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**First-Generation Latina *Testimonios*: Navigating a Predominantly White Institution and
Achieving Academic Success**

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Prepared for the Degree of
Masters of Arts in Higher Education Leadership

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Abstract

The purpose of my research was to understand the experiences of Latina first-generation college students at the University of San Diego, a predominantly White institution. Six Latinas participated in a series of group *platicas* to share *testimonios* with one another and build community. One research question that guided this study was: “How can the self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and academic achievement of first-generation Latina students be enhanced in a predominantly White institution?” Findings suggested participants’ negative experiences with faculty and White classmates impacted their sense of belonging and academic self-efficacy. Most participants worried how they will continue to finance college and struggled to find academic and financial resources. Recommendations include having a physical space first-generation students can access and find resources, additional cultural sensitivity training for students, and mentorship training for faculty advisors.

Keywords: first-generation, Latina, mentorship, sense of belonging, self-efficacy

First-Generation Latina *Testimonios*: Navigating a Predominantly White Institution and Achieving Academic Success

My topic is how first-generation Latina students at a predominantly White institution (PWI) can be supported through their higher education journey by examining and enhancing their self-efficacy, academic achievement, and sense of belonging. My research questions included: “How can I enhance the self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and academic success among first-generation Latina college students at University of San Diego (USD), a predominantly White institution?” and “What factors contribute most to the overall success of first-generation Latina students in college?”

This subject is close to me because I identify as a first-generation Latina student. I understand and have experienced the challenges many first-generation students have faced throughout their educational journeys in K-12 and university settings. I have had a nontraditional journey in higher education, from not thinking I would ever attend college to attending community college for 6 years after high school and eventually transferring to a 4-year university. My experiences thus far, largely in high school and university settings, have influenced many of the values I hold today. Oftentimes, first-generation college students like me do not go into college having access to resources or even a support system. I think about this a lot and the two values that come up for me are equity and empathy. Given students have different starting points and experiences that may either give us a late start or an advantage, I do not believe every student should be given the same opportunities and resources but rather a student’s individual needs should be met. I also believe higher education professionals should be empathetic toward the experiences students have faced, given higher education professionals may not know how these experiences have impacted their academic achievement. I think when

equity and empathy are considered, a holistic approach to student support can ensure the academic achievement, sense of belonging, and self-efficacy of students. The aim of my study was to show how students' sense of belonging and self-efficacy can play a role and have a positive impact on their academic achievement.

Background

What I currently understand about the experience of first-generation Latina college students is based on my own experience as a first-generation Latina student. Because I did not attend a PWI during my undergraduate studies, my experience is somewhat different than that of the students with whom I worked in my research. Themes of sense of belonging and self-efficacy came up for me throughout my educational journey. DeFreitas and Bravo (2012) aimed to prove there was a correlation between faculty-student involvement and mentoring in increasing levels of self-efficacy in Latino and African American college students and predicting academic achievement. Self-efficacy refers to the belief that one's own perceived capabilities for learning and performing can influence motivation and personal accomplishment. DeFreitas and Bravo (2012) discussed Bandura's self-efficacy theory and the sources of self-efficacy, including vicarious learning and modeling, oftentimes present in faculty-student and mentoring relationships. Surprisingly, only involvement with faculty had a significant relation to student GPA. This meant mentorship alone did not predict higher levels of academic achievement. Understanding mentorship, along with other factors, can increase self-efficacy and thus improve academic achievement makes it important to discover what other factors contribute to the success of college students.

Holloway-Friesen's (2021) more recent study was related to the sense of belonging and academic self-efficacy of Hispanic graduate students. Her study hypothesized graduate Hispanic

students with a mentor had greater levels of self-efficacy and sense of belonging than nonmentored students, and Hispanic students mentored in graduate school with a high sense of belonging would demonstrate greater levels of academic self-efficacy. The study found Hispanic graduate students who were mentored were more involved in the classroom setting were more likely to reach out to faculty for help. The participants felt supported by their peers and showed higher levels of academic self-efficacy than their nonmentored peers. They felt more comfortable in the classroom, which also contributed to higher academic self-efficacy and showed how sense of belonging can positively impact the student experience (Holloway-Friesen, 2021).

Themes such as self-efficacy, mentorship, and sense of belonging came up in the research as factors contributing to student success. In addition, cultural factors for Latina students need to be understood to best support Latina students and their unique needs as they balance school and familial responsibilities and norms. Sy and Romero's (2008) study explored the impact of Latina college students' dealing with family responsibilities. They emphasized how family responsibilities or obligations affect the students' college experiences and discussed ways to increase college enrollment and retention rates of first-generation Latina college students. With their explanation of the importance of familial responsibilities and their priority in the cultural and familial dynamic, Sy and Romero's (2008) study highlighted that Latinos require an individual family member to put the needs of the family first, even if it sometimes requires making personal sacrifices. These sacrifices can also include balancing additional responsibilities and expectations as Latinas enter college. These additional responsibilities can cause lower academic performance, increased stress, and continued lower college success rates.

Interestingly, research has found students with a higher academic rank in high school had a stronger sense of belonging once in college (Carales & Nora, 2020). This data point created

more questions for me regarding how students with lower academic ranks in high school should be supported in their transition to higher education so they feel a stronger sense of belonging. The research found students who faced financial worries or received higher financial aid assistance reported lower levels of sense of belonging. Students who had validating and mentoring experiences in college shared a higher sense of belonging (Carales & Nora, 2020). It seems that if Latina students, especially those with lower academic high school ranks, have fewer financial worries and someone they consider a mentor while they are in college they may feel a stronger sense of belonging. Knowing that levels of self-efficacy can influence sense of belonging and both factors contribute to student success and academic achievement, it is important to find ways to enhance the self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and academic achievement of Latina students to ensure students thrive during their higher education journey.

Literature Review

My interest in studying the Latina first-generation student higher education experience stemmed from my own experience navigating higher education as a first-generation Latina and wanting to look at how Latina first-generation students can be best supported to enroll in and graduate from college. What has been striking to me is the number of Latina/o students entering and graduating from college, given the amount of Latina/o students enrolled in public schools. According to the Pew Hispanic Center, from 1990 to 2006 the number of Latina/o students in U.S. public schools doubled (Fry, as cited in Salas et al., 2014). Current Latina/o college graduation rates are not lining up with public school enrollment numbers. According to the U.S. Department of Education, Latina/o students have lower graduation rates compared to other groups (Salas et al., 2014). The purpose of my research was to explore the ways Latina first-generation undergraduate students can be supported in college so they remain enrolled and

graduate. More than just getting by, I wanted to look at the factors contributing to this population's thriving in college. To me, thriving means these students have on-campus support networks, feel represented, feel like a part of their campus community, believe in their ability to succeed, and are performing well academically.

Cultural Factors and Latina Spaces

Stereotypes have labeled Latina/o students as lazy or not caring enough about their education. There is also a misconception Latina/o parents do not care about their students' education, which could not be further from the truth. Goldsmith and Kurpius (2018) discussed the findings from a study they conducted with a group of 11 Mexican immigrant parents of high school students at a selective private college preparatory high school. All parents had their children attend this high school through a scholarship from a privately funded nonprofit. The study sought to find out how this group of Mexican immigrant parents supported the academic achievement of their children through their cultural norms and values. The parents expressed they supported their children's academic success through storytelling and giving advice and talking to their children about what they had to endure as kids and how their children would have better opportunities by doing well in school. The fathers who took part in the study mentioned supporting their children's academic success through their actions, such as doing manual labor in front of their children to show what kind of work might be available to them if they did not pursue their education (Goldsmith & Kurpius, 2018). A common theme with parents is they considered providing their children with basic necessities as supporting their academic success.

Kiyama (2018) acknowledged Latina students have different needs when it comes to their academic success, given their different roles and responsibilities. Kiyama's research included a collective *testimonio* to higher education professionals, in which her research participants shared

what they would like higher education professionals to know about working with first-generation Latinas in higher education spaces. The participants in the study wanted higher education professionals to know they want to be seen beyond stereotypes because they all have different experiences. Participants also wanted higher education professionals to know it is important to them their educational success serves as an example to other Latina/os of what is possible and what opportunities are open to them. They also wanted to share they value their education despite the challenges they have faced and they have used their agency to make informed decisions about their educational future (Kiyama, 2018). Recommendations for higher education institutions and college administrators included learning from available research and serving Latina/o students in an inclusive and culturally relevant way by creating safe spaces welcoming of marginalized students, such as Latina-based clubs and organizations and courses that validate the educational experiences of Latinas (Kiyama, 2018).

In a different study, Kiyama et al. (2015) explained the importance of creating spaces to find cultural familiarity, conducting multifaceted approaches to cultural relevance, providing opportunities to give back to cultural communities, understanding cultural validation, and conducting cultural assessment with the college community. Their research sought to address the racial disparity Latina/o students face in the college landscape. During the study, Museus implemented the Culturally Engaging Campus Environments model (CECE) he constructed in an earlier study (Museus, as cited in Kiyama et al., 2015). The CECE model was used for understanding, assessing, and fostering campus environments reflecting the Latina/o communities. The purpose of the model highlighted the importance of making these college campuses culturally engaging, which creates a more positive outcome for these cultural communities (Kiyama et al., 2015).

Montelongo's (2019) study on the cultural factors impacting Latina/o students' success at PWIs highlighted additional methods for supporting the academic achievement of Latina/o students. The study included ways of improving the socialization of Latina/o students and examining the bicultural socialization of individual students through the implementation of campus cultural centers. Montelongo (2019) also examined how student involvement at institutions played an integral role in the success of Latina/o students by assessing their participation within Latina/o organizations, and how faculty and familial responsibilities also played a role in their educational endeavors. This study investigated how Latina/o students experienced a positive impact on their academic achievement when they had connections with faculty, validation from peer groups, and familial associations. Montelongo (2019) suggested educational leaders and college campuses could gain more knowledge on the socialization process by establishing visible areas of cultural support and expression such as campus cultural centers and Latina/o student organizations. Montelongo (2019) analyzed the essential template of success for Latina/o students and how a focus on negative attributes developed a culture of perceived failure. Implementing positive terminology in describing Latina/o student educational attainment can ensure a proactive approach to student success and create an effective academic culture (Montelongo, 2019).

Flores and Garcia (2009) discussed the need for a "Latina space" at the PWI where they both worked. They formed a group at the University of Utah called Latinas Telling *Testimonios* (LTT), in which Latina-identifying students would gather to discuss their experiences and stories to build community. Students' self-reflections of their first year in the LTT group noted they felt part of a safe space, free from judgment, connected to each other, and like they were at home with family (Flores & Garcia, 2009). Although the participants enjoyed being surrounded by

women from similar backgrounds and sharing their experiences, Flores and Garcia (2009) stressed the importance of addressing challenges within the group to fight against internalized oppression while preserving the safe space.

Cerezo and Chang (2013) explored the impact of cultural congruity, ethnic identity, and connection to ethnic minority peers on predicting Latina/o academic achievement. Cultural congruity pertains to students' personal and cultural values and how students see those values fitting in with the values of their university (Cerezo & Chang, 2013). The results of this study indicated the connection between relationships with ethnic minority peers and cultural congruity as a high predictor of college GPA. Ethnic identity was not a high predictor of students' college GPA, as originally anticipated. Cerezo and Chang believed this could be because other factors not measured in their study may have contributed to students' feeling a "cultural fit" with their university that became more important than ethnic identity. The factors not measured were support system factors, such as mentorship and family support (Cerezo & Chang, 2013). Their research highlighted different approaches to supporting the academic achievement of Latina/o students at a PWI through students' connection with ethnic minority peers and cultural fit. These approaches are factors that can influence a student's sense of belonging and predict their academic achievement.

Sense of Belonging

In addition to academic achievement, sense of belonging is also a very important contributing factor in the success of Latina students. Lee's (2021) research analyzed academic, social, and cultural sense of belonging for women of color at University of San Diego, a PWI. She examined external issues that may affect sense of belonging, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement, which had greatly influenced campus life and

sense of belonging of the college community. Lee highlighted the important role academic professors played as critical surveyors of academic sense of belonging. She argued the establishment of more inclusive and cultural clubs are an essential element (Lee, 2021).

Carales' and Nora's (2020) research aimed to find predictors of Latina/o sense of belonging at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). Five major themes pulled from the quantitative data analysis included: the importance of financial aid, the positive influence of psychosocial experiences on campus, the negative effect of racially-driven attitudes and beliefs, prior high school academic performance, and changes in a student's life (Carales & Nora, 2020). Students who faced financial worries or received higher financial aid assistance reported lower levels of sense of belonging. Students who had validating and mentoring experiences in college had a higher sense of belonging among the participants. Something else that contributed to a higher sense of belonging was interacting with peers from different racial/ethnic backgrounds and learning about their cultures and experiences. Interestingly, students who held a higher academic rank in high school had a stronger sense of belonging once in college (Carales & Nora, 2020). This data point created more questions about how students with lower academic ranks in high school should be supported in their transition to higher education. Lastly, students with higher levels of stress and anxiety due to the major life change of entering college felt less of a sense of belonging at their institution.

Mentorship and Self-Efficacy

Holloway-Friesen's (2021) research was a more recent study on the sense of belonging and academic self-efficacy of Hispanic graduate students, of which minimal research currently exists. She hypothesized graduate Hispanic students with a mentor had greater levels of self-efficacy and sense of belonging than nonmentored students, and Hispanic students mentored in

graduate school with a high sense of belonging would have greater levels of academic self-efficacy. The theoretical framework Holloway-Friesen used for this study was Bandura's self-efficacy theory, which describes someone's beliefs in their abilities to complete academic tasks. The study found Hispanic graduate students who were mentored were more involved in the classroom setting and more likely to reach out to faculty for help. The participants felt supported by their peers and showed higher levels of academic self-efficacy than their nonmentored peers. They felt more comfortable in the classroom, which contributed to higher academic self-efficacy and showed how a sense of belonging can positively impact the student experience (Holloway-Friesen, 2021). This study demonstrated one way mentoring and a sense of belonging are strong indicators of the academic self-efficacy of Latina/o students.

Majer's (2009) research looked at the correlation between the self-efficacy of first-generation college students and their academic success. Majer's study included 96 urban community college students of various social and demographic backgrounds. In this study, students were given the Beliefs in Education Success Test (BEST) every 4 months for 1 year to determine their self-efficacy in 10 hypothetical situations. The BEST is based on Bandura's self-efficacy theory, which is the belief one's perceived capabilities for learning and performing can influence motivation and personal accomplishment (Majer, 2009). The study concluded students with higher levels of self-efficacy had better educational outcomes than other study participants.

DeFreitas and Bravo (2012) aimed to prove a correlation between faculty-student involvement and mentoring in predicting academic achievement and increasing levels of self-efficacy in Latino and African American college students. DeFreitas and Bravo (2012) discussed Bandura's self-efficacy theory and sources of self-efficacy, including vicarious learning and modeling, which is oftentimes present in faculty-student and mentoring relationships.

Surprisingly, only involvement with faculty had a significant relation to student GPA, which meant mentorship alone did not predict higher levels of academic achievement.

Castellanos et al. (2016) studied how cultural fit and mentoring support of racial and ethnic minority (REM) students predicted their college and life satisfaction. They sought to find how mentorship influenced overall satisfaction of REM students at two universities of different sizes and different REM student populations. Their research examined how mentoring relationships of 238 REM students in the university environment increased positive satisfaction and improved student life in the university context. This study cited previous research indicating higher levels of cultural congruity among college students leads to higher social support and self-esteem (Castellanos et al., 2016). In this particular study, the authors found mentors increase the cultural fit and college and life satisfaction of racial and ethnic minority students, and mentoring has an influential role in student development (Castellanos et al., 2016).

Finances

Bello's (2018) action research study looked at the experiences of six first-generation Latina/o college students who were part of the Puente Project at Southwestern Community College. The Puente Project helps low-income, first-generation community college students transfer successfully to a 4-year university by providing them with mentors, counselors, tutoring and other helpful resources. In the study, most students indicated they could use more financial support from their family; one student, who is a single parent, indicated she would like more emotional support from her family. The biggest worries for these students in terms of their academic success were finances and time management.

In addition to financial worries, Latina first-generation students also have to juggle familial responsibilities. Sy and Romero's (2008) study on the responsibilities of Latina college students and how they affect their college experiences discussed ways to increase college enrollment and retention rates of first-generation Latina college students. By explaining the importance of familial responsibilities and their priority in the cultural familial dynamic, their study highlighted how Latinos in general require an individual family member to put the needs of their family first, even if it requires making personal sacrifices such as balancing additional responsibilities and expectations as they enter college. These additional responsibilities can cause lower academic performance, increased stress, and continued lower college success rates for Latinas. For many Latinas, college is a way to remain committed to family needs by relieving financial burden, increasing their social capital, and obtaining opportunities for upward mobility (Sy & Romero, 2008). This study detailed how college retention and enrollment of Latina students can be improved by having higher education practitioners understand what promotes or hinders Latina students' abilities and how higher education practitioners can better understand the multiple roles they balance.

Context

My research study took place at the University of San Diego (USD), a private Catholic PWI. I worked with students who were part of USD's undergraduate first-generation Latina student population. My current connection to USD is as a graduate student and a counselor at the One Stop Student Center. My role as an USD employee allowed me to meet with students daily as they navigated the financial aid, registration, and billing process. Due to the nature of this work, students only come in on an as-needed basis, which made recruiting students for my research based on a specific set of criteria more difficult. In my role as a One Stop counselor, I

come into contact with many of the first-generation and minority students at USD. Through my role, I have seen many of the academic and financial challenges these students face as they juggle being a student with the many other identities they hold. Through these one-on-one interactions, students have shared with me anything from the difficulty adjusting to a PWI to the stress of thinking about how they will continue to afford tuition. As I am a first-generation Latina college student who has struggled with feelings of belonging and self-doubt at the universities I have attended, I felt these topics were important to explore to ensure the academic success of first-generation Latina students at USD.

Project Rationale

My interest in taking a closer look at how first-generation Latina students experience higher education was through self-reflection. I thought a lot about why I wanted to complete the master's in higher education program at USD in the first place. My reasons for doing so dealt with the constant self-doubt and frustration I felt while navigating college. Much of that time I focused on my weakness, but sometimes I thought about the community I wish I had in college, the mentors I wish I had, and the systems I wished someone taught me how to navigate. If I felt this way as someone who attended an HSI as an undergraduate, I could only imagine how first-generation Latinas at USD, a PWI, felt as they tried to navigate their higher education journeys. As a graduate student at USD, I also hold this perspective as a first-generation Latina student at a PWI. As a graduate student at USD, I have experienced many of the same feelings I felt as an undergraduate and have spoken with peers from first-generation Latina backgrounds who feel similarly. Although USD has a multicultural center on campus for Latina-identifying students and students from other backgrounds, there is much room for improvement in how USD supports its first-generation Latina students. Much of the literature I read stressed the importance sense of

belonging, self-efficacy, and mentorship play in a student's overall success, including academic achievement.

Research Design

Because my research focused on the experiences and stories of Latina students, I wanted to use an action research method that allowed me to make changes based on my observations and the new information I anticipated learning from these students. The action research method I chose to use for my research is Koshy's (2005) plan-act-observe-reflect cycle. Figure 1 reflects how this plan-act-observe-reflect cycle influenced the three cycles of my research project's data collection process. Because my research looked at sense of belonging, self-efficacy, mentorship, and other components that contribute to academic success, I wanted to have the flexibility to collect and analyze both questionnaire and focus group responses. These are very different methods of collecting data yet I feel they are equally important. Although surveys allowed the opportunity to collect straightforward data based on the questions asked, they also informed the focus group sessions that followed. A plan-act-observe-reflect cycle can be applied to all data collection methods.

Figure 1

Koshy's (2005) Plan-Act-Observe-Reflect Cycle



Note. From *An Introduction to Action Research*, by Interaction Design Foundation, 2016. (<https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/article/an-introduction-to-action-research>). Copyright 2016 by Interaction Design Foundation.

A critical component of the focus group discussions were the *testimonios*. *Testimonios* are first-person testimonial narratives meant to raise consciousness (Beverly, as cited in Kiyama, 2018). They are more than just sharing experiences but sharing injustices that have been faced. Through these *testimonios*, I learned how first-generation Latina students felt they have been let down by the PWI they attend and where there is room for improvement. It was also an opportunity to understand their sense of belonging, self-efficacy, and other feelings, as well as the support services that have contributed to their academic success.

Action research was relevant to my specific research questions because to answer these questions I, as a member of the USD community, worked with members of the USD student population who were affected to come up with recommendations that may address the challenges

the students face. I believe it would make the most sense for higher education administrators to create policies impacting this student population by hearing first-hand from these students their struggles and where they require additional support. Although higher education institutions make decisions impacting students without first seeking student input, I believe the best way to meet the needs of these students is by working directly with them to understand their challenges and needs to create policies that promote their overall success. My research sought direct input from first-generation Latina students at a PWI by allowing them a safe space to not only share their stories and *testimonios* but find community on campus as well.

Data Collection

My research study included three cycles composed of one questionnaire and three focus groups *platicas*. These cycles were based on Koshy's (2005) plan-act-observe-reflect cycle. The purpose of these cycles was to not only gather data for my research, but also provide a safe space where students could have a support network and share their challenges navigating a PWI as first-generation Latina students. This study included six participants, all USD undergraduate students who identified as Latina and as first-generation college students. I decided to focus on undergraduate students only because of the large undergraduate student body at USD, compared to the graduate student body. I also took the difference in experiences between undergraduate and graduate students into consideration. As far as inviting participation, I provided my contact information to students via an informational flyer (see Appendix A) and an email with information about the research study (see Appendix B). Interested students were fully informed on the reasons for the research study and what it would entail. They were also asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix C) to ensure they were willing participants in the research study. I was as transparent as possible with the participants about every step of the research process.

Of the six participants, five were first-year students. The sixth student transferred to USD from community college and is a senior in terms of credits earned. All six participants live on-campus. Two of the six students were from out of state while the remaining four were from different parts of San Diego County, including one student who attended school in San Diego her entire life but lives across the San Diego border in the city of Tijuana, Mexico. Due to not being able to find a time that worked for all participants, participants were split into two groups of three. Both groups met for the focus group portion of the study, called Group *Platicas*, at USD on different days and times. For purposes of confidentiality, I gave all participants pseudonyms. They will be referenced throughout this paper by these chosen pseudonyms.

I recruited students for my research study by partnering with the Commuter Commons and the One Stop Student Center at USD. I collaborated with the Commuter Commons office by asking them to publish the details of my study and a flyer with information regarding my study in their newsletter to help me recruit Latina first-generation undergraduate students. The flyer included detailed information regarding the study and explained the time commitment. Interested students reached out to me via email and completed a short survey to see what dates and times worked best for our meetings. Lastly, I shared the research opportunity by posting flyers in my work area. As someone who interacts with students daily with regard to financial aid, billing, and registration, I found I was able to find a few eligible students interested in taking part in the study through those daily interactions.

Once I had recruited participants for my research, my objective was to have the participants engage with each other through a series of *platicas* in which students shared their *testimonios*. *Testimonios* in this context refers to the students sharing their experiences related to navigating being a first-generation Latina student at a PWI and the challenges (if any) it has

created. Due to the varied availability of the six student participants, they were split into two groups of three that met on different dates and times. Participants were aware there were two separate groups in the study but were not aware of what individuals made up the other group. The groups met three times throughout the spring semester for up to 1.5 hours for each meeting. Most of the data collected in this study was from the *testimonios* shared by the participants. Additionally, students completed a demographic questionnaire at the start of the first cycle to collect information on their background. A portion of the questionnaire also included questions from the General Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) to gauge respondents' beliefs in their abilities to be successful as a way to determine their levels of self-efficacy. The General Self-Efficacy Scale questions were given to students at the beginning of the study, during the first cycle.

Description of Cycle 1

In the first cycle, students completed a questionnaire (see Appendix D) and participated in the first group *platica*, in which they were asked questions about their mentorship experiences. The purpose of the group *platicas* was to have participants share their personal stories, or *testimonios*, on a different topic at each meeting (see Appendix E for questions). Topics were determined based on research reflecting their connection to the academic success of first-generation and Latina students. It would also be a safe space for the participants to build community and learn about different on-campus resources. The time allotted to complete both the questionnaire and the first group *platica* was 1.5 hours. The questionnaire I provided the participants included demographic questions and questions about mentorship experiences before and during the participant's time at USD. The questionnaire also contained questions from the General Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) to gauge respondents' beliefs in

their abilities to be successful as a way to determine their levels of self-efficacy at the start of the research study. After participants completed and turned in their questionnaires, students formed a circle using the chairs provided in the center of the space. As I asked questions to the group, participants took turns responding. Six participants took part in Cycle 1. Due to everyone's varied schedules, the group could not all meet together at the same time, so I separated the group into two groups of three based on their availability and which group meeting day and time would work for their schedule. Daisy, Marisa, and Maria took part in Group A, and Christina, Amy, and Norma took part in Group B.

After the group *platicas*, I went through the demographic questions on the questionnaires to learn more about the participants. I also scored the second part of the questionnaire, which contained the GSE questions. I reviewed the results of their GSE scores and compared them with what was shared in the first group *platica* to see what connections could be made. I also pulled relevant information and quotes from the group *platica* to uncover themes being addressed.

Cycle 1: Results and Findings

The questionnaire included in Appendix D contains questions answered by students in relation to financial aid, mentorship, self-efficacy, and work outside of school. These questions were important to ask as the research has suggested that the academic success of Latina/o students is impacted by many of these factors. Some relevant highlights from the questionnaire responses are included in Table 1.

Table 1

Table for Questionnaire Responses - First Part

Participant	Group A or Group B	Works 10+ Hours per Week	Utilizing Student Loans	Financial Help from Family	Mentor/Mentorship Program Involvement at USD	Mentor/Mentorship Program Involvement Prior to USD
Marisa	Group A	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Daisy	Group A	No	No	N/A	No	No
Maria	Group A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Amy	Group B	No	No	Yes	No	No
Christina	Group B	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Norma	Group B	No	No	No	Yes	Yes

Some key takeaways from the first part of the questionnaire were that a majority of respondents did not consider themselves having a mentor or being part of a mentorship program prior to beginning their studies at USD, and there was little increase in participation in mentorship programs after the participants transitioned to USD. But from what you'll see in the first group *platica* in Cycle #1, many of these questions were expanded on and students were able to give more accurate responses as we discussed mentorship in greater detail.

The second part of the questionnaire contained questions from the General Self-efficacy Scale. The General Self-efficacy Scale was developed by Matthias Jerusalem and Ralf Schwarzer to gauge levels of general self-efficacy to project one's coping abilities to a variety of struggles after experiencing stressful life events (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). All ten questions from this General Self-efficacy Scale were included in the second part of the

questionnaire that participants completed. The General Self-efficacy Scale was created based on self-efficacy theory. Self-efficacy is described as the belief of one's ability to reach specific goals and was developed by psychologist Albert Bandura. Different sources of self-efficacy include verbal persuasion and vicarious learning or modeling, which can be impacted by mentoring and involvement with faculty (Bandura, as cited in Majer, 2009). Respondents were asked to answer the questions considering their college experience, specifically their academics. The questionnaire included a likert scale ranging from 1 to 4 with the options being 'Not at all true, Hardly True, Moderately True, and Exactly True'. In Table 2, when respondents' answers to the ten General Self-efficacy Scale questions were scored, four of the six respondents received 80% or above in general self-efficacy. This was important information as we got into the group *platicas* portion of the research study and discussed topics like mentorship and academic challenges in greater depth.

Table 2

Table for Participant General Self-efficacy Scale (GSE) Results

Participant	Undergraduate Standing	General Self-efficacy Scale Score (out of 40)	Score in Percentage	Self-reported Being on Academic Probation
Christina	First-Year	34	85%	No
Daisy	First-Year	38	95%	No
Marisa	Transfer	30	75%	Yes
Maria	First-Year	24-27	60%-67.5%*	Yes
Amy	First-Year	34	85%	No
Norma	First-Year	32	80%	No

Note. *Participant left a question blank which resulted in a variation in score based on how the question may have been answered, from lowest score possible to highest.

Marisa, Daisy, and Maria participated in the group *platica* within Cycle #1. Amy, Norma, and Christina participated in a separate group *platica*, and there were some different themes that emerged from their time together. Discussion questions in the group *platicas* covered student's knowledge of mentorship relationships and their experiences with mentors while attending USD as well as prior to attending USD. Students were also asked to reflect on their current experience at USD. In regard to mentorship experiences, several themes emerged: family as mentors, student experiences with advisors and professors, and participation in university mentorship programs. For example, Maria, Daisy, and Norma shared that they were a part of the Student Support Services program at USD and Christina and Marisa expressed interest in joining. The Student Support Services program (SSS) offers services to their members such as academic advising, financial aid assistance, tutoring, access to a computer lab with free printing, and social and cultural activities. Students who are eligible to be part of SSS are first-generation, low-income, underrepresented, and/or students who have documented disabilities. Maria and Norma expressed that they felt that they received many benefits from being a part of SSS, while Daisy felt like she dealt with things more independently and only visited SSS when she was obligated. Daisy shared,

I've never been the type to rely on anybody for mentoring or like role models and things like that. It's mostly like, I can do the things that I want to do. And like, if I have certain deadlines, or like things that I'm confused about, I'll try and figure it out.

Marisa shared that she didn't know much about mentor/mentorship programs at all, stating that:

I didn't even know about mentors. Honestly, I figured that out recently, I was like, I would have liked to know that there were all those opportunities. I was just like, just winging college. Like, I would have liked to have help to understand, like, financial aid. I had to figure it out myself and it'd be so hard with my mom and across the country to translate in English to her all the paperwork, I don't even know what it means. So, I know they, like, offer that help here.

In relation to the second theme mentioned, student experiences with advisors and professors, participants shared apprehension about talking to their professors when discussing their experience at USD. Either because of previous negative experiences with faculty or fear of judgment from them. Marisa shared,

I felt like some of them just didn't feel like they wanted to help you. Just with like, telling you, you're not doing well, like, they would recommend us to just drop the class. And so, I would drop it because I did not feel like they ever really cared for the person I was, like, my wellbeing or anything, they just assumed, like, I just didn't care. But like, there would be other stuff happening.

Maria shared about her fear of asking professors for help because they might think she's not smart. It's evident that even though the conversation was centered more on mentorship during this cycle, issues such as finances and juggling school and work came up. Marisa and Maria shared about the stressors of trying to do well in school while also working. For example, Marisa said,

Last year, in the spring when I was living off campus, the reason I was put on academic probation that semester was because one of my professors, she was the one who told me to, oh, you're not doing well, you should withdraw. So, I did withdraw. And then I just

had three classes. And as I was part time I was working and paying my rent, it was a lot so I was trying to get money. And also, it was stressful.

Maria added,

I didn't go to office hours last semester and like, want to go, I was put on academic probation. So um, yeah, I'm definitely trying to switch the way that I did things last semester, but it's still hard because like, I'm just doing so much. And so, I feel like I don't have enough time to go out of my way to go see my professors. But yeah, I work too and it takes so much time away from what I could be doing, like, go see the teacher or like, get ahead of my studies.

From the General Self-efficacy Scale (GSE) results in Table 2, both Marisa and Maria scored lowest in general self-efficacy than the rest of the participants who took the questionnaire. Marisa scored 75% while Maria scored between 60%-67.5%. The reason Maria's score is listed as a range is because one of her questions was left blank, so depending on the answer to that question she would have scored a 60% at the lowest but a 67.5% at the highest. With the variation in their scores, I considered whether Maria's lower score was impacted by her being a first-year student at USD while Marisa was a transfer student. I considered whether Marisa's additional time spent in higher education between community college and USD had helped to increase her self-efficacy at some point since she began college. Of the four participants with general self-efficacy scores over 80%, I noticed a trend in their responses when the topic of academics came up. Norma, Daisy, and Amy expressed having very minimal to no academic challenges during their time at USD. Christina shared that she struggled a lot with one of her classes during the Fall semester but eventually passed with a C. Even with her busy schedule and

multiple jobs, what she shared seemed to indicate that she is able to juggle her many competing responsibilities well.

The theme of family was present among group B, as they considered family members their biggest mentors prior to attending USD. Even if family members were unfamiliar with many of the processes for applying to college or applying for financial aid, participants expressed just their support alone was helpful as they navigated through how they would get to college. Christina shared, “I can consider my mom as one of my mentors, because she learned so much from my sister going through school. So, both my sister and my mom were very helpful, especially because my mom learned how to do everything but FAFSA. But I’m so grateful”. Amy added about her experience getting help from her older brother stating, “I consider my brother my mentor since he went to school here [at USD]. So, any questions I would just show him my laptop like, ‘what did you put for this?’ Even now. For FAFSA I just take a little snippet of my screen like ‘hey, what did you put for this?’” After listening to Christina and Amy talk about their experiences getting help from their families and older siblings, as the oldest sibling in her family Norma shared:

I feel like being in college, there’s a lot of pressure on myself, because I am the oldest. I love hearing about other people’s experiences and having older siblings, but then that almost makes you realize like, that’s me. So, it’s a lot. I mean, both being the youngest or the middle or every position like the family hierarchy has a role is a lot of pressure in and of itself.

Norma also added that she was part of a college readiness program called AVID in high school that helped her get feedback on college essays, apply for scholarships, and gave her advice on college financial aid and looking at the financial aid award package. When participants

discussed mentors and mentorship programs they were a part of while at USD, Christina brought up her current role at the One Stop Student Center at USD as a federal work study employee. She said, "I don't think I'd find myself looking for a mentor just because I have the counselors [at the One Stop Student Center], I can go to them about literally anything; schedules, classes, grades. So there's that and then I am planning on joining SSS." Amy shared that she sees the prehealth advisor at USD as someone that she can always go to when she needs advice or has any questions and considers this relationship one of the mentorship relationships she has at USD. Norma shared that she is part of SSS, University Ministry Scholars, and also has the academic advisors within the School of Business (her intended major) available to her. With all of the mentorship programs and experiences she was exposed to while in high school, Norma shared that she actively looks for opportunities as a college student where she can connect to others. She stated:

I was the first to fill out the FAFSA alone. That's why I feel like I seek out those mentors. And I did that in high school because of the fact that there wasn't anyone else that had done it before me because you're the first one to do it, like ever. So, overall, like academic success, I feel like I've done a pretty good job at just putting myself where I need to be and kind of trying to equalize the balance that's going on because some people obviously have more resources or have more knowledge when applying to college.

In addition to discussing mentorship relationships prior to and during their time at USD, students shared some of the challenges they have faced at USD that have impacted their sense of belonging. As they transitioned into university, these students shared that they witnessed instances of privilege and racism that were difficult for them to understand and made them feel uncomfortable. Christina expressed trying to make friends with white classmates that didn't

seem to want to make friends outside of their race and were not receptive to her efforts, while Amy expressed hearing white students make anti-Latino remarks. Amy also expressed her concerns about not having more people of color as faculty. She stated, “I’ve had mainly white professors so far. Not any, like, race congruent teachers, which I also think is important that way the white students can become more familiar in that environment. And also, just in general for, like, minority students or students of color”. Christina shared about an experience she had in one of her classes:

I’ve met, like, kind of racist white people. And if they’re not racist, they’re micro aggressive, like microaggression. One of the best examples I could use are the classrooms, a majority of my classrooms would always be divided. My sociology class, half of it was all POC sitting on one side, and the other half would always be white people. So, in a class discussion, I was like, I said it in front of my whole class, I go, ‘look at how we’re divided right now’. I go, ‘we have all the people of color on one side, and all the white people on the other side’, and my class went completely silent”.

This is an observation that many minority students at a PWI may make but may not always feel comfortable addressing. The scenario described is an example of what Latinas at USD must overcome. It also reflects the opportunities for growth within a PWI, and how USD’s minority students could benefit from USD being a more inclusive institution.

Description of the Outcomes and Changes as a Result of the Research

Participants from both group *platicas* in Cycle #1 shared about the pressures and challenges they have faced at USD. While the topic of mentorship was the planned focus of the first group *platica*, the *testimonios* shared issues such as microaggressions, finances, work, academic performance, and interactions with faculty. Through the first group *platica*, two

participants shared about the challenges that played a role in them being placed on academic probation. They talked about the difficulties of juggling work and school and the stress that comes with worrying about financing college when your family is helping you pay for it as best as they can. They also talked about their experiences with USD faculty, with one participant sharing that she doesn't reach out to her professors for help for fear of being judged while the other shared she had previous negative experiences with faculty when her advisor discouraged her from a major she was interested in. Both of these participants scored lower on the General Self-efficacy scale than the rest of the participants. This data makes a connection between levels of self-efficacy and involvement with faculty, (aside from mentorship) being said to be an indicator of levels of self-efficacy (Vogt, as cited in Defreitas & Bravo, 2012). The participants with higher levels of self-efficacy reported more experiences with mentors and mentorship programs prior to and during their enrollment at USD. The group *platica* revealed that during the questionnaire participants actually underestimated their mentorship relationships or didn't recall them at the time of the questionnaire, so students may have indicated no to those questions but then shared information during the group *platica* that said otherwise.

The fact that group A discussed finances and work in greater detail than group B and that group B discussed the mentorship role of family members more, made me realize just how much of an influence being in a group setting has on what is shared. Not to say that what students shared wasn't true, but that hearing other members discuss certain issues and topics may have caused participants to recall similar experiences and share those with one another. During the group *platica* I tried to focus on the topic of mentorship, but I found that students had related experiences connected to challenges they faced that were important to allow them to share if they needed to.

Despite the many challenges that participants discussed during the group *platicas*, there were also some positive experiences shared in relation to students' experiences at USD. Half of participants were members of the Student Support Services program at USD which provides additional support to students in the form of financial aid assistance, academic advising, and tutoring. Students also discussed the support that their families provided them prior to enrolling at USD, as well as during and after the college admission process. Some students referenced being able to attend a private catholic high school due to the hard work and sacrifice of their parents and others spoke to the encouraging words and affirmations that their parents provided them along the way. Goldsmith and Kurpius (2018) referenced this type of support in their research study including Mexican immigrant parents and their children, finding that these parents supported the academic success of their children by telling them they would have better opportunities by doing well in school and by providing their children with advice through storytelling.

Description of Cycle 2

The second cycle included a second group *platica* with participants from Cycle #2. Discussion questions covered the topic of sense of belonging and other related areas and participants again sat in a circle and took turns answering questions. The questions covered in this group *platica* are included in Appendix F.

After this group *platica*, I transcribed the audio recording of the session and pulled out quotes as I started to notice prevalent themes. At this point I realized that the 1.5 hours time allotted for each group *platica* may have been too long, since there were only six participants that were part of this research study, there was only so much information each participant could contribute and it was apparent that the full 1.5 hours allotted for each group *platica* would not be

needed. The research study was initially planned for four group *platicas*, with a different central topic covered at each. I decided that it would make sense to cover the topics of family and familial obligations and academic self-efficacy in the third cycle and have that be the final group *platica*. (I discuss this in the cycle #3 section).

Cycle 2: Results and Findings

The results of Cycle #2 found that participants were seeking out representation on campus, through both increased diversity in the student body and in their faculty. Marisa, Christina, and Maria shared that having more people of color in their faculty would help increase their sense of belonging. The relationships students have with advisors and professors at university, and even long before, are important. They may even have an impact on student's educational outcomes, in addition to their sense of belonging. Maria shared about her experience with her high school advisor who was a person of color, and the very contrasting experience her friend had with a white high school advisor. She shared,

I got lucky because I had a person of color as a, I guess, advisor in a way for preparing for college. But one of my friends, she had a, I guess you could say like, white advisor. And like she was doing actually way better than me senior year. And her advisor was telling her like, oh, 'Maybe you should just consider going to community college. Like, there's no point of you going to actual, like university or college'. And so, I was like, no, don't listen to her.

Maria added that she recommended her friend go to her advisor instead and that her friend eventually was admitted into a really good university. Another participant, Marisa, shared about her positive experience with a Latino professor at USD. She said,

I've had one professor who was in ethnic studies. Alberto Pulido, he's so amazing. And he was like, the only one I felt like, he understood. He had me present my presentation, he thought I did a really good job. So, like, I always see, with professors who are not [people of color], they can't relate to me. They can never like, they don't go out of their way and ask, 'Is everything okay?' While the other professors who are people of color, they do seem to care about their students a lot more.

Experiences like the ones Maria and Marisa describe reflect the care and understanding that Latina/o students believe they receive from professors and advisors who are people of color, that they believe they may not receive from white professors and advisors. Marisa had a very different experience with her academic advisor who is white, and who is also one of her class professors. Her experience shows how a student can feel misunderstood by those that should be offering support. She shared,

I feel like, I would tell her like [my advisor], Oh, I really want to do this, pursue pharmacy. And she just always looks so worried when I say that, and I don't feel supported when I say I want to go into science and all that. And instead, she wants me to do ethnic studies, and I feel like it's kinda like, that kind of stings a little because i know like, the majority people usually are, who go into ethnic studies, are either people of color and like, you know, they don't really see Latinos doing science and STEM.

Both Maria and Marisa's examples above highlight one of the challenges that many minority students often face, and that is being underestimated, and having assumptions made about their ability to be successful. These examples show that many times it's those that should be supporting the academic success of students that ultimately impose self-limiting beliefs on

students. Instances such as these can create self-doubt in students and cause them to be distrustful of professors and advisors.

Something that was discussed in Cycle #1 was that Marisa and Maria had scored the lowest scores on the general self-efficacy scale questionnaire. They also both previously shared about the academic challenges they faced at USD while being on academic probation. The other four participants in this research study, who scored at 80% or above on the general self-efficacy scale, did not express any negative experiences with advisors and professors in any of the cycles. What was shared by Amy, Christina, and Norma, was that their professors were helpful when the participants would approach them after class or during office hours for additional academic support. This information seems to point to a possible correlation between higher levels of self-efficacy and higher comfortability with faculty and asking faculty for help. This aligns with what Holloway-Friesen's (2021) research found, which is that when students feel more comfortable in the classroom it contributes to higher academic self-efficacy. Although participants expressed that having a more diverse faculty would increase their sense of belonging and make them feel more comfortable, white faculty can still make students feel cared for and understood and have a positive impact on the sense of belonging of students. Christina shared that all of her professors at USD are very understanding but that there is one in particular who she really enjoys having as a professor. She said,

All my professors are really understanding about everything. I genuinely enjoy all my professors. Even my white professors, they're just super understanding, especially one of them, he's my changemaking professor and he straight up said, he goes, 'I'm white, I'm never gonna be able to truly understand what you guys go through. But I'm here to try my best'. And that just brought me so much comfort.

USD being a predominantly white institution (PWI) appears to have impacted the sense of belonging of participants, aside from just what they felt was a lack of diversity in the faculty and staff. Participants expressed that for most of them being at a PWI was a new experience and it was difficult to adjust and feel like they belonged, and it's still a challenge. Daisy shared, "I'll walk with my friends, and I'll feel comfortable here. But then it's like the moments when you're alone. And you realize, like, do I really fit in with all these people?". Christina shared,

If I'm being honest, the first few weeks to around months it was really hard here [at USD], I did not like the school at all. Did not like things. I made friends but I was just like, I was struggling to find a place to belong. Definitely because of the culture shock with the PWI.

Participants shared about their experiences with white classmates treating them differently and how it seemed they had an unwillingness to make friends with students of color. Christina described this as a divide and self-segregation. She stated that "If we had to compare the teachers and students, students who are obviously white, will treat you differently than a professor who's white". She added,

Another word that just came up, to mind, was divide, you can definitely tell that there's a lot of self-segregation here. That's another thing, you can tell, and I completely understand why people of color would rather stick with people of color because there's like, the word comfortable. They're very comfortable. I know a lot of people of color who have tried to become friends with white students. And their stories are like kinda horror stories, and they're just like, What the heck is their issue? And yeah, I understand why people stay within their groups. It just sucks the way we get treated.

Marisa also shared about her own experience and how that led to her eventually only trying to make friends with other people of color. She said,

I like going to the circles where I see a lot more diversity, because I feel like oh, they'll probably be more accepting, compared to if I go in a group of white girls. As I've had incidents where I'm in the group, they never make eye contact with me. And it's like, I'm being ignored, because they don't think I have anything to say. So, it's a weird thing.

For white students, just like for professors and advisors, there are ways to be an ally and to help minority students feel more comfortable at a PWI. Amy spoke about her experience making white friends at USD. She shared, "The few white friends I've made, it's because they're willing to learn about people's culture. In my French class, they're pretty knowledgeable about other cultures. One of my white friends, she's learning Spanish and she knows more about Mexican culture".

It seems that if white students at USD made an effort to make connections with students of color and learn about their background and experiences, that this could help increase the sense of belonging of students of color as they would be able to feel included and cared about.

Description of the Outcomes and Changes as a Result of the Research

Participants from the group *platicas* in Cycle #2 expressed that the transition to a PWI was challenging. Some of them shared that they have friend groups at USD that only include people of color. Either because that's the environment where they feel most comfortable in, or because they've had negative experiences trying to make friends with white students. More than half of participants shared that they would love to see more people of color in faculty and advisor roles and this could help increase their sense of belonging. Representation seemed to be a big factor when participants spoke about their sense of belonging. Participants would like to see

more diversity not just in the faculty, but in the student body as well. This theme was prevalent in both Cycle #1 and Cycle #2. Other than increased diversity, participants shared experiences which highlighted different ways that white faculty members and white students can help minority students feel welcomed and supported. What was shared included having white students attempt to make friendships and connections with students of color, as well as trying to become familiar with their culture and their experiences. It was also shared that faculty members should also be supportive of students' goals and ambitions and be understanding of the different challenges they face as students of color. In Montelengo's (2019) research study, he found that even with low rates of faculty identifying as Latina/o, that faculty in general still played a crucial role in the academic persistence of students. This highlights the importance of Latina/o students having access to supportive faculty, regardless of race. Similar to what participants in this study have pointed out through their examples.

Description of Cycle 3

Cycle #3 was the last of the group *platicas* between the two different participant groups in the previous two cycles. Participants in this cycle were asked questions during the group *platicas* surrounding family and financial obligations and academic self-efficacy. Participants once again sat in a circle and took turns answering questions. The questions are included in Appendix G. Even after all questions were covered, the 1.5 hour allotted for the group *platicas* had not been reached. After Cycle #2 I had already been considering whether the individual interviews planned for the fourth cycle were necessarily needed. The initial reason for deciding on individual interviews was that I anticipated that some participants may feel more comfortable in a private setting and that there may be additional information that might be shared in an individual interview that may not be shared in a group setting. I think I may have underestimated

just how much participants would bond with one another and open themselves up to be vulnerable and share their stories. The group *platicas* really had created a small community for participants where they felt seen and heard through sharing their experiences and different campus resources with one another. One learning opportunity was that speaking about finances is a sensitive topic, so some students may have been more open to share about financial worries in the one-on-one setting that the individual interviews would have provided.

Another part of the individual interview script (included in Appendix G) was to get additional feedback on what changes could be implemented at USD to help them be successful academically as well as feedback on how they experienced the group *platicas*. Because of the rapport that the participants had built with one another and because of the additional time remaining after questions surrounding academic self-efficacy and family and financial obligations were answered, I decided it would be best to proceed with questions in the individual interview script for the remaining time together. Participants were given the option of finishing the group *platica* early or staying the full 1.5 hour, or until the questions from the individual interview script had been answered (whichever came sooner) in lieu of meeting individually on a different day. Participants all agreed that they wanted to finish out the questions together as a group. In hindsight, I think for this research study the group *platicas* were the most appropriate way to collect data, although there can always be limitations when discussing sensitive topics. Individual interviews may have worked well as the primary source of data collection when discussing sensitive topics, but it wouldn't have allowed for participants to build community with one another which was a very important aspect of this research study.

Cycle 3: Results and Findings

One of the themes uncovered in Cycle #3 included academic and financial stress. Half of the participants reported being stressed about financial aid and the cost of tuition. Amy expressed wanting to get a job to help her mom, but didn't report feeling stressed about financial aid and the cost of tuition. Participants who shared their experiences with financial stress also reported working at least 10 hours a week to help with their expenses. Christina shared,

My FAFSA, something happened with my Cal Grant. I've been really stressed about that. They took away my Cal Grant. So, I'm just like, I need to figure out my FAFSA, why they took it away because they shouldn't have. So that's like also adding to a lot of stress right now.

Christina added that she has to work because her mom doesn't have any additional money to provide her after she pays the portion of Christina's educational costs that financial aid doesn't cover. She wishes that USD was more considerate of middle class families who don't meet the lower income threshold when awarding financial aid. Amy shared that she had considered getting a job so that she could feel like less of a burden to her mom, who helps her pay her remaining tuition after financial aid. She said,

I was considering, last semester, getting a job. But then I was looking at my schedule.

Like how would I do it? Like working and then doing schoolwork. But now that we get to choose our schedules I'm probably going to work. I mean, since I don't work I'm very, very cautious of when I go out because I hate asking my mom for money. I rarely do.

Maria and Marisa also shared the sentiment that they wanted to, and did work, to help out their moms who were helping them with their educational costs after financial aid. They also expressed feeling guilty that they needed financial help from their moms to cover expenses. Marisa shared,

I had to juggle school and my job in the past because I was living in an apartment. So, I would have to pay rent. And sometimes I'd be out of money. So, I would have to ask my mom and I would feel bad because she's already paying my school too.

Maria also shared about her own feelings of guilt, adding,

My mom's already paying so much for me to come here. So that's why I got a job. So, I can be in charge of my own expenses here and not have to be asking her for money.

Because it just makes me, I don't know why, it just makes me feel so guilty. It makes me feel horrible when I have to ask my mom for money. Because I feel like she's just like a single woman, like, I want to help her out as much as I can.

The increasing cost of higher education is a growing concern in the United States, but the cost of higher education at private colleges, such as USD, can be very stressful and challenging for many students attending these institutions. Maria shared about the sad reality that many low-income and middle class students face at higher cost private colleges, which is whether they will be able to continue to afford the tuition and finish their degree there. Maria shared,

I'm trying to see what my financial package is for next year but then like, if not then I'm considering going back home to study there, just because it's cheaper. So yeah, that's something that I've been thinking about a lot more recently. I've been talking to my mom about it too. I'm like, you know, you can be honest with me, can we actually afford it?

Like, if we can't, I'm down to go back home.

What Maria shared is an example of just one of the many challenges that this group of participants has shared throughout this research study. Maria has also previously shared about her academic challenges and how she is currently working to get out of academic probation. Her situation is an example of the impacts that financial worries and responsibilities have on the

academic success of students and their academic self-efficacy. Marisa also shared about her own experience managing her academics and financial stress. She stated,

I have failed one or two classes now. And I have been on academic probation, I was able to get out of it. But I'm probably gonna end up back, but I hope not, but it's just like, a back and forth. Like, always having a setback. Then I told myself, there's no rush, then my mom's like, 'Oh, don't be too long in school, it's gonna cost more money.' And so then I'm like, okay, like, that's already setting you back. Like, I have to do well in order to get out of the school.

Maria and Marisa share many similarities, including that they've both been on academic probation while at USD and that they both expressed feeling stressed about being able to afford their educational expenses while at USD. Finances also came up in the second cycle and given my role at the One Stop Student Center I shared with participants the different financial aid appeal options that they might be able to pursue. As a result, Maria shared within the group *platica* in Cycle #3 that she submitted an appeal and was awarded additional funding. Although this was helpful, she still worried about continuing to afford the rising tuition costs at USD. Both Maria and Marisa also shared about their struggles with their mental health while trying to be academically successful at USD. Marisa spoke about her test anxiety, while Maria shared about the anxiety she felt when trying to ask professors for help. Maria added,

I think right now, that's my focus, trying to use like, any resource, and I'm also trying to go to office hours, even though like every single time I tell myself that I'm gonna go it gives me so much anxiety because I'm just so scared of what the teachers gonna say, like, reaching out to teachers just brings out so much anxiety.

As Marisa and Maria spoke about their financial worries and how their mental health struggles impacted their academics, I felt a mood shift in the space that felt more somber as these heavy topics were discussed. I made it a point to remind participants about the wellness resources included in their consent forms should they need them. Maria and Marisa were in the group *platica* with Daisy as well (group A). Daisy had previously shared that she was on a full scholarship with USD due to being a DACA student. I now wondered how hearing about these experiences made Daisy feel, and whether she felt at that point that she couldn't relate to either Maria or Marisa in these areas. Throughout the cycles, Daisy had shared minimally on experiencing any academic challenges. Although she didn't reach out to professors for help, she expressed that she was very independent and liked to figure things out on her own. Daisy had also scored the highest on the general self-efficacy scale with a score of 95%. Having Daisy be in group A with Marisa and Maria, who had the two lower scores on the general self-efficacy scale questionnaire, I wondered if this had any impact on the dynamic of the group and how much Daisy shared.

When discussing academic challenges and academic self-efficacy in group B, the mood was very different. All participants in group B scored 80% or higher in the general self-efficacy scale questionnaire. Participants in this group reported they felt really confident in how they were doing in their classes and were happy with their grades. This might be a connection to their higher rates of self-efficacy. Amy said,

I feel I've been performing pretty good. I'm actually really proud of myself. And I hope to keep it up that way because I don't know it just makes me happy, whenever I show my mom. She knows I'm doing pretty well. And that she doesn't really have to worry about me in that aspect and that the money is going towards somewhere.

Norma shared that despite being happy with her performance and her grades, she did stress about classes during midterms and other stressful periods in the semester. She added that positive self-talk helped her get through those stressful times. She also spoke about the pressure to perform well in classes because she's on a full scholarship. She shared,

There are some kids in my classes that don't care about the academics. They really do very minimal, like sometimes they don't even show up. Then like why am I showing up? Like sometimes I have to ask myself, like, regroup myself, why is it that I'm going to class and like taking notes? Like why should I care about this test? Or why am I stressing out about it? It's because if I fail it, or like if I get a lower GPA, I won't have the same amount of aid.

Norma also shared about some of her familial responsibilities when she goes back home to visit. She shared that as the oldest she would often help her little sister with her homework, and that she feels guilt that she is away and can't help her anymore. She also shared about how she helps her mom and how there are additional responsibilities that she has when she goes back home.

She said,

Knowing that, like, my mom, does need me when I go home. And she's like, '*Me ayudas much cuando vienes* [You help me a lot when you come].' And things like, 'I really need you to help me with this.' And she'll still call me and she'll be like, 'Can you send this email for me. So, I think that's sometimes a little, not a setback, but it is hard sometimes.

Norma participated in group B with Amy and Christina. Looking back at this group's scores on the general self-efficacy scale included in Table 2 of Cycle #1, Norma had a score of 80% while Christina and Amy both received a score of 85%. Although this is a minimal difference, I

considered what impact her familial responsibilities and the pressure to perform well academically to keep her full scholarship had on her academic self-efficacy.

When it came time to discuss participants' feedback on their experience with the group *platicas*, overall participants shared that they enjoyed the *platicas* and that they were very helpful. Amy shared that she felt comfortable in the small group setting and that she felt free to speak her mind. Norma shared that she felt good about participating in something that she felt was a good cause and that would hopefully contribute to positive change. She added,

That's kind of like, a little empowering. I walk out of here and I'm like, okay, let's go, you know. I got this like understanding that there's a good community, that they're supporting you. That they want you to excel. We all have very similar backgrounds on how we grew up so it's good to know that, like grounding little, to know, hey, I'm not the only person on this campus that is struggling with these kinds of things.

Other participants also shared about enjoying the group *platicas* and that they felt connected to one another, and appreciated the additional resources they learned about during the group *platicas* and they were helpful. Maria spoke about reaching out to the Center for Student Success, which was brought up during one of the group *platicas* as a place where students could go for tutoring support. After learning about the Center for Student Success she started attending and they helped her with tutoring and developing an academic plan. Maria also spoke about how she enjoyed listening to other participants and seeing how much she related to them. Daisy shared that she liked hearing other people's perspectives and what they go through. Marisa spoke about how comfortable she felt sharing within the group. She said, "I always had all these thoughts. I just never really said them out loud. So, I'm surprised. I'm comfortable talking my mind out here." She added, "I'm just like, where has this been this whole time?...I think it's a

good little safe space.” Marisa also spoke about the need for something like this to be made available to more students. She said,

I feel like it’s very welcoming and I can be vulnerable. And I’ve never really been vulnerable with a group of people I’ve just met. So, it’s like, weird, but also nice to know that I’m not alone in this. And I can relate to people who go to the same school. But I would like to see more people because I feel like some people may not know about *platicas*. So, like, they have more to say and like, see another perspective.

She had more to say about her positive experiences with the group *platicas*, adding that,

I think this helped me want to be motivated. Even though it’s hard, like I want to, cuz I see you and you’re a grad student. I think I want to be like where you’re at. And so, it kind of motivates me to like, keep going, seeing someone like you, in a university like this.

I found that other than Norma, Maria and Marisa had the most to say about their positive experiences within the group *platicas*. I found this interesting given the academic, financial, and mental health challenges they had shared. Maria had previously shared apprehension about reaching out to her professors for help, and Marisa had shared a negative experience she had with her unsupportive faculty advisor. When it came time in the group *platica* to share about what changes they’d like to see at USD that they believed would positively impact their academic success, both Marisa and Maria spoke about the faculty. Maria said,

I feel like professors should be mindful of what they’re saying, because it could totally bring a student down, because I was taking music theory and that class was so hard. I dropped it, by the way, there’s no way I was gonna pass it. But like, the first test that I had, she [the professor] asked me, ‘Why are you in my class? And so, I was like, ‘my

advisor chose it for me.’ So I feel like professors should be really careful about what they’re saying. Kinda like what you guys said with your tests, like, it can bring you down. They should just be mindful, to not make us feel uncomfortable.

In this example Maria was also speaking about a common occurrence with professors shared within the group where they announce the grades that were assigned on tests to the entire class, something that Marisa and Daisy had brought up earlier as something that they did not appreciate. This included announcing to the class the highest and lowest grades and how many of each grade were assigned. Marisa expressed feeling singled out by a professor when he announced the lowest score on a test and the lowest score was hers. She said,

I just don’t like it when they do that. I had that experience where I was the lowest grade and then I went up to my professor I was like, I don’t think you should be doing that. I don’t like you singling me out. Like you kind of singled me out even though no one knew. But I knew when I got that exam, and I ended up withdrawing from the class because I didn’t like that.

Daisy half-jokingly added that USD also needs to make professors less scary and serious. She added, “It’s weird when they just start laughing and smile, like, trying to get along with the class. I get surprised. That’s when I start paying attention.” From what was shared, it seems that these participants want to see USD faculty be more understanding and approachable toward students. Amy and Norma shared about wanting to see more representation and people of color in the faculty. Norma said,

I know it’s hard to get a job here but maybe something more like a systemic change that is outside of the student’s control. Like some people have white guys like teaching history classes about people of color, like what is going on?

Christina felt similarly, and also felt that there should also be more events for Latina/o faculty and students on campus. She said,

I wish USD had more for Hispanic and Latin communities here. Like I know, a few days ago, they had a dinner for the black faculty and students and I think that's wonderful. I just wish that we had something like that for Hispanics as well, or Asians. And I completely understand why the black community got that. I just wish they did a little bit more for us.

Description of the Outcomes and Changes as a Result of the Research

More than half of participants reported feeling worried about affording their educational costs or the requirements to keep their scholarships. Maria and Marisa shared the most in terms of their concerns with being able to afford their educational expenses and also shared the most in experiencing academic challenges at USD. Their examples show that there may be a correlation between financial stressors in college and academic performance. They also shared about their relationships with faculty, with Maria feeling anxiety and apprehension when trying to reach out to professors for help, and Marisa sharing that her faculty advisor was unsupportive and was discouraging her from pursuing a field in STEM. Their relationships with faculty may have impacts, or have been impacted by, their academic self-efficacy. Overall, a majority of the participants expressed higher levels of self-efficacy and minimal academic challenges. Maria and Marisa's relationships with faculty may also serve to highlight the connection between faculty involvement and support and the impact on students' academic success. This connection has also been made in other research studies. Montelongo shared examples of different faculty validation techniques that may contribute to the academic persistence of students, including:

1) faculty who demonstrated a genuine concern for teaching students; 2) faculty who were personable and approachable toward students; 3) faculty who treated students equally; 4) faculty who structured learning experiences that allowed students to experience themselves as capable of learning; 5) faculty who worked individually with those students needing extra help; and 6) faculty who provide meaningful feedback to students. (Rendon, 1994, p. 48-49, as cited in Montelongo, 2019)

Some of these validation techniques are reflected in recommendations made by participants, like when Daisy said that faculty should be less scary and serious and Maria said that faculty should be more mindful of what they say to students and how they make them feel.

The majority of participants also expressed that they'd like to see more diversity in their faculty and in their student body but expressed that regardless of USD being a PWI they were trying to make the best of their college experience. Participants also overall enjoyed the group *platicas* and felt they received many benefits from participating, such as learning about different campus resources and having a safe space to share their experiences with others and learn that they are not alone in how they feel.

Limitations

There were challenges in recruiting participants that met the criteria of being first-generation Latina undergraduate students at USD, with it being such a specific demographic. Most participants were recruited through their visits to the One Stop Student Center where I answered students' questions about the recruitment flyers. I ultimately had six participants total but would have liked a larger sample size to diversify the experiences shared. Participants also shared how much they would have liked the group *platicas* to be larger in size so that they could

have a larger community. Another limitation was finding a time that all participants could meet for the group *platicas*. Because of this I had to split participants based on their availability into two groups with three participants in each.

Also, the general self-efficacy scale that was used in the questionnaire participants completed (see Table 2), is a short 10 question scale. The general self-efficacy scale is typically included as part of a larger questionnaire, but in this case due to the questionnaire being so brief, questions were listed together in a list format. This scale also doesn't tell us what the predictors of a lower self-efficacy score or a higher self-efficacy score are. There were connections made through this research study between participants' results on the general self-efficacy scale and the experiences they shared, but it's difficult to say definitively that certain experiences played a role in participants' academic self-efficacy despite other research supporting these connections.

Major Findings

During group *platicas* participants shared about struggling to find a sense of belonging at USD. The consensus from participants was that having more diversity in their faculty and student body, as well as more on campus communities (such as events, clubs, and physical spaces) catering to Latina/o students, would help increase their sense of belonging. Some participants shared different mentorship programs they were part of at USD, but involvement in these mentorship programs didn't seem to indicate higher levels of academic self-efficacy or sense of belonging. Two things that seemed to correlate with levels of academic self-efficacy were financial responsibilities/stress and student-faculty relationships. Participants who reported higher financial stress also reported higher instances of academic struggles. For the most part students who enjoyed their professors and felt comfortable reaching out for help had higher levels of academic self-efficacy and reported lower instances of academic challenges. A major

finding was how influential the role of faculty is on students' academic success and sense of belonging, despite participants having no faculty they considered as mentors. Participants expressed wanting faculty that were approachable, understanding, and encouraging.

Implications

When I decided on the topic for this research study, I anticipated there was room for improvement at USD (as a PWI) in ways that Latina first-generation undergraduate students could be supported to enhance their academic success. This was partly due to my own experience as a first-generation Latina undergraduate student at a different university, as well as my experience as a first-generation Latina graduate student at USD. As I began to research, I found relevant information that showed the role that sense of belonging, family and financial obligations, mentorship, and academic self-efficacy played in the academic success of Latina/o students. That is why these four topics were the main focus of this research study and I sought to learn more about the experiences of participants within these areas, and also wanted them to build community with one another and form relationships past the length of the *group platicas*. What I didn't anticipate from the research results was how significant the role of faculty would be in the academic success and self-efficacy of students. Although participants expressed wanting to see more faculty of color, most of all they wanted to be understood and cared for by faculty members.

Recommendations

Future studies should include a higher number of participants to diversify the different perspectives and experiences of the first-generation Latina undergraduate community at USD. I believe that having at least 10-12 participants may have provided a variety of experiences that would help uncover more about what changes could be made at USD to help their first-

generation Latina population achieve academic success. Recommendations for changes that USD can make to better support these students include: hiring more faculty of color, additional faculty training on working with first-generation students and students of color, admitting more students of color, and cultural sensitivity training for all students that goes beyond an annual online training. With participants sharing that it was difficult to learn about academic and mental health resources available to students on campus, USD should work towards highlighting those resources at new student orientations and throughout the academic year. Suggestions for marketing these resources include through USD social media channels, flyers and posters in high traffic student areas around campus, the Torero Weekly (USD's campus-wide newsletter), and funding for incentives to encourage students to utilize these resources for the first time. It would also be helpful to make faculty aware of these resources, so they can help refer students when they need additional support. Participants also expressed wanting a space to build community with other Latina/o students on campus. Having a physical space at USD for these students, such as a Latina/o Student Resource Commons, may help these students connect with one another in a space where they feel welcomed and are also able to learn about additional support services available to them.

Conclusion

This study included undergraduate students at USD who identified as first-generation Latinas. The participants shared about their experiences with mentorship, sense of belonging, family and financial obligations, and academic self-efficacy while attending USD, a predominantly white institution. Participants in this study felt comfortable sharing about their experiences during the group *platicas* and that they could be vulnerable without feeling like they would be judged. Overall, participants also shared that having more diversity in the university

faculty and in the student body would help enhance their sense of belonging. Participants who felt comfortable reaching out to faculty members for help after class or during office hours generally had less academic challenges and scored higher in the general self-efficacy scale results. This pointed to a possible connection between levels of academic self-efficacy and relationships with faculty.

These group *platicas* were about showing first-generation Latina students at USD that they are not alone in their experiences. That there are others on campus from similar backgrounds who have been through similar experiences and challenges. While it was about finding how their academic self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and academic achievement can be enhanced at a PWI such as USD, it was also about having participants build community with one another and learn from one another as a way to cope with the multitude of challenges they face.

Personal Values and Future Goals

The topics in this research study are close to me because of my own experiences navigating higher education as a first-generation Latina. Many of the challenges that I listened to participants speak about, I've experienced myself. While it was a very validating experience to listen to their stories and feel understood, I also felt very disappointed to hear about the instances of microaggressions from white students and the unsupportive faculty and advisors that participants faced and witnessed. I believe that being put down and discouraged by the very people meant to support you can have lasting impacts on students and their academic success. My goal as a higher education professor is to always be the biggest advocate for the students that I come across and hopefully in some way contribute to their academic success.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Flyer

FIRST GENERATION LATINA TESTIMONIOS: NAVIGATING A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION AND ACHIEVING ACADEMIC SUCCESS



Nancy Correa is a graduate student and employee of the University of San Diego who will be holding a research study on the **challenges faced by first-generation Latina students** at USD and how this impacts their academic achievement. Participant involvement will take place in-person outdoors at Tecolote Canyon Patio at USD, which is located outside of the Commuter Commons and the One-Stop Student Center.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

First-generation Latina undergraduate students at USD who participate in this study will receive a \$25 gift card to the USD Torero Store. Gift card will be gifted even if the entire study is not completed.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THIS STUDY?

QUESTIONNAIRE



Participants will complete a questionnaire at the start of the first group *platica* answering questions regarding demographics and their experiences navigating higher education. Completion of the questionnaire is included in the first 90-minutes session of the group *platica*.

GROUP PLATICAS



Participants will meet as a group 4 times throughout the academic year for 90 minutes each session as a way to allow them to share their experiences with each other and expand on topics covered in the survey. Group *platicas* will be audio recorded for researcher to evaluate the data collected.

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW



Participants will take part in an individual interview lasting 45 minutes once group *platicas* have been completed to expand on topics covered in the *platicas* and share final thoughts on how they can be further supported at USD. Individual interviews will be audio recorded for researcher to evaluate the data collected.

For more information on this research study or to participate, please contact the researcher by email at nancycorrea@sandiego.edu. Faculty advisor for the researcher is Cheryl Getz and may be contacted at cgetz@sandiego.edu if needed.

Appendix B

Recruitment Announcement Script

Hello,

My name is Nancy Correa, and I am a graduate student in the Higher Education Leadership program. As a part of my graduation requirement, I am conducting an Action Research study titled, “First-Generation Latina Testimonios: Navigating a Predominantly White Institution and Achieving Academic Success”. The purpose of this announcement is to ask for volunteers who identify as an undergraduate first-generation Latina at the University of San Diego and who are interested in participating in this study.

As a participant, you will: take part in four, 90 minute long, in person group *platicas*, where you will reflect on the challenges you have faced navigating higher education at a predominantly white institution and discuss the types of support you would like to receive from the University of San Diego to promote your academic achievement. You will also take part in one 45 minute long individual interview to collect any additional feedback and how you can best be supported at the University of San Diego and your experience during the group *platicas*. You will also take part in one 20 question questionnaire at the start of the first group *platica* which will be a combination of demographic questions as well as questions related to academic self-efficacy. Completion of the questionnaire is included in the first 90-minutes session of the group *platicas*. Your responses during the *platicas* and individual interviews will be audio recorded so that I may evaluate the data collected. Your questionnaire will be collected upon completion.

Participant activities will take place in-person at the USD campus.

This study is completely voluntary, and you can choose to opt out at any given time without any repercussions. A \$25 Torero Store gift card will be gifted to all participants, including

participants that do not complete the entire research study.

Participant involvement will take place in-person outdoors at Tecolote Canyon Patio at USD, which is located outside of the Commuter Commons and the One-Stop Student Center.

If you are interested in participating in this study please come see me in the Hahn University Center - Room 126. You can also email me at nancycorrea@sandiego.edu. To contact my faculty advisor if needed, you may email Cheryl Getz at cgetz@sandiego.edu. Thank you for your time today.

Appendix C

Adult Consent Form

**University of San Diego
Institutional Review Board
Research Participant Adult Consent Form**

For the research study entitled:
First-Generation Latina Testimonios: Navigating a Predominantly White
Institution and Achieving Academic Success

I. Purpose of the research study

Nancy Correa is a student in the School of Leadership and Education Sciences at the University of San Diego. You are invited to participate in a research study she is conducting. The purpose of this research study is: to explore what factors promote the academic achievement of Latina undergraduate students at a predominantly white institution and what changes can be implemented to enhance their academic and overall success.

II. What you will be asked to do

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

Complete one 20 question online questionnaire at the start of the first group *platica* answering questions pertaining to your age, ethnicity, familial obligations, mentorship, sense of belonging, and self-efficacy as it pertains to your academic achievement in college. Completion of the questionnaire is included in the first 90-minutes session of the group *platicas*.

Participate in four group *platicas*, each 90 minutes in length, with other first-generation Latina students at the University of San Diego. These group *platicas* will be audio recorded and promote a discussion of themes including familial obligations, mentorship, sense of belonging, and self-efficacy. The purpose of audio recording the group *platicas* is so that the researcher may evaluate the data collected from participants.

Participate in an individual interview with the researcher lasting 45 minutes after group *platicas* have finalized to share final thoughts on your experience taking part in this research project as well as feedback on how first-generation Latina students can be further supported at predominantly white institutions. This individual interview will be audio recorded. The purpose of audio recording the group *platicas* is so that the researcher may evaluate the data collected from participants.

Your participation in this study will take a total of about 6 hours and 45 minutes.

III. Foreseeable risks or discomforts

There are minimal risks to participating in this study. Possible risks include fatigue from the time commitment or sadness when talking about their experiences at USD. Participants have the option of passing on any questions that you do not wish to answer or leave at any time without needing to provide a reason or explanation.

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

Urgent and Emergency Services at the University of San Diego:

A counselor-on call is available to consult about after-hours urgent psychological concerns at all times. The counselor-on call can be reached by calling 619-260-4655 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week). Please contact the Department of Public Safety to access emergency services (x2222 on any campus telephone, otherwise call 619-260-2222).

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 what factors play a role in promoting the academic achievement of Latina undergraduate students at the University of San Diego, a predominantly white institution.

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 that are provided by participants will be cleansed of all identifiers and may not be used in future research. Because part of this research study seeks to allow the participants to build community with one another and possibly continue relationships once the research study is over, students will disclose their real first names during the group *platicas*.

VI. Compensation

If you participate in the study, the researcher will give you a \$25 Torero Store gift card in the following way: physical gift card (in-person during individual interview). You will receive this compensation even if you decide not to complete the entire research study.

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're 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.) Nancy Correa, Principal Investigator

Email: nancycorrea@sandiego.edu

2.) Dr. Cheryl Getz, Faculty Advisor

Email: cgetz@sandiego.edu

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 _____

Appendix D
Questionnaire

1. What is your age? _____

2. Did you transfer to the University of San Diego from another higher education institution? Yes / No

If so, was it from a community college? Yes / No / Not Applicable

3. Describe your current housing status: On-Campus / Off-Campus / At Home w/ Relatives

4. Do you currently work on or off campus? Yes / No

5. If so, how many hours per week do you work? _____ (if you don't work write N/A)

6. Are you from outside of the San Diego area? Yes / No

7. Are you currently taking out any student loans to pay for your educational expenses? Yes / No

8. Does your family currently help you pay for any educational expenses not covered by financial aid? Yes / No / Not Applicable

9. Prior to attending college did you have a mentorship relationship with someone or were you part of a mentorship program where you were the mentee? Yes / No

10. Do you currently have someone at the University of San Diego that you consider a mentor or are you part of a mentorship program as a mentee? Yes / No

Considering your college experience, and specifically your academics, read each statement below and decide to what extent it is true in your case:

1. I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough.

Not at all true / Hardly true / Moderately true / Exactly true

2. If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want.

Not at all true / Hardly true / Moderately true / Exactly true

3. It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals.

Not at all true / Hardly true / Moderately true / Exactly true

4. I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events.

Not at all true / Hardly true / Moderately true / Exactly true

5. Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations.

Not at all true / Hardly true / Moderately true / Exactly true

6. I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort.

Not at all true / Hardly true / Moderately true / Exactly true

7. I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities.

Not at all true / Hardly true / Moderately true / Exactly true

8. When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions.

Not at all true / Hardly true / Moderately true / Exactly true

9. If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution.

Not at all true / Hardly true / Moderately true / Exactly true

10. I can usually handle whatever comes my way.

Not at all true / Hardly true / Moderately true / Exactly true

Appendix E

Group *Platica* #1 Script

Introduction Script:

“Hello everyone! Thank you so much for being here today and agreeing to be a part of this research study. I am going to start handing out the required consent forms. Please read through them carefully and let me know if you have any questions. If you still wish to proceed with the research study after reading through the consent form, please sign the form and bring it up to me.

Before we get into our first group *platica* I will be passing out a short questionnaire for completion. Once you have completed the questionnaire please bring it up to me. I will give you all about 10 minutes to complete it.

Now that everyone has completed their questionnaire we will go around and introduce ourselves. Because these group *platicas* will also be a space where you can build community with one another at USD, we will be sharing our names with each other although only your first name is required. I’d also like everyone to share a favorite hobby, their hometown, and their class standing at USD. Once we finish our introductions we can get into the questions for today’s group *platica*”.

Questions for Group *Platica* #1: Mentorship

- Please share a brief overview of your experience at the University of San Diego (USD) so far.

- What made you decide to attend this institution for your postsecondary education?
- Does anyone currently have a mentorship relationship or is part of a mentorship program at USD? What is that relationship like?
- How did you come across this mentorship opportunity?
- Tell me about your experiences in developing mentorship relationships at USD.
- What do you think the benefits of having a mentor are?
- For those that don't have a mentorship relationship, how do you think that having a mentor would impact your college experience?
- Have you had any mentorship relationships outside of USD? How do you think those experiences contributed to your overall academic success and your decision to attend college?

Appendix F

Group *Platica* #2 Script

Introduction Script:

“Hello everyone, I hope everything has been going well since the last time we met. I really enjoyed our last group *platica* and I’m looking forward to today’s. We will go around and do brief introductions again today and a one word check-in on how we are doing. Afterwards, we can go over how everyone felt after our last group *platica* and get into our questions for our second group *platica*”.

Group *Platica* #2: Sense of belonging

- How did everyone feel after leaving the last session? Any additional thoughts that came to mind that anyone would like to share?
- Are you familiar with what sense of belonging is in higher education?
- Tell me about your experiences with finding a sense of belonging at USD.
- What do you think contributes to someone’s sense of belonging while at a predominantly white institution like USD?
- Do you currently feel a sense of belonging at USD? What do you think the factors are that contribute to this?
- How do you think first-generation undergraduate Latina students might feel an increased sense of belonging at USD?

Appendix G

Group *Platica* #3 Script

Introduction Script:

“Hello everyone, thanks for being here. I hope you all have been doing well since our last group *platica*. We will start off today by going around and sharing a one word check-in on how we are doing. We will then get into our discussion questions.

Questions for Group *Platica* #3: Family and Financial Obligations

- How did everyone feel after leaving the last session, any additional thoughts that came to mind that anyone would like to share?
- How is school and college life going? Is there anything that anyone would like to share?
- What current or past family and/or financial obligations have you had while enrolled at USD and how has that impacted your college experience?
- How do you feel that family and financial obligations impact your academic success specifically?
- How does the cost of paying for college have an impact on your college experience? How much does the worry of paying for college affect your day to day as a college student? Are there any changes USD can make to better support you through family and/or financial obligations while you attend school?

Group *Platica* #4 Script

Introduction Script:

“Hello everyone, thank you for joining us today for our final group *platica*. Today we will be discussing the topic of academic self-efficacy. We will start off today by going around and sharing a one word check-in on how we are doing. We will then get into our discussion questions”.

Group *Platica* #4: Academic Self-Efficacy

- How did everyone feel after leaving the last session, any additional thoughts that came to mind that you'd like to share?
- Please share about your own experiences and feeling in terms of your abilities to perform well academically at USD
- Were there setbacks that you have experienced while in college and how did you overcome those setbacks?
- How do you deal with stress related to school?
- What resources does USD provide to improve and develop your skills and knowledge?
- How much interaction do you have with the faculty in your program?
- Is there anything that USD can do to increase your chances of being academically successful?

Individual Interview Script

Introduction Script

“Hello (Participant Name), thank you so much for your participation in this individual interview which is the final component of our research study. This interview will take approximately 45 minutes and will be audio recorded. As a reminder, the individual interview is our time to meet one on one to discuss anything that might not have been covered during the group *platicas*. It’s also the opportunity to provide any feedback you may have. Any data that I collect from this individual interview will reference you using your chosen pseudonym. Please let me know if any questions about any of this come up at any time during our interview”.

Individual Interview Questions to Participants

- How was your experience during the group *platicas*? Was there anything you particularly liked or disliked about them?
- Would you have preferred individual interviews entirely during the research study or did you prefer the group *platicas*? Why?
- What was it like to have a dedicated time to share with other undergraduate first-generation Latinas about your experiences at USD?
- Have you noticed any benefits from participating in the group *platicas*?
- How comfortable did you feel sharing within the group *platicas*? Was there anything that you wanted to share during the group *platicas* but didn’t? Either because you did not feel comfortable or there wasn’t enough time?
- Did you feel the group *platicas* were an effective way to understand the undergraduate Latina population at USD and to determine what factors contribute to their academic success?

- Is there any new information that you learned from our group *platicas* that you might not have known before? Either about a particular topic or about yourself?
- Do you currently have a mentorship relationship or are you a part of a mentorship program that might not have been mentioned during the group *platicas*?
- Is there anything that you wanted to share in terms of mentorship, sense of belonging, family and financial obligations, and academic self-efficacy that might not have been mentioned during the group *platicas*?
- What overall feedback can you provide on what the University of San Diego (USD) can do to better support undergraduate first-generation Latinas in terms of the topics discussed during the group *platicas*?