure of our experiences and promotes White supremacy.

The HSI designation is easily achieved on paper through enrollment numbers. However, I ask USD to see Latinx students as more than just a number and center Latinx students' academic success. To achieve this transformation at USD, students and administrative constituents should work collaboratively to dismantle systemic racism, prejudice, and exclusionary practices built into organizational processes such as financial aid. Including a commitment to serve Latinx students in USD's mission statement and strategic plan can help us achieve an equitable institution. Centering Latinx student experiences with the HSI designation is not exclusive. Rather, the designation serves as a change agent for transformation. Latinx students have consistently shared their concerns, wants, and needs with administration. They hold grit and resilience; however, they should not have to overcome a plethora of obstacles and barriers to be valued, accepted, and thrive at USD.

Recommendations

In drafting recommendations, I honor the participants' cuentos by centering their experiences for each recommendation. These recommendations serve as a starting point for USD to continue to move in the direction of becoming Latinx-serving rather than Latinx-enrolling.

Additional funding received through the HSI designation should center the needs of Latinx students, which would also support students with different racial and ethnic identities.

Research on Latinx Students' Experiences

Firstly, I recommend for the HSI committee and institutional research to host various open forums at different times of the year, in addition to surveys and focus groups. Conducting open call research or directly reaching out to participants skews our data by only capturing the experiences of certain types of participants: vocal, engaged, and connected students. We must be proactive in seeking the marginalized, Latinx experiences navigating USD. These students may not hold leadership roles on campus, be a part of the ASG, or attend Latinx community events. With open town hall meetings in different spaces throughout the year, we can involve Latinx students in the HSI designation exploration process. Decisions must be data-informed and not driven. We need more data to make decisions about pursuing the HSI designation and to support the needs of current Latinx student experiences.

Review and Assess Current Resources and Services

I recommend for USD to review and assess the current resources focused on supporting students with marginalized identities. Students named SSS, UFMC, The Commons, Ethnic Studies Department, and Multicultural Student Organizations to be instrumental in their success at USD. We must identify the processes and practices these services are utilizing to share them across campus. Students shared they experienced microaggressions in financial aid, the writing center, in the classroom, and other spaces supporting diverse students. USD currently offers services and resources aiding Latinx educational attainment, however, most of these spaces do not have sustainable funding nor enough staff members to support the growing Latinx population. We must allocate sustainable funding to hire more full-time professional staff and

faculty of color across campus. The assessment and redistribution of funds will help expand these essential resources for students to thrive, not just survive at USD.

Collaboratively Explore Organizational Transformation

As of Fall 2020, 59% of students are White, making USD a PWI. With the HSI designation, we cannot expect to operate as we have with this shift of student demographics. Gina Garcia has outlined ten areas an institution must review for transformation to an HSI: mission, purpose, membership, governance, technology, boundary management, incentives, justice & accountability, community standards, and external influences (Garcia, 2017). I recommend for the committee and key constituents to review lectures from Gina Garcia and draft action items for transformation. I attended a free virtual lecture of Gina Garcia lecture at California State University, Northridge on March 10, 2021. She outlined the areas of change for transforming into a Latinx-serving institution. USD must also center Latinx student voices in the HSI designation process. Latinx students have expressed frustration in not being heard or valued. Giving Latinx students autonomy in allocating HSI grant money through community discussions will foster belonging at USD. Other ways to involve Latinx students is by publishing meeting minutes and hosting open HSI committee meetings for the USD community. Latinx students want authenticity and transparency from administration.

Community Spaces for *Conocimiento*

Latinx students thrive in social, community gatherings. I recommend USD to host spaces for social hours, workshops, or teach-ins for Latinx students. The Latinx community has immense funds of knowledge and capital to share with each other and the USD community. Community spaces fostering conocimiento are currently inaccessible to Latinx students. When given space to share cuentos and reflection, students silence themselves and try not to take up

space. Students share the desire for a Latinx space, however, the work of being Latinx-serving should not be siloed to one space. A Latinx center may be beneficial in becoming the hub for leading these activities but cannot be the end all be all to become a Latinx-serving institution. There was also a desire for a Latinx space, but I do not want to confine conocimiento to one space. Normalizing conocimiento community spaces will strengthen Latinx students' belonging at USD, encourage identity exploration, and increase educational attainment.

Conclusion

The Hispanic-serving institution federal designation carries a lot of responsibility and hope. Many institutions acquire the HSI designation through enrollment with very minimal change to their organization. With USD's culture of care and change-making status, I anticipate a more holistic approach in obtaining the HSI designation. Our final year at USD was envisioned much differently than it was. I had hoped to have met my research participants in person, yet I would not change a thing. The beautiful, virtual spaces we created to heal, inspire and resist energized me to complete my studies as a first-generation college graduate student. The aspirational capital we exchanged has left an immense impact on me.

In my conocimiento journey, I realized the complexity of Latinidad. We are not a monolithic culture that holds the same experiences navigating higher education. Latinx students value community, the actualization of aspirations, and dedication for a better future for their families and future generations. Moving forward, I am dedicated to learning more about the diverse culturas y hxstorias de Latinx[26]. I am filled with gratitude for the participants in my study who showed up for me con sus apoyos y cuentos[27]. I leave this study with a final message to my community: *para la comunidad, por la comunidad. Les deseo salud, felicidad y éxito. Cuidense.*

[26] Culturas y hxstorias de Latinx: Translates to "Latinx culture and hxstories."
[27] Con sus apoyos y cuentos: Translates to "with their support and stories."

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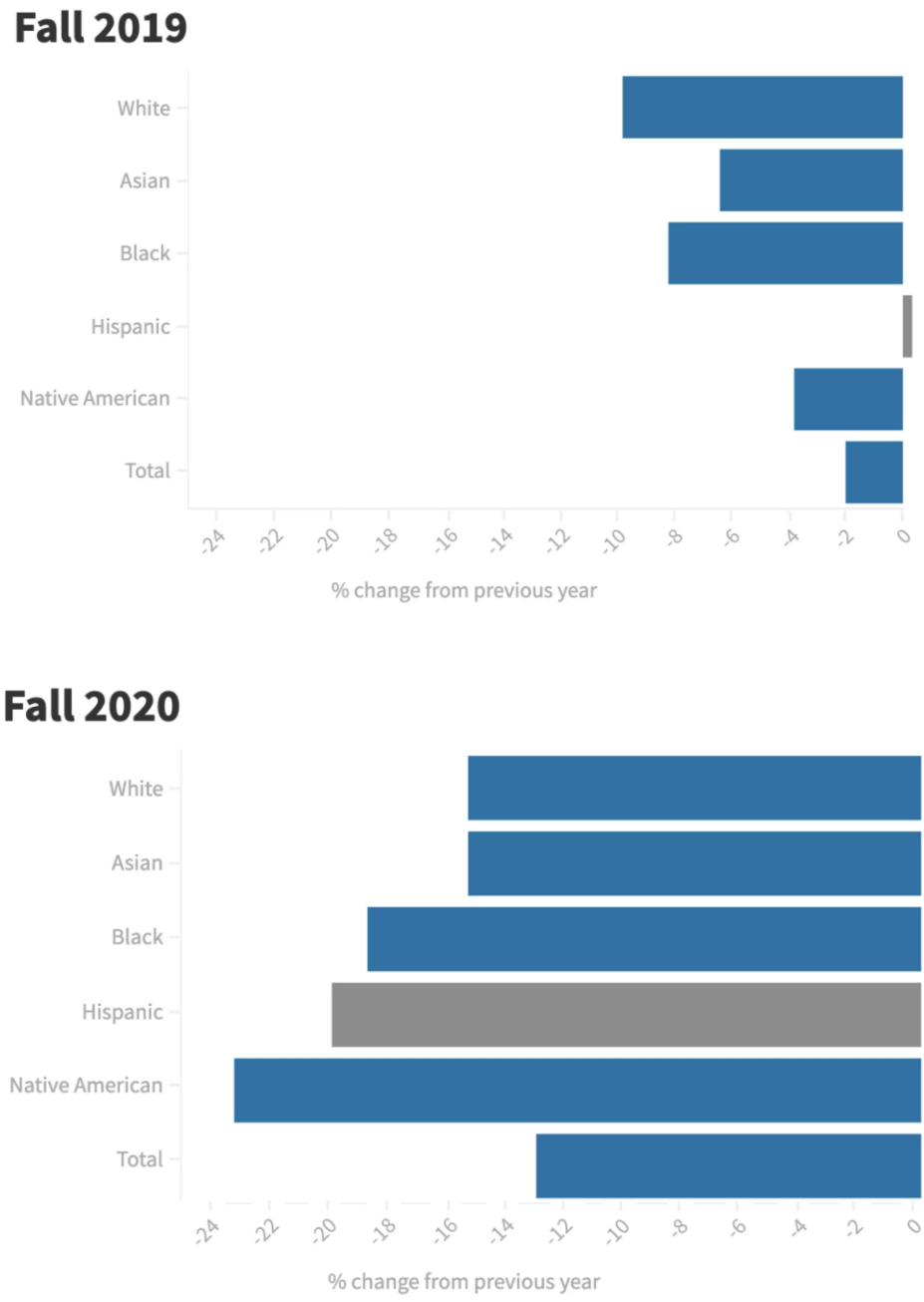
Appendix A: Latinx Student Enrollment Rates in Higher Education in the United States

Figure A1: Latinx first-time freshman enrollment rate drops in 2020.

Source: *Undergraduate - Enrollment picture worsens as pandemic drags on*. (June, 2020)



Appendix B: University of San Diego, Latinx Student Demographics

B1: University of San Diego Internal Stat Book - Degree level, college/school, major/program, gender, and race/ethnicity

Source: Institutional Research and Planning (IRP), University of San Diego (2020)

Degrees Awarded by IPEDS Year:
By Degree Level, College/School, Major/Program, Gender, and Race/Ethnicity

Select Degree Level: All | Select College/School: All | Select Major: All

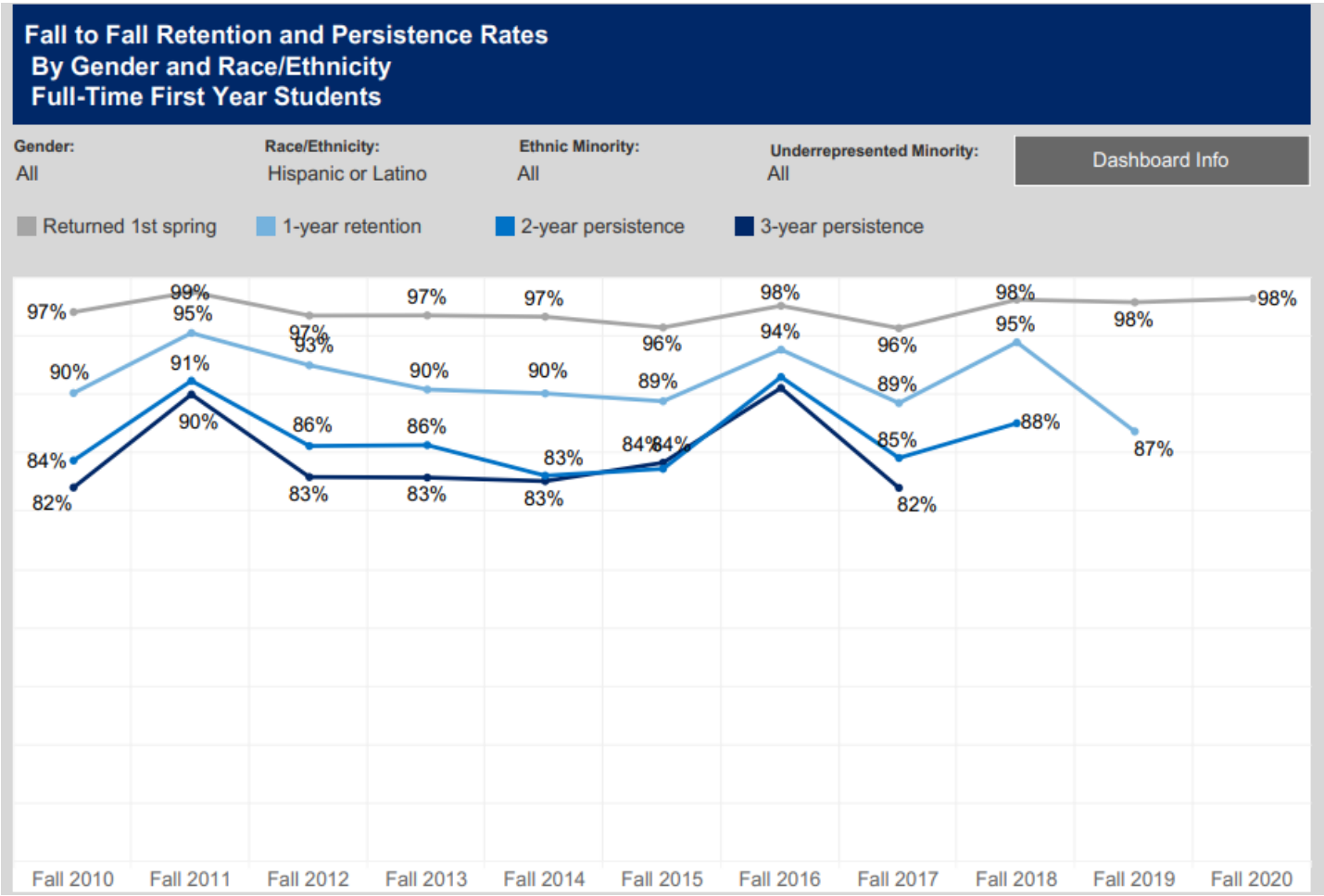
Bachelor's degrees are totalled by first major only. An undergraduate may complete more than one major under one degree. For total bachelor's degree graduates in each major see: https://www.sandiego.edu/irp/internal/graphs/ug_dept_profile_degrees.php

		2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Total Degrees Awarded		2,272	2,425	2,293	2,426	2,656	2,725	2,794
Female		1,277	1,401	1,309	1,402	1,508	1,518	1,558
Male		995	1,024	984	1,024	1,148	1,207	1,236
International	Total	141	169	168	197	233	246	246
Minority	American Indian or Alaska Native	11	14	9	13	9	10	8
	Asian American	192	188	175	169	253	260	225
	Black/African American	57	61	80	75	95	110	115
	Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	5	7	10	7	9	11	8
	Hispanic/Latino	370	408	374	457	486	517	569
	Two or more ethnicities	117	83	105	111	113	108	127
	Total	752	761	753	832	965	1,016	1,052
Not specified	Not specified	139	155	143	109	134	135	110
	Total	139	155	143	109	134	135	110
White	Total	1,240	1,340	1,229	1,288	1,324	1,328	1,386

Note: This table shows the number of students enrolled by ethnicity. The yellow bars depict Hispanic/Latinx student enrollment. Latinx student numbers have grown over the last 5 years. The largest increase was 22% from Fall 2015 to Fall 2016. The most recent data shows an increase in enrollment from Fall 2019 to Fall 2020 of 10%.

B2: University of San Diego Internal Stat Book – Fall to Fall retention and persistence rates.

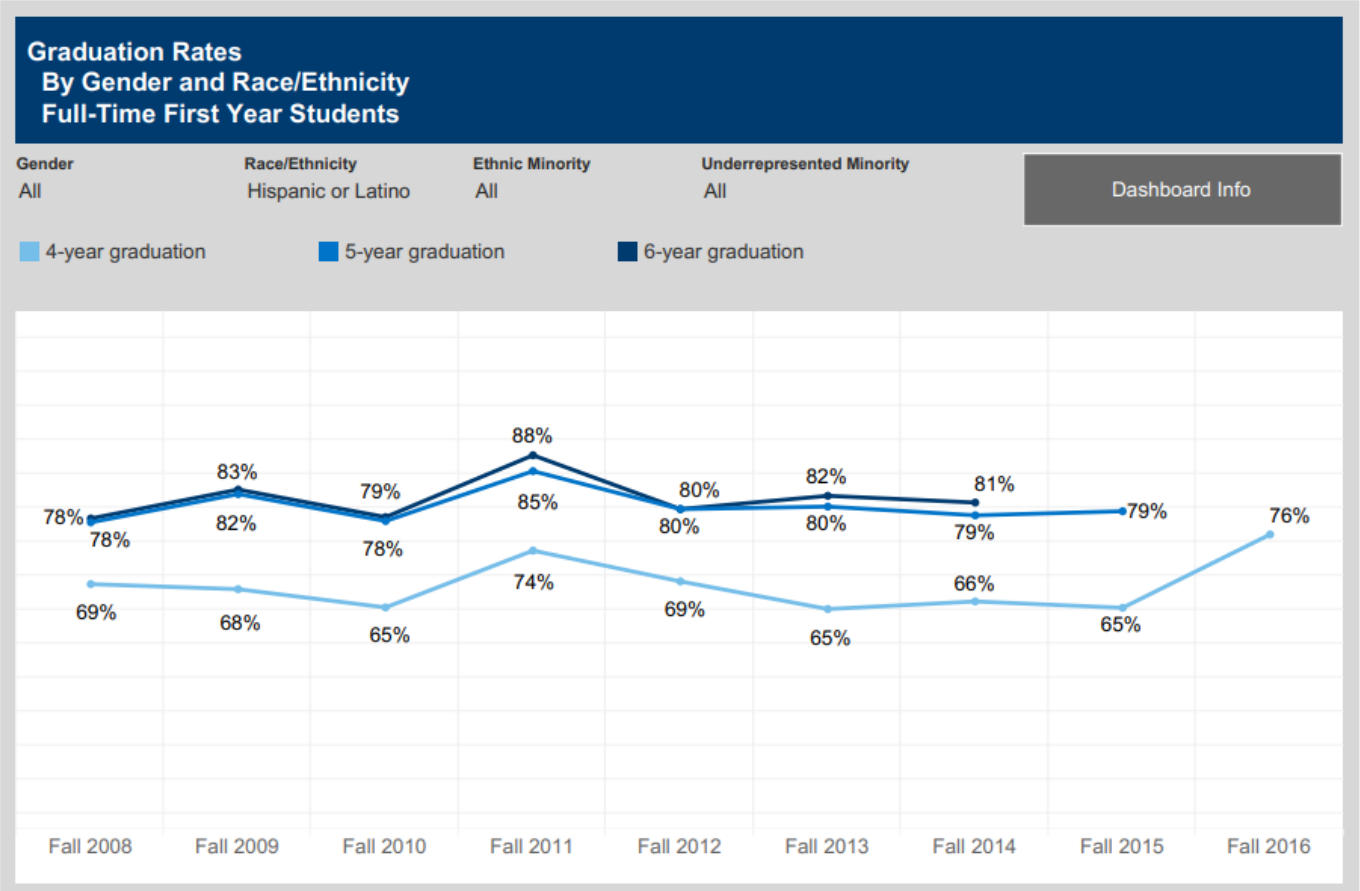
Source: Institutional Research and Planning (IRP), University of San Diego (2020)



Notes: This chart shows the retention of Hispanic/Latinx students at the University of San Diego by year. The second one from the top, the light blue line, shows a severe dip in retention from Fall 2018 to Fall 2019 amongst first-year students.

B3: University of San Diego Internal Stat Book – Graduation rates.

Source: Institutional Research and Planning (IRP), University of San Diego (2020)



Notes: This chart shows the 4-year, 5-year, and 6-year graduation percentages from Fall 2008 to Fall 2016. As we can see by the bottom, light blue line, 4-year graduation rates were steadily decreasing with positive increasing spikes in Fall 2011 and Fall 2016. This was the most recent data I could find on Latinx graduation rates.

Appendix C: Cycle one focus group questions

Cycle One: Latinx/Chicanx/Raza Focus Group Outline

I. Introductions
   a. Hello everyone, I am grateful for each of you making time to share your perspective with me on how USD can better support you all. I also want to be present to the fact we may be holding a lot of different emotions with the election results, virtual learning, and other things we have going on in our lives. I ask for each of you to be as present as you can be and please utilize the chat and unmute option to answer any questions you feel called to answer. I have already started recording this zoom call.
   b. To get better acquainted with one another, I would like to invite you all to share your name, pronouns if you'd like, and what semester you are in at USD.
      i. I can model what it can sound like--Valerie Mora, she/her/ella; I am in my 3rd-semester grad student at USD.
   c. Participants: Name and pronouns (if you would like), What semester are you at USD?

II. Purpose of Focus Group
   a. The purpose of this gathering is to better understand your experience at USD. As some of you may know, USD is an emerging Hispanic--serving institution (HSI). What this means is that USD will have at least 25% of the student population categorized as Hispanic and half of the 25% needs to be categorized as low income. With this designation, USD will become eligible to apply for different federal grants.
   b. Through your honest feedback, I hope I can better understand what the current student experience is and how USD can do better.
   c. At the end of my study, I hope to draft recommendations to USD to take into consideration should they move forward with this HSI designation. Questions?

III. Anonymous Chat Activity
   a. To encourage honesty and anonymity, please rename yourself to "." and if you feel called to, answer the following questions.
      i. In 3 words, describe your experience at USD.
         1. Before we move on to the next questions, I will read these words out loud and make a mental note on which words stand out to you.
      ii. Where do you find a sense of belonging at USD? (spaces, clubs, organization, classes, etc.) How have these spaces impacted you?
         1. Can I have a volunteer read the comments in the chat?
   b. If you can, can everyone unmute yourself to create a free-flowing conversation?
      i. Would anyone like to share something that resonated with them?

IV. Reflection

   a. If you would like to rename yourself to your name you can or, you can leave the dot as your name.
   b. So, we have talked a little about our relationships with USD and places in which we felt that we mattered. For this next portion, You can unmute yourself or utilize the chat
      i. Are there places on campus that you do not feel comfortable because of your Latinx/Chicanx/Raza identity? If so, what are they?
   c. Why do you think that is?
   d. What keeps you from being connected to USD?
      i. For returning students, before COVID-19, what kept you from being connected to USD?

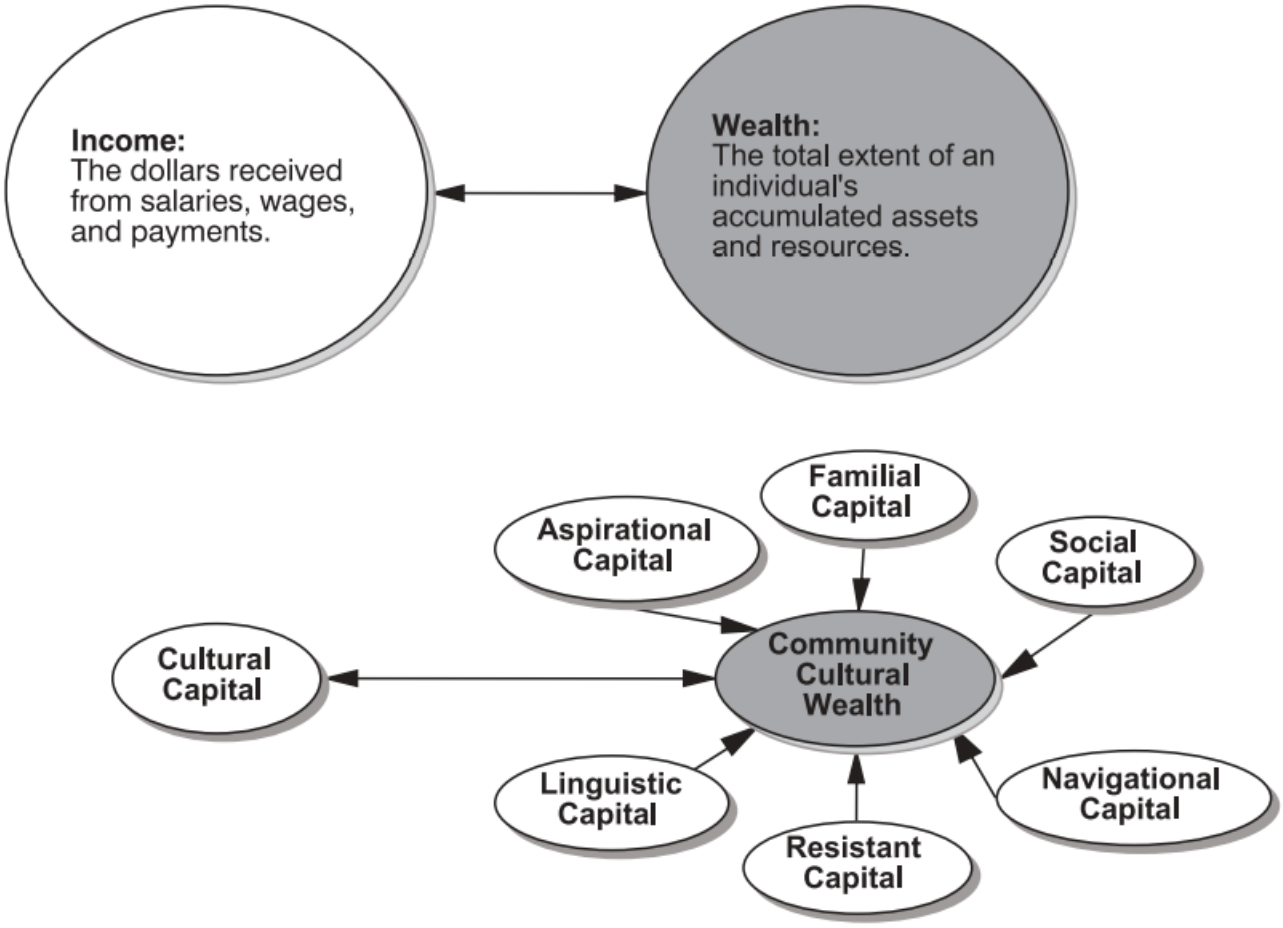
V. Brainstorming (Jamboard)
   a. The Latinx community continues to grow. There has been a steady increase for Latinx students enrolling at USD. How might USD create a more welcoming space for undergraduate Latinx/Chicanx/Raza students?
      i. Use 1 post-it for each idea, thought, or comment.
      ii. If you see an idea or thought that resonates with you, please add a star, x or something to indicate your agreement with it

VI. Closing remarks
   a. This is an ongoing conversation. You may think of something later on in the day or week, I encourage you all to write it down, record your thoughts in some way so we can share it. You all will have continued access to the Jamboard in case you want to add it there.
   b. I will use the email you provided on your registration to email participants their $20 eGift Card. You should receive it no later than Sunday, 11/15.
   c. I appreciate your feedback. I will be in contact with you all with a calendar invite for our next discussion focused on the Latinx/Chicanx/Raza community through an asset-based framework. You will not receive any monetary compensation for participating in the 2nd cycle and is completely voluntary as it takes place over intersession (December)
   d. Lastly, I am available to meet with any of you one on one through my office hours Monday-Thursday 12-1 PM PST should you want to further discuss anything in a more private setting.

Appendix D: Cycle One Jamboard

Appendix E: Tara J. Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth Model

Community Cultural Wealth Model (Yosso, 2005)



Community Cultural Wealth Model: Yosso, 2005

Appendix F: Cycle two workshop outline

Para La Comunidad: Centralizing Latinx Voices in the Hispanic-serving Institution Designation Conversation

Cycle Two: Discussion: Community Cultural Wealth and our Latinx community (90 minutes)

I. Welcome and Check-in.
   a. Name/pronouns
   b. What is the story behind your name?

II. Continuation of the last cycle
   a. So we have talked a little about our relationships with USD and places in which we felt that we mattered. For this next portion, you can unmute yourself or utilize the chat
      i. Are there places on campus that you do not feel comfortable because of your Latinx/Chicanx/Raza identity? If so, what are they?
   b. Why do you think that is?
   c. What keeps you from being connected to USD?
      i. For returning students, before COVID-19, what kept you from being connected to USD?

III. Latinx/Chicanx/Raza community
   a. In three words, how would you describe the Latinx/Chicanx/Raza community?
   b. Where do these ideas and feelings come from?
   c. Are you proud to be a part of this community? Why or why not?
   d. Do you see the Latinx/Chicanx/Raza community represented at USD?

IV. Yosso's community culture wealth (5-8 mins)
   a. Where did this framework come from?
      i. Deficit thinking takes the position that minority students and families are at fault for poor academic performance because: (a) students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills, and (b) parents neither value nor support their child's education.
   b. Framework tenets
      i. These are not mutually exclusive, there is overlap.
      ii. Aspirational Capital: the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers.
      iii. Linguistic Capital: includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style.
         1. act as an interpreter for members of their family as well as the culture being based in storytelling, linguistic capital may enhance a student's ability for "memorization, attention to detail, dramatic

pauses, comedic timing, facial affect, vocal tone, volume, rhythm, and rhyme." (p. 79)

iv. Familial Capital: Those cultural knowledge nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition.
v. Social Capital: Can be understood as networks of people and community resources.
vi. Navigational Capital: The skills of maneuvering through social institutions.
vii. Resistant Capital: Refers those pieces of knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality.
1. Persist and resist. Resistance passed down through generations.

V. Jamboard activity
a. Let us make sense of the capital we have in this virtual space.
b. You can submit one or a response for each capital. Please refer to the definitions of each capital on the chat
i. Aspirational Capital, Linguistic Capital, Familial Capital, Social Capital, Navigational Capital, Resistant Capital

VI. Reflection
a. Applying Yosso's community cultural capital to your student experience at USD, what are some programs or services that can support students to use their "assets" to succeed academically at USD.
i. Are there programs or events that do this?
ii. What kind would you like to see?
iii. How do we celebrate where we have been and where we are going?
iv. Ideas
b. Next steps: I encourage you all to journal, draw, write, record, or create a playlist over Fall break.
i. Take notice of traditions, who you are around, how you feel, what you miss.
ii. Applying the community cultural framework captures any other capital you did not mention today.

VII. Closing remarks
a. Office hours if any of you want to drop by
b. I will be sending out Yosso's article so you can save it in your files.
c. I will see you in the spring for our reunion comunidad

Appendix G: Cycle Two Workshop Jamboard

Appendix H: Cycle Two Participant Cuentos Summary

"Andrea"

Andrea shared her difficulties navigating USD as a first-generation college student, transfer student and how she looks, in addition to her Chicana identity. She talked about how marginalized she felt in her transfer learning community (TLC) as she was one of two students who transferred from a community college. Andrea shared how her options to attend college were limited due to financial accessibility. Community college was affordable for her and she felt as if her peers in TLC, most transferring from other 4-year institutions, were dismissive of their privilege to attend a four year straight out of high school. Andrea was hoping to connect with other transfer students in her TLC, a very high contact space, but only connected to the only other student of color in her TLC group. Andrea proudly showed us her tattoos on her arms and explained how the artwork on her body attracts uncomfortable stares, especially when she attends mass at USD. She has felt criminalized for the way she looks, making her question her belonging on campus. However, Andrea found solace in her religious identities course. Exploring religion and other salient identities has grounded her in who she is, highlighting her strength and resilience.

"Inez"

Indigeneity is a very salient identity for Inez. She struggles to find her place of belonging within USD and the Latinx community. Colorism and anti-indigenous rhetoric exists in the Latinx community. Inez only met two at USD that could understand her experiences as a Mixtec woman. Through her cuentos, she illustrated the importance of having critical dialogue around being indigenous in the Latinx community rather than only celebrating indigeneity within the US border lines. She is constantly profiled for being Latinx in her classes, perpetuating the erasure of

her indigeneity. Inez does not want to be tokenized for being brown or having her lived experiences be exploited to benefit others. Her trauma is not a learning tool. Inez also shared how distance learning has allowed space for her to heal from microaggressions and tokenism because she does not encounter it as much in a virtual environment. Despite never feeling belonged, Inez resonated with everyone's cuentos. She reclaims her indigeneity through fashion and supports community members by purchasing more traditional clothing from her pueblo.

"Lola"

Lola shared how her Logan Heights community was constantly criminalized in various conversations in the USD campus community. Her peers had minimized the value of the community, however, culturally appropriated things from her community like hoop earrings. Lola has also shared about the colorism within the Latinx community and the difficulty of having these conversations with her comunidad. Socioeconomic and White privilege within the Latinx community and other peers at USD has created hostile spaces for Lola to just be herself. Lola joins an advocacy multicultural organization on campus that uplifts the Chicanx experience and promotes healing. In addition to her involvement at USD, she is also a part of a nonprofit organization fighting against environmental injustices in lower socioeconomic areas, like Barrio Logan. These are the places where she thrives.

"Lucy"

Lucy's experiences were shared from the intersections of being an older, Mexican American woman student. She is in her late 20's and started her educational journey later in life than the "traditional student." She shared having trouble finding women her age who shared her interests. Her ethnic ambiguity and evolving conocimiento of what it means to be Latina also made it difficult to be connected at USD. As a business and real estate major, she was used to

being the only person of color in her classes and being tokenized or profiled to being in the Latinx perspective. She does not want people to feel pity for her but rather understand that her complicated life experiences have made her who she is. Lucy's navigation in the borderlands led her to identify more closely with the international student experience. The international students would share the difficulties of honoring their heritage in an American society where individualism is a key-value versus collectivism. Lucy also encountered the narrative that all Latinx and Mexican-Americans look the same, stating, "You're Mexican?! But you're beautiful." or "You don't look Mexican." These comments perpetuate the narrative of a monolithic Latinx community and anti-Mexican hate, which was nationally spread through President Trump's campaign and presidency. Despite the confusion around her Latinidad, she is a co-founder of Women in Business student organization to uplift the women, but more specifically women of color, who have successfully navigated the White male-dominated business field.

"Rita"

Rita has felt targeted in the classroom by professors for how she appears, and assumptions made about her political preferences. As a first-year student, Rita did not expect to start her university academic journey remotely. Due to distance learning, Rita stayed in her home state. It just so happened that her home state was under the microscope for the Presidential Elections of 2021. This presidential election took an emotional toll on already struggling students because of the remote environment. Her professor spotlighted her at the start of class on the last day of polling. Rita was asked leading questions about her political preferences and teased about the anxieties she was holding around this election. Her professor's insensitivity around the

election results' implications on their students depicts cultural incompetence. Rita was able to connect with a sorority and join the leadership team while at USD, fostering her belonging.

"Mia"

Mia attended all cycles; however, she did not speak or chat. I took it upon myself to make assumptions about why she kept attending if she did not share her cuentos? In this reflection, I recognized my bias of what I think engagement looks like. She could have been actively listening and taking in the stories of her peers, or still making sense of her own experiences. Regardless of her reasons for being a part of my study, her time and presence in the virtual space add to our comunidad. Since the study, I have seen Mia volunteer for different event planning committees as a part of a multicultural student organization.

Appendix I: Cycle Three Latinx Social Itinerary and Survey

I1: Latinx Social Itinerary

Latinx Spring Social
February 4, 2021
1:15-2:15pm

Time/Volunteer	Task
1:15-1:20pm	◊ Tech/Meeting host: UFMC Staff ◊ Music & Chat Moderator: UFMC Intern
1:20-1:25pm Welcome: UFMC staff Land Acknowledgement: Student leader	◊ Welcome: Introduce yourself. Welcome, Bienvenidos to our Virtual Latinx Social. The purpose of today's event is to meet new people and have fun. We have selected a couple of games for you to engage with one another! ◊ Land Acknowledgment: Hello everyone! To get us started, I wanted to acknowledge USD's campus is on Kumeyaay land. We want to take a moment to acknowledge the historical legacy of colonialism by honoring and paying respect to the land, which was taken by conquest, along with the domination of the people who inhabited the land, and the imposition of White supremacy. We do it to raise greater public consciousness of Native sovereignty and cultural rights as a small step toward equitable relationship and reconciliation.
1:25-1:40pm Loteria: Student leader (Breakout room 1) Valerie M. (Breakout room 2) 1:25-1:40pm	◊ Loteria Facilitator: How many of you have played Loteria? For those that have played Loteria, we are going to play a little differently. ◊ Host link: xxx ◊ We will have 2 rounds. In the first round, we are playing for the border card. In other words, the first one to fill the border of their card wins! In the second round, we are playing for a full card! ◊ The first one to fill all the boxes on their card wins. Winners will get the choice of $20 gift cards between Limon Simon and Por Vida Cafe. Two of our favorite SD local shops. ◊ Click on the link in the chat and click on Generate Card. Give me a thumbs up when you have your card. ◊ Announce winners of each round and ask them to drop their email in the chat or PM "Valerie Mora". ◊ UFMC Intern: Copy & Paste before we break out into rooms ◊ "Instructions: Click on the following link: xxx ◊ UFMC Intern: Copy & Paste before we break out into rooms ◊ Then click on "Generate Card" to get a unique Loteria card. ◊ Round 1: We are playing for the border card. In other words, the first one to fill the border of their card wins! ◊ Round 2: we are playing for the full card! The first one to fill all the boxes on their card, wins

1:40-1:55pm Student Org Shoutouts & Staff & Faculty Intros: UFMC Staff Latinx student org reps: 3 student leaders	◊ Student Org Shoutouts: Thank you for playing our Loteria game! I hope you all had as much fun as I did. Before we move on to our next game. I wanted to shout out a few student orgs who were essential in planning and making this Latinx Social happen. Without further ado, I will pass it over to A.Ch.A. to get us started. (Order is A.Ch.A., APS, M.E.Ch.A.) ◊ Student Org Reps: Each student org rep will introduce themselves, provide a summary of your student org, and (optional) share in one sentence *"why"* you joined your org. ◊ Staff & Faculty Intros: Thank you for AChA, APS, and MEChA for helping us make today's event happen. I would like to invite Faculty and Staff to introduce themselves, the department you are a part of, and contact info if you choose to share via chat. ◊ Can I have 2-3 Faculty/Staff volunteers to unmute themselves and share?
1:55-2:05pm We are not really strangers! Facilitators: 5 student leaders	◊ We're not really strangers! Facilitators: Welcome! We will be playing "We're not really strangers". There are 3 questions in the chat. I would like everyone to pick 1 question to answer and share with the group, along with your name, where you are Zooming from and your major. I will go first and then popcorn to someone else. ◊ If time permits, have another round where everyone chooses a different question. UFMC Intern: Copy & Paste before we break out into rooms. ◊ Pick 1 question to answer and share with the group. ◊ We want to get to know each other better. We ask for you to introduce yourself with your name, where you are Zooming from and your major, and your response to the question you picked.
2:05-2:15pm Closing announcements: UFMC Staff.	UFMC Intern: Copy & Paste ◊ Join the UFMC newsletter list to get our latest event updates. Sign up at tinyurl.com/UFMCnews ◊ Have you heard our DiversiTea podcast? Tune in at IGTV @USDUFMC or listen on YouTube @TheUFMC. We have special giveaway prizes so be sure to listen soon! ◊ Closing announcements: Hello, my name is Valerie Mora. I use she/her/ella pronouns. I am a graduate assistant at the United Front Multicultural Commons, and I have the pleasure of concluding our time together. Thank you so much for engaging with us. It was nice to see new and returning faces. The fun does not have to stop. I encourage you all to get connected with a student org, faculty, staff, or center during your time at USD. ◊ I will be sending you all a follow-up email with the UFMC upcoming events and our social survey. I would like for you all to fill out the survey and share with us how we can improve Latinx Socials moving forward. ◊ Before we depart, I would also like us to take a group picture. If you would prefer not to have your picture taken feel free to log off now. UFMC Staff: Take group pic

I2: Latinx Social Survey and Results of Spring 2021

Thank you for taking the time to complete a short evaluation of your experience with the Virtual Latinx Social. Your feedback ensures that we can continue to improve the program and provide a better experience for students. The evaluation should take you approximately 2-3 minutes to complete. The information collected is confidential and analyzed in aggregate. Once again, thank you for your participation!

Q1a: Did you attend the Virtual Latinx Social?	Number of Respondents
Yes	22
No. If not, go to 1b.	5
Total responses	**27**

Q1b: If you did not attend, please tell us why.	
If you did not attend, please tell us why.	
I had accidentally double-booked myself	
I had class going on during that time.	
I had a meeting with a professor	
I had class.	
Total responses	**5**

Q2: Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. As a result of participating in the Latinx Social…

Question	Disagree	Number of Responses	Neutral	Number of Responses	Agree	Number of Responses
I feel like I belong at USD.	4.55%	1	13.64%	3	81.8%	18
I met a student/peer who I can connect with.	9.09%	2	13.64%	3	77.3%	17
I met a staff or faculty member who I can connect with.	18.18%	4	13.64%	3	68.2%	15
I feel connected to the USD community.	9.09%	2	0.00%	0	90.9%	20
I feel that the Latino/a/x community is valued at USD.	9.09%	2	22.73%	5	68.2%	15
I feel connected to the Latino/a/x community at USD.	13.64%	3	18.18%	4	68.2%	15
Total responses	**22**					

Q3: Share one or two things that you are dealing with that is impacting your ability to feel connected to USD.	
Remote learning	
Total responses	**1**

Q4: Please tell us how we could make events like the Latinx social better or share any additional thoughts you might have.		
Theme	**Number of Responses**	**Percentage of Respondents**
Event was well-planned	4	25.00%
Make events longer	4	25.00%
More socials and games	3	18.75%
More story sharing about USD	3	18.75%
No suggestions	2	12.50%
Total responses	**16**	

Q5: Share one thing that the United Front Multicultural Commons can do to support you.		
Themes	**Number of Responses**	**Percentage of Respondents**
More Latinx Socials	4	36.36%
Spaces to talk to other Latinx students	3	27.27%
Tutoring	1	9.09%
Financial aid workshop	1	9.09%
Outreach from Latinx staff and faculty	2	18.18%
No suggestions	1	9.09%
Total responses	**11**	

Q6: Which of the following best describes your USD status?		
USD State	**Number of Responses**	**Percentage of Respondents**
New First Year Student	1	7.69%
New Transfer Student	3	23.08%
Returning Student	4	30.77%
Other	5	38.46%
Total responses	**13**	

Q7: If you would like to be entered in a raffle, please provide your USD email.
No data will be disclosed to protect the identities of respondents.

Appendix J: Email templates

J1: Invitation Email to Participate

Hello {{First Name}},

I am contacting you to invite you to participate in a study, Centralizing Latinx Scholars at an Emerging Hispanic-Serving Institution, focusing on centralizing the Latinx/Chicanx/Raza student experience at USD. This study will not exceed 180 minutes of your time which would include one focus group on Monday, 11/9 @ 7 PM, one workshop during intersession, and one social celebration in the Spring. Participants will receive a $20 gift card.

The purpose of my study is to highlight Latinx student experiences, identify existing and desired support resources, and aid student belonging and mattering. If you are interested in participating, please register here. You can also reply to this email with any questions or concerns regarding this study. Thank you for your consideration.

In solidarity,

Valerie Mora and Dra Sanchez

(Contact information)

J2: Reminder to Register for the Latinx Focus Group

Hello {{First Name}},

This is a friendly reminder to register to participate in Centralizing Latinx Voices at an Emerging Hispanic-Serving Institution that focuses on centralizing the Latinx/Chicanx/Raza student experience at USD. This study will not exceed 180 minutes of your time which would include one focus group (60 mins) on Monday, 11/9 @ 7 PM, one workshop (60 mins) during intersession, and one social celebration (60 mins) in the Spring.

Participants in the Latinx Focus Group will receive a $20 eGift card. Thank you for your consideration.

In solidarity,

Valerie Mora and Dra Sanchez

(Contact information)

J3: Latinx Focus Group Expectations and Information Email

Hello {{First Name}},

Thank you for registering to participate in the Latinx Focus Group for tomorrow, Monday, Nov. 9 at 7 PM PST. You should have received a Google calendar invite with the Zoom link. The Zoom invitation is also pasted below for your reference.

COMMUNITY EXPECTATIONS

This focus group will invite participants to explore how their cultural identities have played a role in how they experience USD. I ask for you to attend the focus group with an open mind and heart. We each have a unique understanding of what it means to be a part of this Latinx/Raza/Chicanx community. I hope we can create a space to learn and affirm one another.

E-GIFT CARD DELIVERY

After the focus group, I will use the email you provided on your registration for your $20 eGift card. You should expect to receive it no later than Sunday, 11/15.

ZOOM LINK

Topic: Latinx Focus Group

Time: Nov. 9, 2020 07:00 PM Pacific Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting (link)

Warm Regards,

Valerie Mora

(Contact information)

J4: Latinx Focus Group Follow-up and Cycle Two Invitation Email

Dear {{First Name}},

Thank you for your participation in the Latinx focus group. I sincerely appreciate the vulnerability and respect we were able to foster in our short time together. Please see the next steps below:

BRAINSTORMING

I want to continue the conversation around what things USD can do to better support its Latinx students. If you have any other ideas, comments, or concerns that you would like to bring to my attention, please add them to our Jamboard here or email me directly.

eGIFT CARD

You should be receiving your $20 Target eGift card via your @sandiego.edu email account today.

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

I will be hosting another opportunity, 12/1 @ 1 PM PST, for us to come together to continue exploring your experiences at USD and explore what the Latinx/Raza/Chicanx identity means to you. I will be offering a $10 gift card to participants. Since you have already filled out the consent forms, all you have to do is accept my calendar invite to participate. See attached flyer.

Good luck with finals. I am rooting for you!

Best,

Valerie Mora

(Contact information)

J5: Latinx Social invitation and registration email

Happy Spring Semester {{First Name}},

On behalf of the United Front Multicultural Commons (UFMC), welcome back! We hope the beginning of the new year is off to a good start for you!

We would like to personally invite you to our Virtual Latino/a/x Social on Thurs., Feb. 4th at 1 PM PST. We invite you to register for the social to meet other Latino/a/x students, staff, and faculty as well as allies that can help support you on your USD journey. The event will be fun, informal, and full of opportunities to meet new faces. Please register for the Latinx Social here or at tinyurl.com/Latinx21.

I have also attached our Latinx Social flyer for your reference. We hope to see you there!

Warm regards,

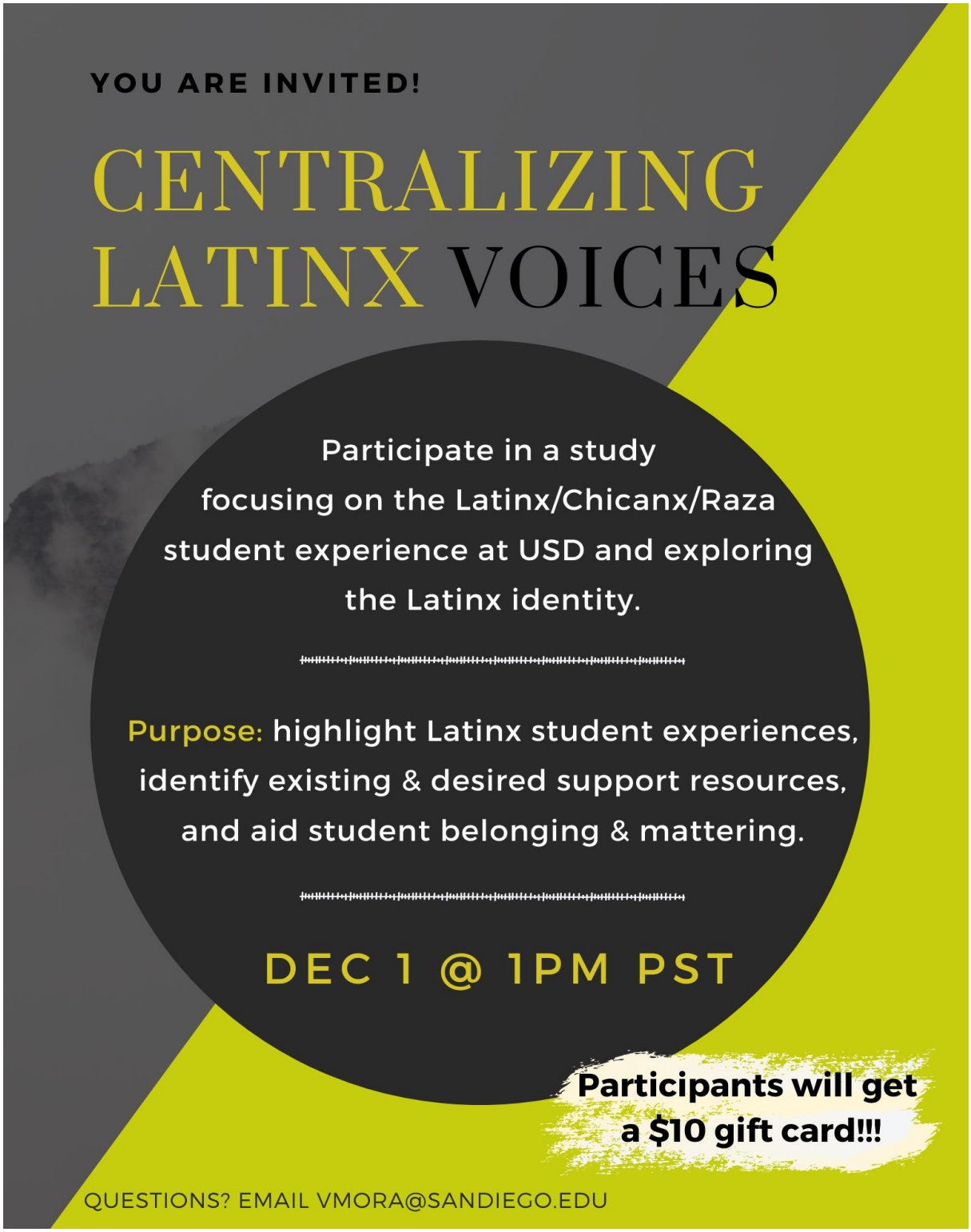
UFMC Team

(Contact information)

Appendix L: Flyers

K1: Cycle One Marketing Flyer

K2: Cycle Two Marketing Flyer



K3: Cycle Three Marketing Flyer

Appendix L: Consent Form

University of San Diego
Institutional Review Board
Research Participant Consent Form

For the research study entitled:
Para la Comunidad: Centralizing Latinx Scholars at an Emerging Hispanic-Serving Institution

I. Purpose of the research study

Valerie Mora is a student in the School of Leadership Studies and Education at the University of San Diego. You are invited to participate in a research study he/she is conducting. The purpose of this research study is to inform USD administration of areas of improvement of support services and resources for Latinx students.

II. What you will be asked to do

If you decide to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Complete two questionnaires that ask you questions about your age, ethnicity, income, year you are in school and your experience at USD as a Latinx/Chicanx/Raza student.
- Participate in a focus group discussion about how your Latinx/Chicanx/Raza social identity has shaped your experience at USD and what USD can do to support you in your academic journey.
- Keep a record through journaling, private debriefs or videos of your thoughts and feelings throughout this research.
- Optional: Participate in reunion de comunidad to create space for participants to share their narratives, heal and inspire.

You will be audio recorded during this interview. Your participation in this study will take a total of 360 minutes.

III. Foreseeable risks or discomforts

Sometimes when people are asked to think about their feelings, they feel sad or anxious. If you would like to talk to someone about your feelings at any time, you can call toll-free, 24 hours a day: San Diego Mental Health Hotline at 1-800-479-3339

IV. Benefits

While there may be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study, the indirect benefit of participating will be knowing that you helped researchers better understand how USD can better support Latinx students by centralizing their voices and not assumptions about the community.

V. Confidentiality

Any information provided and/or identifying records will remain confidential and kept in a locked file and/or password-protected computer file in the researcher's office for a minimum of five years. All data collected from you will be coded with a number or pseudonym (fake name). Your real name will not be used. The results of this research project may be made public, and information quoted in professional journals and meetings, but information from this study will only be reported as a group, and not individually.

The information or materials you provide will be cleansed of all identifiers (like your name) and **may** be used in future research.

VI. Compensation

If you participate in the study, the researcher will give you a gift card in the following way: email. You will receive this compensation even if you decide not to complete the entire focus group and workshop.

VII. Voluntary Nature of this Research

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You do not have to do this, and you can refuse to answer any question or quit at any time. Deciding not to participate or not answering any of the questions will have no effect on any benefits you are entitled to, like your health care, or your employment or grades. **You can withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.**

VIII. Contact Information

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact either:

1) Valerie Mora
Email: vmora@sandiego.edu
Phone: (760) 518-8326

2) Dr. Nydia Sanchez
Email: nydiasanchez@sandiego.edu
Phone: (619) 260-8839

I have read and understand this form, and consent to the research it describes to me. I have received a copy of this consent form for my records.

Signature of Participant Date

Name of Participant (**Printed**)

Signature of Investigator Date