Barriers to Belonging II:
Deepening Latinx Student Inclusion at UCSD

June 2023

Contributors

This study was designed collaboratively by the Mexican Migration Field Research Program, the Hispanic Serving Institution Working Group, and the Undocumented Student Services Center at the University of California, San Diego.

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Table of Contents

Introduction

In 2016, the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) began the formal process of becoming a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HIS), marked by the creation of a "HSI Task-Force" designated to assess the strategies and practices needed to achieve the desired status. In the fall of 2020, UCSD reached 22% full-time Latinx undergraduate students. This enrollment record enabled the institution to be classified as an "emerging HSI." As of 2023, UCSD's diversity website says the institution is working to accurately reflect the demographics of California: where 39% of the population and 55% of K-12 students are Latinx. But does attaining the status of an emerging Hispanic-Serving Institution reflect the experiences of the students whom UCSD now serves?

To address this question, in 2021, the Mexican Migration Field Research Program (MMFRP) partnered with the Office for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, the Raza Resource Centro, and the Undocumented Student Services Center at the University of California, San Diego to conduct a student-led study of Latinx students' experiences. The final report revealed significant gaps in Latinx students' sense of belonging, detailing that most Latinx students feel isolated and excluded—intensified by the intersection of financial barriers and diverse Latinx identities.[1]

This report extends the analysis from the 2021 report mentioned above. First, we further explore the barriers Latinx students face to reach academic success. Second, we look into how students' citizenship status–not only their own, but also that of their family–contribute to feelings of isolation and lack of support. Third, we explore students' feelings of distrust towards the institution and how this distrust affects their mental health and wellbeing. Finally, we identify barriers to Latinx students' engagement in student organizations.

As a candidate for HSI funding, UCSD must live up to the challenge of serving the Latinx student population. This study contributes to the conversation around UCSD's responsibilities to serve Hispanic and Latinx students and evaluates how well the university currently meets this goal.

Methodology

This report relies on interview data collected by the Mexican Migration Field Research Program (MMFRP) between January-March 2023. A team of 12 undergraduate and 3 graduate students participated in this study. The research team received intensive training on trauma-informed qualitative interviewing. During the Winter quarter of 2023, coordinated by graduate student team leader Alelí Andres, we invited undergraduate students at UCSD who identified as Latinx to participate in this study. To recruit participants, we sent emails to professors teaching classes across the university, asking them to share email and verbal announcements with their classes. We made announcements in hundreds of classes and invited interested students to add their names to an online interest form.

Ultimately, we got interested from several hundred students and completed 112 in-depth interviews, with each student researcher conducting an average of seven interviews.

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[1] That report can be found here:
https://mmfrp.files.wordpress.com/2021/12/barrierstobelongingreport.pdf

Interviews consisted of a short closed-answer survey (gathering basic demographic information, as well as inquiring about employment, transfer status, financial situation, and immigration status). This was followed by an open-ended qualitative interview about the participants' experiences as Latinx students in UCSD. Interviews were conducted in private locations of the respondents' choosing (or over Zoom, if preferred) and lasted an hour on average.

For the analysis, the open-ended portion of the interview was transcribed by the interviewers and shared with the research team. For confidentiality purposes, each participant was assigned a pseudonym. The student researchers worked in teams to analyze the interviews by theme, most of them using qualitative coding techniques to identify patterns in the data. Specific coding and analytical approaches are specified in each chapter's methodology section.

Overview of the data

Our sample of respondents was diverse in terms of gender, age, year in college and major. In total, we collected 112 interviews, all with Latinx-identifying undergraduate students at UCSD. Of these, 75% identified as female, 18% identified as male and 7% as non-binary. The average age was 21. Except for first years, who composed 13.5% of the sample, students were roughly distributed evenly across the final three years of college. Approximately the same number of respondents were social science (43%) and STEM (42%) majors, with a minority of students majoring in arts and humanities (14%).

In terms of their geographical background, a significant majority (91%) had lived in California before college—almost a quarter (23%) had lived in Los Angeles. Most (87%) of students were born in the United States, while a tenth were born in Mexico. One student each was born in Brazil, Guatemala, Colombia, and Venezuela.

In terms of socio-economic background, more than half (54%) of the students came from households earning below the median household income in the US ($75,000) and 27% came from households below the poverty line ($40,000). Only 21 students (19%) came from households where both parents had received higher education. In addition, the students we talked to reflected a diversity of documentation status. While 98 were US citizens, one had DACA, four were legal permanent residents, and four were undocumented (with one foreign-born student preferring not to state). A quarter of all respondents had at least one undocumented parent.

In terms of students' conditions while studying, most of the interviewed students (52%) had to juggle working and studying, and a third (33%) worked more than 10 hours a week. The average pay was $16 per hour. Many (42%) of these students were also commuters. These statistics reflect a reality reiterated multiple times in the report: that most Latinx students are juggling multiple responsibilities.

Map of the report

Chapter 1 addresses the challenges Latinx students face in the classroom. First, it shows how economic strains can affect students' academic performance, particularly as they are overburdened with jobs and need to make cover unexpected expenses for class materials. Second, it dissects how Latinx representation in faculty and across the student body helps students feel they belong in the classroom and enables more active participation in class. Finally, it examines the difficulties Latinx students face to find and

access university resources designed to support academic success. To start, many students are unaware of the support available to them or are unfamiliar with how to navigate an institution such as a public university. In addition, resources tend to be impersonable, overcrowded, underfunded, and culturally distant.

Chapter 2 focuses on challenges faced by students with insecure legal status, including undocumented students and students from mixed-status families. Most students without secure status face constant anxiety, worrying about themselves and their family's ability to stay together. In addition, they often feel unseen and that they must conceal this part of themselves to others. Moreover, UCSD's location close to the border means students must navigate CBP checkpoints to arrive at campus. The risky geography of the university makes it hard for families to visit. Furthermore, undocumented college students and those from mixed status families tend to hold an advantaged position within their household. This means they also have additional burdens to carry, such as supporting their families through paperwork, as role models, or with other caretaking and financial responsibilities.

Chapter 3 looks at how the lack of representation and inaccessibility of student services contribute to the skepticism students feel towards UCSD, which can trigger feelings of anxiety and isolation. First, students feel poorly represented in the campus culture and among institutional personnel. Campus culture tends to flatten Latinx identity and equate it to Mexican culture, without acknowledging and celebrating the diversity across and within Latinx peoples. In addition, lack of Latinx representation among faculty and, most importantly, institutional accountability towards overt acts of racism from faculty, feeds into the distrust students feel towards the university. To conclude, Latinx students tend to have low "resource literacy," that is, little knowledge about institutional resources. This pattern compounds the fact that services are underfunded and overcrowded and leaves students overstrained and unable to access mental health support.

Finally, **Chapter 4** spotlights barriers to Latinx student activism in the university. At the individual level, students face familial, work, and academic responsibilities, especially if they are first-generation college students. Extra burdens of work add to the pressure of having to excel academically due to the sacrifices students' families have been through to get them to college. Hence, most Latinx students, particularly those who are first generation, must prioritize academics over political involvement. At the organizational level, existing Latinx student organizations often lack visibility and can be blind to the complex identities integrated under the Latinx label. While some outreach activities exist, as well as emerging groups acknowledging non-normative identities, there is still a lot of room to improve these efforts so that the Latinx student body feels welcome to engage in shaping the university.

Chapter 1:

Supporting Latinx Students in the Classroom: Financially, Emotionally, and with University Resources

Analysis and writeup by Briana Ruiz, Julia Kott, David Mendoza

Chapter summary

This chapter identifies three areas where UCSD could better support the academic success of Latinx students: (1) assisting students financially, (2) facilitating more Latinx representation in the classroom among both faculty and students, and (3) providing more access points for academic support and out-of-class resources.

We found that family income was correlated with GPA. Among students with GPAs less than 3.0, only 24% reported total family income over $75,000, whereas 56% of those with GPAs over 3.8 reported a family income above $75,000. In interviews, students explained that they struggled to pay for textbooks and that they were uncomfortable asking for help. If these students had been able to afford the textbooks–either through financial aid or additional funding–it could have made their classroom experiences easier. Many students struggle with financial stress. To help mitigate this financial stress within the classroom, instructors should not expect students to pay for classroom materials.

We also found that faculty that show solidarity with Latinx students and professors who demonstrate competence around Latinx student experiences improve the experience of Latinx students. In interviews, respondents said that Latinx UCSD faculty and more Latinx students in the classrooms made them feel more included and comfortable. Several participants also linked a feeling of imposter syndrome to a lack of racial representation of faculty and in the student population.

Finally, we found that many students were uncomfortable seeking out academic support resources or did not know how to access them. Of students with GPAs below 3.0, 88% were first-generation college students, compared with 56% of those with GPAs over 3.8. In interviews, we also noticed a link between being a first-generation college students and lacking knowledge about resources. Such students often wished for more culturally specific support in seeking out campus resources.

Most interviewees also strongly advocated for hiring more Latinx faculty and admitting more Latinx students. They said this representation was key to helping them feel like they could succeed at UCSD. On top of any pre-existing cultural beliefs, programs sometimes also imposed extra barriers to access that could make it discouraging and difficult for Latinx students to get help. The university should prioritize reaching out to students with information about resources and ensuring that the resources offered to students are properly funded and easily accessible.

Introduction

Many Latinx students face significant obstacles in the classroom compared to

"traditional" students who are typically under twenty-five, enrolled directly after high school, and have no other obligations, such as a full-time job. As UC San Diego (UCSD) attempts to become a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), meaning that 25% of the student population are Hispanic or Latinx, it must take action to address obstacles to Latinx students' academic success. The university defines academic success as "maintaining or exceeding good academic standing; making steady progress toward degree completion; actively engaging in research, co-curricular opportunities, and the campus and local community; and utilizing resources to intentionally develop the competencies to lead in a global society" (see https://commons.ucsd.edu/for-students/).

This chapter uses UCSD's definition of academic success as a way of holding the university accountable to its own stated standards. It shows that students face financial barriers to success in the classroom, that they see (the lack of) Latinx representation in the classroom as a factor in their academic success, and that they face barriers when seeking out support and resources. We use both quantitative and qualitative data to support our claims.

Although UCSD plans to become an HSI, it has failed to fully address the academic barriers Latinx students experience on campus. To improve the academic success of its growing Latinx population, the university needs to change its practices and application of resources. In the recommendation section at the end of the chapter, we offer a set of clear best practices and strategies to better support student success in the classroom.

We found financial constraints, the identity of faculty and other students, and how students' access resources all impact their academic success.

We argue that UCSD administrators, instructors, and faculty should not expect students to spend money in their classes on top of housing and tuition. Furthermore, better representation and composition of faculty at UCSD could help Latinx students feel more included in the classroom. Finally, UCSD needs to make student resources more accessible.

Chapter methodology

Our analysis used the following categories to interpret the 112 qualitative interviews: "comfort on campus/in the classroom," "familiarity with university/school procedures," "financial hardships," "access to resources," "bad academic experiences," and "good academic experiences." We then grouped the coded categories to uncover themes in the barriers that students themselves identified. We tried to look specifically for what students were saying, rather than imposing our own ideas around what these barriers might be. This approach allowed us to identify three main categories that students brought up: financial need, identity of faculty and other students, and access to resources.

Meanwhile, the brief survey data helped us make sense of the impacts of students' financial stress. We looked specifically at the quantitative data around "high achieving students" (or students with a 3.8 GPA or higher) and compared them to those with GPAs under 3.0 to see how their backgrounds compared. We found that higher achieving students tended to come from higher income families and were less likely to be first-generation college students. The structure of this chapter follows the main student-identified barriers that came up in the research and analyzes the quantitative and qualitative evidence to understand how students managed barriers to their success. The

chapter concludes with a recommendation section that provides suggestions for ways the university can better support Latinx students.

Financial constraints impact student academic success

Teachers often overlook students' financial constraints. Instructors should not expect students to spend their own money in their classes, because this is a barrier for some Latinx students.

Around 70% of students interviewed reported total family income (prior to starting at UCSD) under $75,000. In our analysis, we found that high achieving Latinx students (those with GPAs over 3.8) we more likely to come from middle to high-income backgrounds. Only 44% reported family income (prior to starting at UCSD) under $40,000. In contrast, among students with GPAs less than 3.0, we found that 76% reported total family income under $40,000. This suggests that GPA may be impacted by family income. One way of interpreting this data is that financial stress has a negative impact on student success.

Many students we talked to shared that they came to UCSD primarily because of their financial aid package. For example, Alejandra, an 18-year-old student from Sacramento, California, confided: "If it wasn't for financial aid, I would not be here at all. Like my mom can't afford it. I can't afford it."

Unfortunately, some students also decided to leave the university because of financial stress. Emmanuel, a 22-year-old, shared that some of his friends ended up leaving UCSD because of financial problems. He explained, "The people I was closest to, like, they had financial troubles. They just couldn't keep paying for school." Emmanuel added that close friend had to leave UCSD after her financial aid changed because the university found out she was working.

Additionally, to cover the cost of school, living and/or supporting their family, most Latinx students we interviewed worked for pay. Ximena, a first-generation transfer student, shared: "I had to work full time while also being there (in community college) because I'm also financially responsible for my family and just help taking care of the home." Prior to enrolling at UCSD, Ximena worked multiple jobs to support her family. Her father had recently had surgery which put him out of work, and her mother needed to be a caretaker. This example demonstrates the range of responsibilities that low-income Latinx students have, which can impact their ability to show up as consistently and fully as privileged students in the same classroom.

Financial stress can also impact a student's schedule, giving them less time to work on schoolwork. For instance, Carmen was a second-year student. To help her parents, who worked around the clock, Carmen took on many household responsibilities. She explained, "I still come home to clean the kitchen. Like because you know my parents work 24/7 to make ends meet, so I am definitely still the one that comes home, cleans. [...] I come clean, do some work, sleep, repeat and then we leave." Even if Carmen herself was not working long hours, the need to support her family reduced her free time.

Students who worked and students who received financial aid both found additional school expenses, such as the cost of textbooks, a barrier to academic success. Esperanza, a first-year student from Los Angeles, struggled to afford her textbook for a chemistry class. Esperanza's mom was delayed in sending money, so she ended up getting a 50% on a homework assignment. She didn't feel comfortable telling her professor about her situation, so she accepted the failing grade.

Roxana, also a first-year student from LA, shared that in one class she was expected to buy three textbooks, and she struggled to pay for them. The cost of the books added stress to her existing struggle to balance her job (to be able to afford living) and being a full-time student (which is a requirement to receive most forms of financial aid). Roxana also felt uncomfortable asking for help. If these students had been able to afford the textbooks–either through financial aid or additional funding–they would have felt less stress.

As we show with these examples, zany students are profoundly impacted by economic concerns. Latinx students hold jobs, support their families financially, and many struggle to pay for additional classroom resources like textbooks. Financial status also has a spillover effect in that it impacts their ability to take part in social activities outside of class.

Latinx students need Latinx representation

In general, interviewees felt less comfortable participating in class at UCSD compared to their high schools, which tended to have more Latinx students. They shared that having Latinx professors helped them feel more included in the classroom and that they appreciated when faculty took the time to show that they were invested in Latinx students' success. Finally, students expressed frustration about being in courses without Latinx faculty and with few other Latinx students.

Many students we interviewed shared a feeling of imposter syndrome, meaning they felt out of place at UCSD and that they did not belong. Several students linked these feelings to a lack of Latinx representation among faculty and other students. In interviews where students mentioned comfort in the classroom, nearly half specifically said the identity of professors was vital to their academic experience.

Alejandra, for instance, said that the whiteness of her professors – and her feeling that there were not many others like her in the student body - made her less likely to participate in class, because she feared she would not be understood. For her, language was a barrier to participation – especially compared to her experience in a majority Latinx high school. Alejandra was bilingual and moved fluidly between Spanish and English throughout her interview. But in English, she said, "I feel like my vocabulary is very limited. Because I don't know, it's just not as good. I don't want to sound dumb, I guess, so I'm just gonna, like, kind of stay quiet [in class]." She felt there was little space for her multilingual vocabulary in class.

Roxana, a first-year student from Los Angeles, said she did not participate in her Political Science lecture classes because "The majority of [the students] are white. I'm not gonna lie… I feel like it's internalized; I just feel very not confident to say what I have to say because I feel like it's not smart, I guess … And the teachers are white. So, I just feel like there's a lot of other people aside from Hispanics that-they're not going to understand me. So, I mean, why say something that they're not even going to understand? And they're going to look at me in the wrong as well … I'm sorry, but I would prefer a Mexican professor." Roxana then compared the political science course to her experiences in a classroom with more Latinx students, adding, "And now [in another class] I do see a difference, when I'm surrounded by other, [Latinx] people, I just feel more confident to speak and, yeah, I'm not as scared."

Even though Latinx students are now 22% of UCSD's student body, students often *felt* like they could not find others like them. Jasmin, a high-achieving transfer student, said she

had good grades but was surprised to come to a school where she was sometimes the only Latina in the classroom. She explained, "I was used to seeing more people like me in my classrooms. Now, it is completely different. Like, I think it fed it into my imposter syndrome, just because I was like, where am I?". Even though Jasmin thought of herself as talkative and outgoing, she often felt uncomfortable speaking up in class for fear of being judged by the professor. Jasmin's experience was common across interviews.

By contrast, when students described positive experiences, they tended to be with Latinx faculty members or teaching assistants. For example, Carmen, a second-year student studying electrical engineering, said her Latinx-Chicano Studies TA made her feel more included in the classroom, making it easier to speak out in class. Carmen said she felt more comfortable in the classroom with Latina instructors, reinforcing the importance of Latinx representation among professors.

Similarly, Roxana said her best experience at UCSD was with a Latino faculty member who showed genuine interest in her learning and performance. Yet UCSD had not officially hired this faculty member. Roxana felt frustrated that the university would not hire this individual and believed it reflected a general refusal to prioritize hiring Latinx faculty.

In short, having more Latinx faculty, TAs and students made respondents feel more welcome in classroom settings. Representation also helped students feel there was space for them in academia and higher education as a whole. A large portion of the Latinx population at UCSD are first-generation college students, and being able to visualize themselves in these spaces is crucial for their further academic success.

Other positive pedagogical strategies (alongside racial and ethnic representation), included showing genuine interest in students. When professors reached out with relevant articles or engaged with Latinx students' interests on a personal level, students felt welcome. Lucy, a fourth-year transfer student, mentioned a moment of belonging when a professor brought up a research opportunity related to her interests during office hours. She said this made her feel seen. Such efforts can improve Latinx student academic experiences, but they must be coupled with increased visibility and representation.

Barriers to academic support and resources

In our interviews, we learned that many Latinx students do not utilize existing university resources, including the writing resource center, financial aid, and counseling services. Students we talked to often voiced discomfort around seeking resources at all, and when they did seek out resources, many expressed uncertainty about how to access them. We link this hesitation to cultural and structural barriers. Seeking resources was particularly difficult for Latinx students who were not familiar with university systems. Even though financial aid, mental health, and food services might not directly relate to classroom experiences, they also shape how a student is able to show up in the classroom.

For example, when asked about seeking support from the university, Alejandra, a Latin American Studies major and first-generation college student, said, "Truthfully, I don't know where to go." Alejandra added that since her mom – who had not gone to college - "doesn't know any resources or anything about the higher level of education." As a result, Alejandra did not know where to begin.

Similarly, Esperanza said she would like assistance from the university but did not know where to look for it. She said, "I probably do need help in chem[istry], and finding those

resources has been kind of difficult." She also said that she only recently began seeking out the disability accommodations she was entitled to, because "I didn't know that I could get accommodations for [her disabilities], until like, a week or two ago." LIkewise, Gabriel, a first-year, first-generation student from Los Angeles said that he would like help with academic advising but "I'm really not sure where to go for that."

In short, many Latinx students are not aware of the resources available to them at UCSD and feel uncertain about how to access support. Additionally, they do not have people in their lives who are familiar with attending a four-year university, leaving students even more in the dark about what help is available.

In addition, some students had negative experiences when seeking out university support. Emmanuel, an Anthropology major, shared, "I've had really bad experiences with the learning common[s]". He mentioned that the number of people looking to receive tutoring meant that spots filled up so quickly he couldn't get help. He explained, "I never really got a chance to use it because it would fill up so quickly." Roxana, likewise, said that she had to go to the financial aid office repeatedly, because "they make mistakes." In these examples, the pressure of seeking help was placed on students, and when they made the effort to find appropriate resources, they felt pushed away or that they had to struggle to get their needs met. Even when the university offered resources, often, the offices were not adequately staffed, making it hard for students to access support, especially if they were not as aware of the resources or had more limited time than students from more privileged backgrounds.

Familiarity with academic resources comes at least in part from having parents who went to college. In our quantitative survey, we found that 88% of respondents with GPAs below 3.0 were the first in their families to go to college, compared to the 56% of those with GPAs over 3.8. Not having parents who went to college might contribute to a lack of experience with the university's bureaucracy and a lack of comfort with navigating its complex resource systems.

Another barrier that keeps Latinx students from accessing resources is cultural. Many students shared that cultural barriers make them hesitant to seek out university resources. Isabel, a fourth-year student majoring in sociology and business psychology, said that she struggled to seek out mental health resources because she felt "a little bit of a stigma or like taboo to, like, seek out, like for help." Similarly, Gabriel, a first year, first-generation student shared, "I got to, definitely got to a point where I had like, my mental health was bad. I felt really down and I - I know in a traditional Mexican household 'you're a man, and you're not supposed to express feelings.'" He said that his cultural upbringing made him less comfortable seeking out therapy. Carmen also said that her cultural background made it harder for her to ask for help. She explained,

> I I feel kind of embarrassed to talk about it, but in my culture that I was raised in, my family's very much - we give, but we don't take. So in a way, I think, like anything, any resources that have been to help or - such things, I've never reached out to them because I was just raised – "You can always give but like, don't ever take." Also, because I was raised in a very - in a humble house, meaning, "We have enough to eat, don't go out if you don't need to eat," right. Or just, "Don't, if you don't need it, don't go get it." So even though we, even though I wasn't the richest, I didn't have the most, I knew enough to where it's enough. And right now, I think I have enough even though - but then again, I haven't really reached out for these resources.

These students' experiences demonstrate the cultural barriers some Latinx students face in asking for help. In particular, some Latinx students feel a stigma against asking for help or seeking out resources. Such stigma can present an invisible barrier to Latinx students getting help when they need it.

When students are able to bypass the cultural stigma against asking for help and decide to get support, they can also be met with bureaucratic barriers. Even though most students interviewed were aware of the resources available on campus, less than half had gone in to visit a resource center or gotten help when they felt they needed it.

However, not all students experienced the same uncertainty about where to get help. In particular, students had *good* experiences when UCSD support centers reached out *to them*. Paloma, a transfer student from Orange County, shared a positive experience seeking resources at UCSD. She said, "I think I've been just very fortunate to have been provided resources before the school even started. Like, the Raza Resource Centro reached out to me over the summer, the Triton Transfer Hub reached out to me in the summer." That is, various UCSD organizations got in touch with Paloma before she even started at UCSD, and this helped connect her with the resources she needed.

Roxana, meanwhile, was able to seek resources thanks to the racially-specific orientation she received. She explained, "When I got here, I applied for the Latinx and Black orientation and I learned about resources on campus, like the Raza, Hermanas Unidas, Hermanos Unidos, and stuff like that. And so, when I started in the fall, I went to those organizations, and they really did help me." That is, an early, Latinx-specific orientation helped connect her to support from the outset.

Finally, many interviewees said the Summer Bridge program helped them feel acclimated to UCSD, both academically and socially. Roxana's statement about the Summer Bridge program is representative of other student experiences. She described:

> What actually really helped me was Summer Bridge. I got a peer mentor, and she was also a first-generation student, so I got to share my experiences with her, and she shared hers. And it was comforting to know that, obviously, a lot of students who are similar to me are also kind of feeling scared about coming here and stuff. And, yeah, it was just really comforting to know that I had places to go to.

Particularly for first generation students like Roxana, who might be coming into a new environment, Summer Bridge provides support for the transition to the university. It does this by letting students know that they are not as alone as they feel, that their experiences are normal, and that they have a roadmap to seeking support.

Conclusion and recommendations

This chapter has addressed some of the most salient issues that came up in interviews related to Latinx students' academic success. While the college experience goes beyond academics, succeeding in the classroom is key to quality higher education. For Latinx students, academics at UCSD come with special challenges. Financially, Latinx students tend to carry an additional weight of supporting their family, balancing jobs and academics, navigating financial aid, and covering unexpected fees, such as textbooks. Identity-wise, they also struggle to feel welcome in classrooms where educators and peers are not like them. And institutionally, they must learn to navigate the public university and overcome cultural barriers to getting support. UCSD must do more to reduce these challenges. We provide a series of concrete recommendations below.

Recommendations

- Professors and Teaching Assistants (TAs) at UCSD should reduce requirements to purchase classroom materials. Some examples include:
    - Using texts that are already available through UCSD's online databases
    - Connecting students with financial support programs on campus (such as student co-operative programs, Financial Aid Office appointments, etc.)
- UCSD should hire more Latinx faculty. Of 112 Latinx undergraduates interviewed, almost all mentioned wanting to see more Latinx professors. Hiring faculty from underrepresented communities would allow students to see themselves represented in the higher education.
- Professors and TAs should adopt inclusive teaching practices and create a welcoming, comfortable, and engaging academic environment for students by:
    - Making lectures accessible after class
    - Providing extra office hours if needed
    - Connecting students directly to tutorial centers/writing hubs–as opposed to giving a phone number or websites on a sheet
    - Explicitly expressing interest in and awareness of Latinx student issues
- Departments, faculty, and student organizations should more proactively reach out to Latinx students and create casual environments to open a dialogue with them.
- Before students arrive at UCSD, or during orientation, they should be provided with detailed, explicit, and culturally-specific advice about how to get help from existing support centers on campus.

Chapter 2:

How Legal Status Shapes Students' Academic, Emotional and Social Wellbeing

Analysis and writeup by Pilar Ceja-Aguilar, Nicole Ceron Lopez, Linda Velasquez, and Lorena Yu-Liao

Chapter summary

This chapter draws from 112 surveys and interviews with Latinx-identified students at UCSD, conducted in Winter 2023. We seek to highlight challenges that Latinx students face when they lack secure legal status. We pay particular attention to undocumented students and those with mixed-status families (students with parents or other family members who do not hold citizenship or permanent residency).[2] We then trace how legal status shaped students' academic, social, and emotional wellbeing.

Some key findings from our research that directly affect Latinx students:

- At least 34% of students surveyed came from mixed-status families or faced legal status barriers themselves. Five identified as undocumented.

- Nearly half of students surveyed worried about the deportation of a family member, and 33% had an immediate family member who had been detained, deported, or involved in deportation proceedings.

- The fear of deportation undermined students' emotional well-being.

- The geographic location of UCSD affected students' social well-being, especially if they came from mixed-status families.

- More than three quarters of students surveyed had lived outside of San Diego before attending UCSD.

- Students often took on extra familial responsibilities, from translating documents to sending money home, especially in mixed-status families.

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[2] We did not ask about siblings' or other family members' legal status, meaning a larger number of students may be part of mixed-status families than represented here.

Introduction

Legal status has an impact on Latinx students' social, academic, and emotional wellness. Being undocumented or part of a mixed-status family can set students apart from their peers and is frequently disregarded by classmates, instructors, and campus administration.

In this chapter, we evaluate how legal status impacts Latinx students at UCSD. To learn more about the experiences of this student population, our team analyzed interviews of undocumented students and those from mixed-status families at UCSD. Among the total of 112 students interviewed, at least 34% came from mixed-status families or faced legal status barriers themselves. Five identified as undocumented.

When we asked these students about their experiences at UCSD, we found that there were three main trends in their concerns: 1) fear of deportation for oneself or their parents, 2) the geographic location of the campus, and 3) having family responsibilities on top of being a student.

Nearly half of students surveyed (i.e. even more than those we identified as undocumented or mixed status) worried about the deportation of a family member, and 33% had an immediate family member who had been detained, deported, or involved in deportation proceedings. This fear undermined their emotional wellbeing.

Because San Diego is a surveillance hub, the university's location and fear of deportation go hand in hand. The numerous checkpoints and enhanced border patrol monitoring in the San Diego region due to our proximity to the border made it challenging for students from mixed-status families. More than three quarters of students surveyed had lived outside of San Diego before attending UCSD, and those from mixed-status families hesitated to have their family visit. Students often assumed UCSD would have a sizable Latinx population since it is close to the border but felt isolated once they arrived. Additionally, being separated from family members who faced legal obstacles caused students anxiety, which had a negative impact on their mental health, and could impair their academic performance.

Finally, students from mixed-status families were especially likely to take on extra family responsibilities, from translating documents to sending money home. We discovered that students from mixed-status families juggled large numbers of family obligations and frequently struggled to balance their personal, professional, and family lives. These family obligations affected students' mental health and academic performance.

These issues all intertwined with pressure and anxiety due to the political climate, family worries because of legal status barriers, and culture shock when arriving at UCSD. By identifying and acknowledging these issues, UCSD and relevant organizations can provide better support and resources to help Latinx students thrive. As an emerging Hispanic Serving Institution, our findings will be essential to improving the Latinx student experience at UCSD.

Chapter methodology

Drawing on the 112 interviews conducted with Latinx students at UCSD by the Mexican Migration Field Research Program in 2023, we selected students who came from mixed-status families or were undocumented. Because the survey only asked about parents

(and not siblings or other family members), we identified respondents as having mixed-status families if at least one of their parents did not hold citizenship or lawful permanent residency in the U.S.

Focusing on these individuals, our analysis looked at questions about their legal status, barriers to academic success, and their overall emotional state as students at UCSD. We also compared these students to the rest of the Latinx student respondents. This comparison allowed us to pinpoint the differences in experiences and assess how legal status shaped these differences.

We refined our analysis by using the following coding categories: "physical location", "fear of deportation", and "academic performance." We sought to understand how the unique location of UCSD–so close to the border and near several immigration checkpoints–affected students and their families' decisions about whether to come and/or travel to UCSD, thus impacting their social well-being. The "fear of deportation" category brought up the US political climate and its effects on a student's identity, either as undocumented or coming from a mixed-status household, and emotional well-being. With the category of "academic performance" we wanted to evaluate the relationship between a student's family responsibilities (including being a caretaker, translator, and/or supporting emotionally and financially) and their ability to excel and focus at UCSD.

Fear of deportation erodes emotional wellbeing

Students from mixed-status families or who lack legal struggled with fear of deportation for themselves or their family members. Undocumented students often felt the need to conceal their identity from their peers due to the risk of having it exposed to the public, which could threaten their security in this country. Hiding their identity could create a sense of disconnection and emotional exhaustion, leading to feelings of isolation and stress.

When we asked students if they worried about deportation, 48% said yes (more than the 34% we identified as undocumented or from mixed-status families). In qualitative interviews, they explained that this fear created constant anxiety. For instance, Carmen, a first-generation college student from Escondido, California, described her struggles with this fear even before she arrived at UCSD. As the U.S.-born child of undocumented parents, Carmen took on numerous daily tasks in her home and community, such as helping to translate documents and inform others about the college application process.

At UCSD, Carmen often felt isolated from other Latinx students and experienced a sense of imposter syndrome. Most importantly, she said, her parents' and family's legal status left her "unsettled." She described:

> Immigration [enforcement] was really bad in my hometown, and I just had to be worried that they [would] make a stop and they would ask for papers and that would be, you know, the end. So even [at] home, it was scary because I was home, but now that I'm away…it's a 30-minute drive, sure, but I don't have a car, you know, my brother is all alone over there, and it's not just my parents. It's my uncles. Half, if not all, of my family is undocumented, so it's really upsetting. I feel so far away, not that far away, but it's definitely unsettling in case of an emergency happening.

Carmen's combination of managing responsibilities at home and feeling out of place at

UCSD was common among many first-generation Latinx students.

Like Carmen, many students we interviewed juggled numerous responsibilities and were preoccupied with how deportation could affect their families. Sofia was born and raised in Tijuana and her mother was undocumented. As the oldest of her siblings, Sofia had to not only learn everything about going to college on her own, but also pass the knowledge along to her siblings. Legal status barriers were influential in her everyday life. She shared:

> I always think about deportation… because I [have] my two little sisters, one is in high school and the other one is middle school, but they are the ones that need her [my mom] a lot… [It's] very stressful…think[ing] about it, so…if she needs anything, from the store….or the bank or something like that or doing some paperwork. I always go with her (my mom) or my dad, because we are the people that we can help if she has troubles about speaking in English, or something like that…And also if they need an ID or something.

Sofia was one of many students that had to look out for undocumented parents, an added stress. Being far from home – even just 30 minutes like Carmen - increased their concerns about being absent and unable to support a parent in the case of an arrest or any other encounter with law enforcement or immigration control.

Patricia was a first-generation transfer student whose parents had recently gotten their citizenship. Yet, her fear of deportation never went away. She explained:

> Even though they're citizens, I am still kind of scared that ICE could take it away, or they could be taken away at any moment, you know. Becausethey're allowed to live here, but there's things that they can't do, and I'm always just scared that if I expose them, I might somehow be part of them getting taken away or something. Especially if I told the wrong person, and I think it's kind of more of an anxiety thing. But I don't disclose it unless I absolutely feel I have to or if it's someone that I trust that I know that they don't really care, or they have the same experience as me.

To avoid the wrong kind of attention, students like Patricia often avoided disclosing their parents' legal status, even with friends. As Patricia put it, they worried they might "expose" their parents or unintentionally trigger a deportation. Worrying about one's parents and walking on eggshells to protect them was a huge burden to carry, especially when students could not share their fears with their friends. Instead, students quietly lived with this deep anxiety, alone.

Fear of deportation could also have a significant impact on one's identity, particularly for undocumented students. Though we only interviewed five undocumented students, all of them lived with anxiety and uncertainty about their future. This made it difficult to establish a sense of self and connection to their community. It limited their opportunities to pursue their goals. For example, Ignacio emphasized that he felt trapped by the need to hide his unauthorized legal status. By contrast, when he felt he could safely reveal his status, he could be his "full" self. He explained:

> I guess I still don't really feel seen in my full identity as an undocumented student, so I've just been trying to, I guess ground myself with the community and services. It's just that the peace that I need to just know that I don't have to put up a front for someone or - I don't have to hide my status or be someone else in a certain

space because. I am that in SPACES, because I work there, and I am in the Raza Resource Center. So, it's kind of hard to just be there like a person and not so many different things.

That is, Ignacio felt more peaceful and authentic in spaces on campus that made it clear he would be protected when he disclosed his legal status. He finds this sense of belonging in certain spaces, such as his workplace and the Raza Resource Center. In such spaces, it was easier to connect with people and be himself, without feeling the need to put up a front or hide his identity. However, he also felt like he was seen as "so many different things" in these spaces and longed for a sense of simplicity in his identity.

In short, legal status barriers triggered fear of deportation and a sense of needing to hide important parts of their identity, leaving students feeling anxious and often isolated. Campus institutions that explicitly made space for students to reveal these parts of themselves helped alleviate these feelings to some degree, while never assuaging them altogether.

Geographic location shapes social wellbeing

UCSD is located less than 30 miles away from the U.S.-Mexico border, and thus within a 100-mile border enforcement zone. Within this radius, U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) has the authority to search vehicles and passengers without a warrant. This policy limits the mobility of students with legal status barriers. It maintains the distance from family members, and from other students, making it hard to feel fully safe or at home.

More than 90% of the students who identified as mixed-status or undocumented were from California. About three quarters had lived outside of San Diego County, with most coming from Los Angeles County. Usually, they came to campus by driving down Interstate 5. That route (the most common and direct) included a Customs and Border Patrol checkpoint in the city of San Clemente. This checkpoint left students and family members with legal status barriers vulnerable to CBP surveillance. The various checkpoints on important interstate highways that connect San Diego County with the rest of the state, like the I-5, I-15, and I-8, made accessing campus risky–adding to the anxiety described in the section above.

Students with full citizenship don't have to worry about being able to move throughout the U.S. By contrast, students who are undocumented or have undocumented family members often limit their mobility throughout the region due to fear of encountering border enforcement. This lack of mobility cuts students off from family and makes the experience of traveling to and living at UCSD more stressful.

For example, Jade, a Chemistry major from Los Angeles, described the limitations she experienced at UCSD and in society because of her parents' unauthorized status. When she saw her peers visit their parents (or vice versa), she wanted to see her own parents as well. But, she explained:

Even traveling to San Diego sometimes, it makes [my parents] scared 'cause they don't want to get deported back. So, I don't see them much when I'm in San Diego. I mean, when there are holidays I come back, or breaks… It really makes me sad and feel lonely that I won't be able to see them until breaks 'cause I see some of my friends' parents or siblings coming to pick them up, and it's like, "I wish my parents could come and hang out here, in San Diego, and have a fun time." Because of the fear and the worrying they [if they] do come to San Diego they will

just be worrying. It's maybe better for them to stay in LA.

Being near the border, across a checkpoint, and unable to visit made students like Jade uneasy.

Feeling isolated and unsupported could also have significant impacts on students' mental health, affecting their academic progress. When asked how being in San Diego affected her, Natalia, an undocumented senior from Desert Hot Springs, California, explained:

> Mentally, of course, it's draining because it affects my whole life - physically, mentally, and emotionally. I actually remember having a breakdown when I was in the summer program during my first year. I questioned why I even came to UCSD, as my family wouldn't be able to visit, and I wouldn't feel as comfortable as I could in the area. I really considered going to a community college first and then transferring to a four-year closer to my hometown.

Despite efforts to make UCSD an inclusive campus, including having an Undocumented Student Services Center, border-zone checkpoints make UCSD especially stressful for students.

In addition, UCSD is located in the white upper-class neighborhood of La Jolla, far away from the multicultural neighborhoods of central and south San Diego. With the campus being so close to the border, many students expected that it would have a higher Latinx population or that they might feel culturally at home. Jessica, a biology major, for instance, found it challenging to connect with peers who did not share the same background. She reflected:

> I don't know what I thought, but I guess I kind of figured that because San Diego is so close to the Mexican border - I thought that there would be a lot more diversity at UCSD. But making connections with my peers has been really hard for me. Because I feel like I can't relate to anyone, and I don't know, like, I just don't see a lot of like representation at UCSD.

Many students interviewed expressed a similar surprise: even though UCSD was located in a multicultural, hybrid, border region, and had 22% Latinx students, they often felt isolated.

It is important to foster more inclusivity for students like those featured here. In particular, our findings suggest that somewhere between one third and half of Latinx students fear deportation and may get limited support from family members due to the risk of passing through CBP checkpoints to get to UCSD. This disconnection can make students feel isolated, stuck and estranged.

Managing family responsibilities.

College students from mixed-status or undocumented families tend to hold a privileged position within their households. As a result, many take on additional roles in their families, as caretakers, translators, breadwinners, or role models. These roles impose demands on students above and beyond their academics (and/or their jobs). Students have to balance their own education – which often comes with high expectations – and the need to support family financially, practically, and/or emotionally. In turn, they often struggle academically and/or emotionally.

For undocumented students, legal status also imposes major financial burdens.

Undocumented students are not eligible for federal financial aid and scholarships, or even work opportunities (until 2023). As a result, it is difficult for them pay for tuition, housing, and other necessary expenses. Often, this financial strain leaves students feeling even greater pressure to succeed academically, adding stress.

In our interviews, at least a third of students from mixed status families mentioned family responsibilities besides being a student. These responsibilities ranged from translating for their parents to working to relieve the financial burden of their families to providing emotional support for their parents or siblings. Many students felt stressed about their family responsibilities and said these demands got in the way of their studies. Aurora, a first-generation student with immigrant parents, described that in her family:

> I'm in charge of anything that has to be done in English. I translate important documents. And then, everything college-related with my sister, I've done. I filled out her FAFSA. I helped her fill out all her college applications, like scholarships and things like that. Um and it's not...I guess I've helped with my own finances. My dad helps me pay rent. That's it. Everything else, I pay for. So, I guess that's a responsibility that I've taken away from them. And I'm just there for my mom.

These responsibilities, Aurora added, took time away from her studies. She felt guilty leaving her family to pursue higher education. Due to this guilt, many students like Aurora felt even *more* responsibility to care for their families and assist younger siblings while they were away.

Aurora added that it was hard to worry about her parent's legal status while being away at college. She reflected:

> The first time she [my mom] got deported back, she got arrested for a couple of days. And because of that, if she were to apply for citizenship, she would have to go back to Colombia for like five years and then try to come back. It's a whole process. Like, my parents were thinking about it two years ago in the middle of me doing finals. And I was like, okay, now I have to stress about finals, *and* I have to stress about this whole immigration thing.

Such legal status issues within the family made it difficult for students to focus on their education. When legal struggles arose, such as managings the legalization process or the threat of deportation, education became second priority.

Many students, especially students from undocumented families like Jessica, felt the need to support their families financially while they were away at college. Jessica highlighted the trouble with balancing work, school, and external responsibilities, explaining:

> But I still have bills to pay outside of school and loans and stuff like that. And so that's why I work. But I can't work as much as I'd like because I can't deny that classes are pretty rigorous. And if I want to excel, I do have to prioritize school, which puts a financial strain, which stresses me out. Yeah, which then makes me not do well in school. So, it's this whole cycle. So, I'm not working as much as I should be. So, right now, I'm surviving. I'm basically only paying my bills. And I don't have my own money, if that makes sense … And so that's where I kind of see the privileges come in, and how a lot of people have just like a lot more free time [than me]. So, I think that people will inevitably do better [in school], because they have the luxury to study, whenever they want. And I don't have that, you know, the

luxury to just have free time.

Students like Jessica have to make time to work to provide for themselves and their families, on top of their studies. This takes a toll on their academic well-being, as well as their self-esteem in trying to compete with students who seem to have all the time in the world.

Jessica exemplifies the difficulty of making time for oneself as a student whose family cannot provide financial assistance. To survive, such students tend to prioritize their jobs instead of school. Working also impacts a student's social well-being, leaving little time to socialize with friends or participate in extracurricular activities.

Meanwhile, undocumented students faced another kind of stress: being unable to earn money due to their legal status. Natalia, who wanted to graduate and become a teacher, explained:

> The fact that I can't get a job means that I don't have any income. If I want to find a scholarship, it requires a lot of work. Even now, when applying for a master's program or any program that requires teaching, I would have to go through an entirely different process. Sometimes the people who are ready to help you might not know exactly what to do. This affects me mentally because it puts me in a space that I can't leave. It feels like I am only working towards a job. This feels more real now that I am in my fourth year. I've been working towards two degrees and putting all into it, but am I even going to get a teaching job? Honestly, I am not sure.

Paradoxically, while Natalia could not get a job, students like Jessica *had to keep a job* to support their family. Though the limitations were different, both experienced the added burden of navigating college and citizenship issues simultaneously. This struggle generate anxiety, stress and a feeling of being disconnected and unsupported by the university.

Conclusion and recommendations

Students who are undocumented and/or come from mixed-status families face added burdens even compared to other Latinx students. Specifically, they must cope with an omnipresent fear of deportation, impacting their mental health. The specific geography of UCSD can also be hard for them, cutting them off from family and friends and intensifying the fear of a deportation or run-in with law enforcement while they are far from home. Finally, such students must often support themselves and take on a range of family responsibilities, above and beyond those taken by other Latinx students. These responsibilities leave such students anxious and with little free time to attend to their studies or make friends. Such students do not have the luxury of focusing solely on school and often feel guilty if they do not fill these responsibilities for their families. In addition, students whose families face legal barriers often feel an intense pressure to succeed "for" their families and beat the odds against them.

In what follows, we offer a series of recommendations via which UCSD could better support such students.

Recommendations

Fear of deportation and isolation due to border enforcement and checkpoints:

- Create a welcoming and inclusive campus environment where Latinx students feel valued and can express their full identities:
  - Provide training to faculty and staff about diversity and inclusion, educating them on the struggles that some students face due to legal status problems (staff can then develop teaching methods that validate students' experiences and background)
  - Increase students' accessibility to legal aid, such as having an immigration lawyer and keeping students informed regarding immigration policies
  - Ensure that the Office for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion embraces and represents the overlooked population of Latinx Students
- Have a Latinx or cultural-based organization on campus (Raza Resource Centro, Cross-Cultural Center, CAPS) host a support group that will allow students from mixed-status/undocumented backgrounds to express their emotions with others surrounding the fears and stress they experience while attending UCSD and being a child of immigrant parent(s).
  - Increase the number of student-run groups/clubs on campus that provide a space for Latinx students to participate in events and build social connections with each other.
  - Host cultural events and activities, create safe spaces for students with legal status issues to connect and share their experiences in a safe environment
- Hire therapists to support the CAPS office that specializes in working with children of immigrants, or with immigrant backgrounds themselves will allow for a greater understanding of the experiences of mixed-status/undocumented students.

Supporting students with added financial and other responsibilities

- Strengthen targeted financial assistance to students from mixed-status families, such as scholarships and grants, to better account for financial hardships facing students with legal status barriers.
  - Create inclusive fellowships and grants that include undocumented students.
  - Train the Financial Aid and Scholarship Office to offer more support to Latinx Students with legal status barriers.
  - Educate students about their options regarding funding and any type of grants available to them.
- Create opportunities that will help students connect with professional mentors and rolemodels in a safe and secure environment (including internships, research, and other work opportunities that do not require work authorization).

Chapter 3:

Institutional Distrust:

How UCSD's Inaction Undermines Latinx Student Mental Health

Analysis and writeup by

Bahar Fouladpouri, Breanna Ramirez, Diego Gonzalez, and Vanessa Garcia

Chapter summary

UCSD is an emerging Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), with a current student body made up of 22% Hispanic students. As such, it is important to build trust with Latinx students and provide them with the help needed to graduate. In our interviews, we found that most Latinx students distrust UCSD and believe it is not taking sufficient action to address past failings. For instance, students argued that non-Mexican students felt isolated and unacknowledged. They noted that there were very few Latinx-identifying faculty members. Students mentioned feeling better when they could approach someone who looked like them, someone who echoed their worries, and someone who they could see as a rolemodel. They also suggested that UCSD did little to address faculty racism and the tokenization of faculty and students of color.

Other interviewees said they struggled to navigate UC SHIP (school health insurance), specifically to get mental health. They added that support resources such as CAPS were often underfunded and overcrowded. Many found it hard to secure an appointment, taking months for students to get their needs met.

All of these experiences gave Latinx students a feeling of distrust for the university, feeding into feelings of imposter syndrome (doubting one's abilities compared to others), isolation, and anxiety, and worsening mental health within the Latinx student population.

In Latinx communities in the U.S., it is common to be brought up with a sense of resilience. Many of us are taught independence as a cultural value, from a very young age. Therefore many students do not ask for help when they need it, especially when UCSD and its current system present so many barriers to getting that help. When asked, students proposed many ways the school could help them. Here are the most important:

- Provide more funding for CAPS, to expand their services and hire more mental health professionals, allowing them to serve more students.
- Create opportunities for more students to access beneficial programs with specific attention to racial and ethnic background, such as Summer Bridge, RAZA Living Learning Communities, and CASP.
- Expand representation of non-Mexican Latinx peoples (Salvadorian, Columbian, etc.), by flying flags, having more cultural food options, and allowing the RAZA Resource Center to expand through extra funding.
- Hold the school and professors accountable when racist acts happen on campus.
- Institute a Chicanx/Latinx training requirement for current and future faculty to better educate and respond to harmful acts.

Introduction

The University of California, San Diego (UCSD) is on its way to becoming a Hispanic Serving Institution. For a school to receive the HSI designation, 25% or more of the student body must identify as Hispanic. Despite this aspiration, UCSD does not provide enough support for this growing population. Many Latinx students on campus do not feel welcome and

experience insufficient support in events, faculty, and UCSD resource centers. This experience has negative impacts on Latinx students' mental and physical health.

Institutional trust plays an important role in subjective well-being. People need to feel like they can safely rely on the institutions they are part of. When institutional trust is weak, wellbeing deteriorates, and mental health issues increase–such as anxiety, imposter syndrome, and isolation. For UCSD's Latinx community, a heightened sense of insecurity while at school only adds to existing obstacles to their mental wellbeing.

For context, Latinx-identifying students experience several barriers to accessing mental healthcare. Many of the students interviewed for this report expressed a sense of guilt because they were in college while other family members were not. Being the only one (or one a few) in their family to go to college contributed to their feelings of imposter syndrome. Many also faced cultural stigma and low awareness about mental health issues growing up. A large portion of Latinx students stated that they were not supported by their families if they sought mental health treatment, causing them to avoid reaching out for help or simply due to a lack of opportunity. These cultural and socioeconomic limitations mean that many Latinx students were unaware of how to use the mental health resources on campus and were rarely encouraged to seek them out by those around them. In addition, the risk of deportation made student anxious and made some afraid to seek mental health services.

For many Latinx students at UCSD, the transition to college could be greatly aided by better mental health resources. Up until that point, collectivist cultural values such as *familismo* (family loyalty) help many Latinx students cope with challenges. When such students move to college, they are suddenly isolated from their cultures and families. Instead, they have to rely on formal resources at UCSD. Despite the school's relative proximity to the border, numerous interviewees explicitly used the term "culture shock" while describing their first quarter on campus, referring to the absence of their family and community as they adjusted to a new schedule and environment. A strong cultural emphasis on family/community also means that many of these students either hope or are expected to help provide for their families financially, a pressure that feels a lot more real when they must cover college tuition.

As an emerging HSI, UCSD must do more than just enroll Latinx students– they also share a responsibility to make sure these students feel safe on campus and graduate. Other than a few successful programs with limited coverage, such as Summer Bridge and CASP, Latinx students generally have little support at UCSD. Mental health services are underfunded, overcrowded, and difficult to access. In addition, other harmful practices, such as low racial representation and low accountability for racism among faculty, leave students feeling tokenized and isolated. These added pressures make it more difficult for Latinx students to cope with the challenges they experience in their personal lives. We also argue that the school's inaction to fix such issues *adds* to the list of barriers to Latinx student mental health. That is, students tend to be less likely to reach out for help due to the school's reputation among them, and they feel less safe and valued as individuals in the classroom. At the end of the chapter, we include recommendations provided by the interviewees themselves and our observations based on patterns in the interviews so that UCSD can hopefully take critical steps to foster trust among its Latinx community.

Chapter methodology

To analyze the interviews conducted by the MMFRP team in 2023, our group coded for

keywords including "representation", "resources", "school policies", and "mental health." We wanted to identify mental health struggles common to the Latinx student community and understand how interviewees were responding to UCSD's existing efforts to support them. The common thread linking the four categories that we noticed during the analysis process was a strong sense of skepticism and insecurity regarding the school, which harmed students' mental wellbeing. Based on this trend in the data, we adjusted our report's structure to center the most common student experiences, breaking down these feelings of distrust towards UCSD and crafting our suggestions for how to improve the situation.

(Mis)Representation and accountability

One of the most important parts of being a student at a four-year university such as UCSD is feeling like one belongs. In many of the interviews we did, students felt a disconnect between UCSD and themselves. Representation matters, not just in faculty, but also based on how students see themselves and their culture on campus. When speaking about their feelings towards UCSD as an institution, most respondents said they felt they didn't belong, largely because they did not feel represented. Many said they felt isolated and without much support (from peers, professors and the school itself). They linked this lack of belonging to their performance in school. The unfamiliarity of an institution without Latinx representation was compounded by the distance that many felt from their family, since many Latinx students come from Los Angeles or other parts of California. Isolation also fueled a sense that they did not belong, or impostor syndrome. Ultimately, such experiences led to worse mental health.

We categorized representation in two ways, which participants saw as equally important: personal and professional. Personal representation entails a Latinx student being able to see their culture visibly around campus (such as in food options, events, art, important holidays). Professional representation is a student's ability to connect and be able to speak to staff and faculty who are from or even aware of that person's culture.

In terms of personal representation, many students mentioned that they did not feel belonging at UCSD because they did not see themselves represented. Aurora, for instance, captured the situation she faced when she was a first-year student:

> I think it was like my first year when I was going through all the imposter syndrome. I was trying to find a group. Or a group of people that I could - that I felt most connected to. But I've noticed that when there's clubs tabling, um it's so focused on like Greek life and then - a lot of Asian student associations. And there's nothing wrong with the Asian student associations, but sometimes it's kind of selfish. Sometimes I feel like it's unfair that there's like a Cambodian student alliance, Korean student alliance, Japanese student alliance. But for Hispanic students it's either Hermanos Unidos, Hermanas Unidos, ELLA, or NAC, and that's it. There's no Salvadorian student alliance, there's no Colombian student alliance. And I feel like, also, when anyone refers to the Hispanic students, it's usually to Mexican students. I feel like Central and South American students are so swept under the rug or all grouped in with Mexican students. So, it's definitely hard to find community here when it's so, like, swept under the rug in comparison to Greek life and other student orgs. Um, so that definitely didn't help with the imposter syndrome.

In other words, Aurora felt imposter syndrome not just because she struggled to keep up

with her studies, but because she saw representation for everyone but her own culture.

As Aurora mentioned, most UCSD organizations for students who identify as Latinx were melting pots of every Latin American ethnicity. Many also implied that every Hispanic student is Mexican, when that is not the case. There are many more cultures within what the school considers Hispanic, all with different events, foods, and even flags. For instance, the culture mainly represented by the Raza Resource Centro is Mexican culture. The name, "Raza" comes from the popular phrase in Spanish "Viva la Raza," "La Raza," which refers to "The Mexican Race." The Raza Resource Centro's name contributes to non-Mexican students' lack of belonging and distrust for UCSD's attempts to celebrate diversity. A better name for the center could be the "Latinx Resource Center", or the "Raices Resource Centro." Both of these names apply to the entire Latinx student population and would make a larger proportion of students feel seen.

Professional representation is representation for students to see themselves when looking at professors and other administrators at UCSD. While it is not necessarily a requirement for professors and faculty to be of any culture or ethnicity, it is important to students to have professors whom they can relate to. Being able to see someone who has your skin color or who eats and celebrates the culture you are a part of allows a student to connect and feel less fear when approaching professors. Sebastian offers an example. He explained:

> When I see a Brown professor, I feel more comfortable talking with them. When I've had a White professor, I wouldn't be comfortable going up to them and being like, "Hey, I don't get this, I was wondering if I could talk to you after class or something." But I think a Brown professor really helps me. Really helps me. Just go up to them, like, "Hey, you can help me, too? We're similar." So, I think that's important. Diversity among staff.

Similarly, Joaquin highlighted a memorable experience with a professor, reflecting:

> Yeah. He [Brown Professor] was really cool. It was like, it just felt cool seeing another person who was Latino. And yeah, we talked about that in class because we would go over some kind of, I guess, problematic things that happened either at SDSU or on campus and the whole thing with the Professor for Organic Chemistry making fun of one of the Latino workers, the janitors.

Joaquin and Sebastian's stories show how much representation matters in feelings of belonging and adequacy. The fact that both were Latinx allowed students to talk with them freely about problems and develop a bond. This connection is a gamechanger: Latinx faculty allow students to feel safer and more comfortable, especially when culturally specific worries arrive. There is a sense of sharing a background, experiences like *familismo*, *machismo*, and even concerns about deportation, which someone who is not from the same background might not understand.

Such representation has important mental health implications. Sometimes, students felt their anxiety was too much, especially when faced with serious problems like deportation anxiety. In these cases, interviewees said they felt more comfortable going to someone who would understand on a personal level to ask for things like extensions and alternate assignments. Often, students felt that UCSD was more like "echo chamber" where all their worries, arguments, and stresses were repeated back to them or acknowledged and then not taken into consideration. Instead, they wanted to be heard, and have mentors who "got" their worries and could be rolemodels.

The lack of representation goes hand in hand with the lack of institutional accountability towards acts of discrimination. Interviewees such as Jaqueline described classroom environments and practices made them feel isolated and tokenized when exclusion was quietly swept under the rug. A public law student in her final quarter at the time of the interview, Jacqueline explained:

> The school, again, never addresses anything. And they just want everything to seem picture perfect. So I feel like acknowledging stuff and giving stuff a voice would help people. Like, [to make us feel], "Oh, well, they are listening to us. They are trying to take accountability for what happened." I feel like that would help a lot of people feel at least more heard, I think, in the school.

When Jacqueline first arrived at UCSD, she believed the public rhetoric claiming that Latinx students were being advocated for and listened. Then, Jacqueline experienced multiple insensitive class discussions on border politics that caused intense anxiety, and a poorly investigated hate crime towards her Jewish suitemate. After seeing such exclusion ignored, she came to feel that the promise to care for Latinx students was performative. In addition, Jaqueline said, she only felt comfortable with only one out of her many white male professors. She decided to graduate early, in part due to the constant insensitivity about racial issues she experienced in her major–comments that went unaddressed.

Elizabeth, a second-year who recently switched her major away from chemistry, described a similar feeling of disenchantment. Elizabeth noted that former chemistry professor, Robert Ternansky had been publicly racist towards Latinx employees during a lecture. She reflected, "I couldn't find myself feeling welcomed in any way. And there were also incidents with, like the professor that said something racist. So, I was like, 'Yeah, I'm not gonna feel welcome here [in chemistry] no matter what.'" Many other respondents also brought up this episode as a reason they did not have much trust in the school, particularly due to how lightly Ternansky's actions were treated.

For Elizabeth, the video of Ternansky's comments was the last straw after many moments of feeling isolated as a Latina in STEM courses. For Jaqueline and Elizabeth, the school's lack of accountability for racism contributed to feelings of anxiety and loneliness. They ultimately could not trust that their inclusion would be prioritized and resigned themselves to leaving their respective majors as soon as possible.

Even interviewees who appreciated the school's existing efforts to address racism still believed that UCSD acknowledges racial disparities shallowly, in ways that are most convenient for the institution. As another student, Osimara, put it, "I like the fact that UCSD has these cultural centers and stuff. But it also just feels like, "Oh, like let's throw them a bone and let's have Black history month or Hispanic history month'… Like, it just feels performative more than genuine, I guess."

There is a general consensus amongst Latinx students we interviewed that the school does not truly prioritize inclusion and allyship. For this reason, we recommend increasing standards for both hiring Latinx faculty members and holding the institution and faculty accountable when they fail to create the welcoming atmosphere being advertised on the surface.

Inadequate and hidden resources

Latinx students' distrust for UCSD does not come out of nowhere. Existing resources to support underprivileged students are systemically neglected, forced students to navigate

mental health, financial, and academic struggles on their own. On one hand, some interviewees had positive experiences with school programs like the Summer Bridge program. On the other hand, in our observations, Latinx students rarely explored or utilized existing school resources, particularly those related to mental and physical health. We found that not only were such resources difficult to access, but Latinx students also had low "resource literacy," meaning little awareness or knowledge about existing resources.

Students who had been in Summer Bridge or similar orientation programs tended to have high resource literacy, while those who had not were far less likely to be aware of the range of services available to them. Advertising the school's resources would improve the issue. However, the interviews taught us that there is another barrier that prevents Latinx students from knowing what is available to them at UCSD. For example, interviewees tended to express uncertainty when it came to using UC-SHIP (health insurance). Valentina, for instance, said:

> Something I've been struggling with a lot is to know what are the benefits of my healthcare. I've been having a lot of problems with my wisdom molars or teeth. I think I struggle a lot to be able to even find a dentist that takes UC SHIP because you kind of have to go through the jungle of websites in the UCSD stuff to even figure it out.

Valentina highlighted the challenge of navigating resources alone through UCSD websites. To make things worse, the UCSHIP website tended to have outdated information, including not displaying current benefits for students who use this insurance. The fact that many of these websites are outdated makes accessing support more difficult, since students must do additional digging in order to get accurate, up-to-date information. While current resource literacy seminars highlight information and make services accessible, they are not well advertised to most students. Only students in programs like Summer Bridge or CASP receive this valuable information.

Another barrier to resource utilization is that many of the school's programs and services are severely understaffed. One example is CARE at SARC, the Sexual Assault Resource Center on campus. Currently, the entire office performs their tasks remotely and has done so since 2020. In addition, the CARE website explicitly states that this office is understaffed and does not have the ability to keep up with all students. For example, Lucero reported feeling unimportant when she sought out help from this Center, due to long wait times. She was told to call many numbers rather than having someone help her directly as a survivor of sexual assault. She recalled that after this experience:

> I was so defeated. I was like "Wow! The one place." This is supposed to be the place that will help me, and they didn't help me, so I didn't do anything. But then, my RA scheduled a one on one for us. So, I scheduled one [sigh]. And I told him. I was like, "Listen, like I'm going through this. I have called CARE at SARC, and like they're not helping me. I don't know what to do." So, he was like, "Listen, I will handle it."

Lucero's story shows how students cannot rely on crucial school resources for help in a time of crisis, especially with the type of trauma that CARE at SARC is meant for. Instead, Lucero had to get help from someone not trained for it, but who was available and cared. Still, each year the CARE at SARC facility continues to hire only two student interns, keeping the resource center small and leaving students seeking this sort of support unseen. By keeping places such as CARE at SARC understaffed, many Latinx students–

who already have a difficult time navigating the world of mental health resources–are met with a wall once again.

The same issue came up among interviewees who attempted to access the school's Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS). Jaqueline, for instance, shared:

> Whenever I would call the number, no one would ever pick up. And sometimes I'd be waiting for like half an hour. And I was like, "Why is no one picking up?" And then the one time that they pick up, they're like, "Oh, we're currently full. We're not taking new patients." And I was like, "Oh", and they were like, "Just call back soon, hopefully we'll have something open." And I was like, "Well, there goes that."

Jaqueline's testimony shows that, although the CAPS service is technically available and free for all students, it is way too limited. From our interviews, students who did get appointments through CAPS were in the minority. This reflects severe understaffing, since currently there are 38 counseling staff members working there to serve UCSD's 43,000 students. We repeatedly heard instances of students calling numerous times without success and being referred to therapy outside of the school. Hence, despite putting in the time and effort to request mental health care, many students are not getting support.

The repeated lack of positive experiences help explain the limited trust that Latinx students feel towards school resources. Gladys' words are clarifying in this matter. She explained:

> I feel like I've heard CAPS isn't even very helpful. So I didn't even want to reach out to the. I feel like that's kind of a bunch of BS, 'cause like, it's super important that they are here and that students get that help, or at least I feel like I needed help. I still need help, actually, but I feel they're very unreliable, and that makes me not want to reach out.

Gladys expressed skepticism that the school's resources could help her, which led her to not even attempt to use the services. In other words, "resource literacy" is not enough. Like Glady, there were plenty of interviewees who were aware of UCSD resources but saw them in a negative light. Indeed, iterviewees without prior experience with school resources were not told to use them by their Latinx friends and acquaintances. When participants were aware that resources had a poor reputation, they stopped regarding them as an option.

In addition, these services are poorly adapted to meet Latinx students where they are at. Less than a quarter of the small group of CAPS workers speak Spanish, the language in which many Latinx students express their emotions most comfortably and vividly. Even fewer are Latinx themselves. Some interviewees expressed that they were not comfortable talking to mental health professionals who were not guaranteed to be understanding of the unique challenges that they faced.

CAPS also offers a restricted service schedule that does not adapt to students who must commute and hold jobs. One of our participants, Mónica, stated that her weekend shifts prevented her from seeking much-needed therapy. She explained that she would prefer to drive home to Tijuana to see a therapist she could trust to understand her experiences or not see one at all, rather than see one at UCSD.

The lack of diversity and flexibility in UCSD's mental health staff reinforces Latinx students' feelings of isolation. In practice, Latinx students are left to fend for themselves due to unavailable and culturally distant resources. In our interviews, we quickly noticed a need

to be seen and to grieve that was not being provided by the school's existing mental health resources. For many of our respondents, the interview with our team was the first time they shared their stories and family history with someone–and this became a cathartic space. This shows that Latinx students feel their experiences are invisible, and they rarely see opening up to others as safe in the UCSD context.

To sum up, the expansion of CAPS and the hiring of equipped staff members who come from a Latinx background is an important step to start supporting Latinx students' mental health and build trust. In addition, there needs to be more effort to maintain websites and widely inform students about existing resources, as practiced – rarely – in programs like Summer Bridge.

Conclusion and recommendations

As an emerging HSI, UCSD must become more aware of the issues that its Latinx students experience. While Latinx students are frequently praised for their mental resilience by outsiders, we share with our respondents a fatigue over having to be resilient in the first place. When Latinx students shoulder extra responsibilities and feel unable to turn to anyone for help, their mental health is negatively affected. Currently, the university does not have the necessary resources available to improve student mental health. In other words, UCSD creates an environment that undermines students' mental health and then cannot address the issues. Over one hundred testimonies from Latinx students on campus reveal how unsupported such students feel on this campus. To address these issues, we suggest several changes, as detailed below.

Recommendations

More representation for Latinx cultures:

- Having different food options, fly different nationalities' flags, and expand the Raza Resource Centro to all Latin American cultures, among other efforts to recognize the multiplicity of Latinx identities.
- Provide more funding for CAPS to hire more professionals who understand and can serve the Latinx population.
- Hold the school and professors accountable for any acts of racism.
- Host events to help students find a therapist, learn coping mechanisms, and learn about all of the resources available to them.

Hiring more diverse faculty:

- Include a Chicanx or Latinx studies requirement for staff members.

Increase school resources and outreach for Latinx students:

- Share information in campus dorms, apartments, and Raza Resource Center, among other frequently visited student sites.
- Create opportunities for more students to access beneficial programs (such as Summer Bridge and CASP) and expand the information provided in those prorams to all Latinx students.
- Create ways for students to ask for help in privacy, like the Basic Need Hygiene Form.

Chapter 4:

Barriers to Participation in Latinx Student Activism

Analysis and writeup by:

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Chapter summary

This chapter asks what barriers currently exist for students to participate in collective advocacy to ensure that UCSD is better held accountable to their students and that the campus supports its Latinx community. The interviews and surveys analyzed in this chapter reveal the many barriers Latinx students face to participation in political activism. Students described family, work, and academic responsibilities, first-generation college student pressures, and unreliable Latinx resource organizations as the predominant barriers to participation. In addition to identifying barriers to engaging in political activism, we detail Latinx students' perspectives on how the university can alleviate such barriers and enhance its service to the Latinx community on campus. To do this, we delve into the multifaceted identities of Latinx-identifying students, acknowledging their diverse backgrounds, needs, and perceptions of inclusion.

Although Latinx organizations exist at UCSD and can facilitate opportunities for community development and participation in political activism, many students abstain or disconnect from participating in these spaces. This chapter identifies three specific barriers to participation:

1. Latinx students often have multiple roles and responsibilities that restrict their time and capacity for advocacy.

2. For first-generation students, academic and career success take priority, leading students to prioritize their studies over participating in organizations

3. Communication and visibility gaps exist between Latinx organizations and students.

To address the barriers detailed in this chapter, we recommend that UCSD allocate more funding to campus organizations, expand communication strategies, and ensure programs orient students to Latinx organizations beyond summer and first-year initiatives. We also recommend that current Latinx student organizations address intersectional identities and visibility gaps through student-led committees and workshops. The emergence of UCSD as a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) makes it important to examine how the university's current configuration expands or restricts space for Latinx students' voices on campus.

Introduction

Being part of campus organizations is just one way that students can organize and participate in political activism. Organizations oriented around specific student identities, such as the Raza Resource Centro, the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicanola de Aztlán (MEChA), and The Black Resource Center, have a deep-rooted campus history that reveals the importance of student activism. For instance, in 1965, The Black Student Union (BSU) and The Mexican American Youth Association (MAYA), known today as MEChA, birthed the Lumumba Zapata Coalition. The coalition's goal was for the University of California, San Diego's (UCSD) Third College to be devoted to the needs and class interests of historically oppressed groups, such as Black, Brown, and indigenous working-class students. In the document "Lumumba-Zapata College: BSC-MAYA Demands for the Third College, UCSD," they demanded that the "Third College be devoted to relevant education for minority youth in the study of the contemporary social problems of all people. To do this authentically, the college must radically depart from the usual role as the ideological backbone of the social system, and must instead subject every part of the system to ruthless criticism" (The TMC History Project, see https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb2392060k/_1.pdf). In this chapter, we build on the legacies and labors of former, current, and future student activists at UCSD and recognize both individual students and their organizations as drivers of change.

Our report highlights and addresses the challenges Latinx students face in representing their interests and fighting for a more inclusive, supportive campus. Latinx-identifying students are incredibly diverse, with varying needs and senses of inclusion. This chapter explores the conditions (social, historical, material) that orient Latinx students toward or away from engaging in activism centered around a shared but varied Latinx experience.

First, we illuminate some obstacles that impede Latinx students from engaging in Latinx student organizations and other spaces conducive to political activism. While political activism exists outside formalized Latinx student groups like Movimento Estudantil Chicanola de Aztlan (MEChA) or the Raza Resource Centro, we explore student political engagement with these spaces as an important reference, since much of students' discussion and social and political activism connect to these organizations.

Interaction with these groups is affected by many factors, including work and family responsibilities, academic and career expectations, resource allocation, first-generation experience, identity, sense of belonging, institutional structure, and communication between Latinx organizations and students. All of these factors, we argue, influence how individuals navigate higher education–either toward or away from collective political action. Presenting the narratives of Latinx students at UCSD highlights measures that the university can adopt to alleviate burdens and foster student involvement. The chapter seeks to amplify respondents' experiences and advocate for their interests. Ultimately, it ties greater voice for Latinx students to better resource investment by the university in their wellbeing.

Chapter methodology

The data used for this chapter come from 112 in-depth interviews of Latinx students at UCSD conducted by students in the MMFRP (Mexican Migration-Field Research Program) in 2023. In analyzing these data, our guiding question was, "Why are some students oriented away from Latinx organizations and political activism, and what factors enable other students to get involved?" We used coding, a qualitative research analysis method, to organize words, phrases, or paragraphs into categories related to political activism to

develop common themes across our data set. We focused on respondents' stories about participating in student-led organizations as well as the comments that, by omission, revealed how they felt burdened and unable to be fully part of the active student body. Pulling from structured and grounded theory approaches, we initially coded with a few preconceived themes in mind, allowing others to develop throughout the process. This brought us to the three main themes developed in this chapter.

Latinx student workload

Most Latinx students juggle multiple responsibilities, which can restrict their ability to allocate time and energy to participating in student activism. Latinx students' financial and family responsibilities can make it more challenging for them to find time to establish connections with student organizations and participate in spaces that are conducive to Latinx-focused activism. Nearly 60% of the students interviewed said that they worked at least part-time, and many described their familial roles as an extra responsibility that required time and attention.

These barriers affect students across year, background, and transfer status. For instance, Claudia, a first-generation student in her third year, spoke of the difficulty of living at UCSD, finding community, and participating in campus organizations. Claudia was from Los Angeles, grew up in an immigrant household, and still contributed what she could to help with groceries and other essentials for her parents. Knowing that her family could not assist her with school and feeling she needed help, she also had to work. Claudia expressed how juggling work and school made joining and participating in Latinx organizations difficult. She reflected, "I have wanted to join MEChA, but I've been discouraged 'cause I just don't have time to. I feel like I work a lot and I am on campus, but I don't really go and venture out to the Raza Resource Center. I feel like I can go more (often) there."

As for Claudia, many Latinx students had to work for financial support. Students working from part-time to full-time had to balance work, school, social life, and extracurriculars - with work and school prioritized. Claudia waws one student among many who expressed that they wanted to join Latinx campus organizations like MEChA, a Latinx political voice for UCSD. However, after work and studying, they felt they did not have enough time to contribute to other areas. Immersed in schoolwork and her job, Claudia added, "I think it's just - I haven't seen very many opportunities to do so. And also, I get into a time constraint where I do have a test at the end of the day. As much as I would love to get involved, I still do have classes and work I still have to do."

While work and academic commitments play an essential role in making students feel they cannot participate in political spaces, their time and energy can be limited by other responsibilities - most notably, as seen in Claudia's instance, family commitments. Many Latinx students, especially those from mixed-status households, fulfill essential roles in their families; they are translators, clerical workers, and a source of financial support. This additional labor further reduces a student's capacity to engage in political activism. Mayumy, a first-year student born and raised in Los Angeles, held multiple responsibilities for her parents, who migrated to the U.S. from Central America. When asked about family responsibilities, Mayumy described with the financial and clerical work they do for family members, saying, "Literally a couple days ago, I had to take care of some financial stuff for my family. And I'm constantly, in terms of FAFSA and financial aid in general, I'm always in charge of that and (it is) just kind of a lot of pressure sometimes." Supporting family is

essential and often intense for students from mixed-status households.

Claudia and Mayumy's testimonies underscore the shared experience that Latinx students have with juggling multiple responsibilities as full-time college students. Balancing this work often leads to deprioritizing student organizations. Student organizations and UCSD administrators interested in expanding community engagement and political activism must consider students' multiple responsibilities.

First-generation pressure

For many Latinx first-generation and transfer students, feelings of anxiety, pressure, competitiveness, or "falling behind" accumulate around academic and career expectations. This feeling pushes them to put their extra time towards academics. Over three quarters of the students we interviewed were first-generation college students. A recurring theme across interviews with such students was the affective experience associated with first-generation status, of having to prove that one's parents' sacrifices were "worth it."

One of those students was Gabriel, a cognitive science major from Los Angeles in his first year at UCSD. Gabriel said that coursework limited his ability to get involved with student organizations, let alone learn about them in the first place. He felt he could not participate in Latinx organizations because of the pressure of academic expectations. Being a "first-gen" student often means navigating higher education without the social and financial capital that peers may hold, such as connections to internships and labs or the financial security to take non-paying positions. In addition, many Latinx students feel that not only their financial aid but also their family's moral support depend on their academic success.

First generation students interviewed may also feel like when they enter the university, they are already behind and have to "catch up" to succeed. This leaves them hesitant about participating in student organizations. For example, Margarita, a first-generation student from San Diego, attended the Preuss School at UCSD - a charter middle and high school geared towards low-income scholars who have never had family members attend college. After high school, UCSD gave Margarita a scholarship, four years of secured housing on campus, and connections through the Summer Bridge program. Though Margarita's position at UCSD may seem unique–not many interviewees were promised a full scholarship–the pressure around academic work and career felt like a huge burden to her. Margarita explained that even in high school:

> As a first gen student, I knew that I needed to apply myself really early on in order for me to be even eligible for these opportunities. So, I think that's why it was always ingrained in me to study hard and whatnot, and do the extracurricular activities, do the AP classes, go above and beyond, essentially over, I guess, an average student from my background.

To even get to UCSD, Margarita had to adopt an intensive work ethic. By the time she arrived at the university, it was ingrained that this was what a low-income, Latinx student needed to do to succeed. Other first-generation college students also as if they entered the university with a different starting point, behind their peers. To compensate, students put extra time and effort into academics and career preparation.

In the "competitive" environment of UCSD (as Margarita put it), she felt like participating was not an option. Margarita described socioeconomic status, identity, and geographic

background as constitutive features of the first-gen experience. When asked what it meant to be a first-generation college student, she replied:

> It's not being able to relate to my peers at certain levels. So socioeconomic status, racial ethnicity reasons, literally anything regarding background, even our geographies or where we were from. Some people coming from out of state, out of the freaking country, clearly having money to pay for it. I'm on a full scholarship, thankfully. But if I couldn't (pay for it), if I didn't get this. I wouldn't have been able to come here. I probably would have gone to community [college], and that's fine.

Even though 22% of UCSD students identify as Latinx, Margarita *felt* a deep sense of isolation about her background and her dependence on financial aid. To keep that financial aid, she had to maintain a certain grade point average. Her GPA also helped Margarita to feel she belonged.

Family expectations also sometimes intensified the pressure to succeed. Of 112 participants interviewed, 96.5% had immigrant parents. Only 20% had a parent born in the United States, and just four had two parents born in the United States. Many described their trajectory to UCSD as shaped by the values, histories, sacrifices and desires of family members who migrated to the United States. These family backgrounds shapes students' educational trajectories, informing their declared majors and their determination to succeed. Like many other participants interviewed, Margarita often thought of her single mother, who had immigrated to the U.S. and continuously emphasized the importance of education to her children. Margarita explained:

> Again, my mom came here very young. She did all of this for me. And I feel like if I give up this opportunity, I'm like, "What? What will become of me?" Like, I don't have any backups. I don't have anything. What am I going to do? I'm only going to have to work, and I don't want that for myself personally. Because I know the struggle.

As Margarita described, children of immigrants often felt added pressure to succeed and affirm the sacrifices made by their parents. Such expectations added further pressure to spend time on academics, rather than in student organizations.

Visibility gaps in student organizations

In addition to personal barriers to participation, we found that existing student organizations had communication and visibility gaps for Latinx students. While many students were familiar with the existence of UCSD's resource centers and certain prominent organizations—such as the Raza Resource Centro and MEChA—few understood what these organizations did in their day-to-day work. They also had little clarity on what such groups offered to students who joined.

Most of our interviewees did not know much about what the resource centers offered. For instance, Lizbeth discussed in great depth how her status as an undocumented transfer student affected her experience at UCSD and named various experiences with different centers and organizations on campus. She considered that perhaps the Raza Resource Centro could help her conceptualize and connect to her Latina identity. However, she framed the thought as a question, adding "I don't know. I could not even tell you what the Raza Center even does." While Lizbeth imagined the center as beneficial, even as a very informed student, she knew little about it. Similarly, Joaquin, a

first-year community health science major from Baldwin Park, Los Angeles, described the Raza Resource Centro as "kind of underground." Adding, "It takes time for Latinos to find them."

In another example, Patricia mentioned a center on campus geared toward Chicanx or Latinx students, but she was unable recall the center's name. Nor could she recall what operations or services that center provided or know any peers who had visited. Though vaguely interested, she did not feel inclined or comfortable enough to visit. She explained:

> Unfortunately, I haven't gone to the Chicanx Center, I think it's called, or the Latinx Center. I haven't explored it yet. I passed by it, but I wasn't really sure. I was like "I don't know if I can go in there" or if you have to have an appointment or something, I don't know. It's just kinda - because I know a lot of places you kind of just go in there and like chill. But I also don't really know anyone who is part of that center or has gone to that center.

Patricia's hesitation expresses unfamiliarity and perhaps even anxiety, when one might expect such spaces to feel more welcoming. The lack of knowledge about such resources can inflate a student's feelings that they lack support or community, a key path to participation in groups that facilitate or engage in Latinx activism.

We found a common sentiment that the university has contributed to said visibility gaps. Many respondents felt that the university placed such organizations in obscure places that were difficult to find or on the periphery on campus. For instance, several mentioned how the Raza Resource Centro had been moved to Pepper Canyon, in a place that was hard to find. Joaquin, now an involved participant in the Raza Resource Centro and other Latinx organizations like MEChA, described how it took him years to learn of these organizations. He felt that UCSD did little (especially after summer orientations) to make such organizations visible for students. Itzel added:

> Yeah, if they (UCSD) want to become an HSI, they have to know that if you're going to admit these (Latinx) students, you have to therefore combine that with support... You got to do the "serving" portion, you got to make sure your resources are not just a band aid solution.

Many shared the view that UCSD was responsible for and had to do more to make Latinx student organizations visible.

On the other hand, when thinking of possible methods to mend visibility gaps, respondents also emphasize the importance of direct outreach and communication. Better communication from Latinx-identified organizations might help students comfort, belonging, and knowledge about the organizations. As Lucero put it, "They send the daily symptom checker every day, they send me an email about the Chancellor once a week, they should send me Raza updates like monthly!"

In fact, many respondent suggestions, including recurring announcements via newsletter or email, are already offered by the Raza Resource CEntro via online sign-up. The problem is, Latinx students are often juggling many roles and responsibilities (as explained above), so the extra effort to sign-up for these newsletters is not a priority. Resources must come to them, and not the other way around. In addition, students also described a lack of institutional trust and support (see Chapter 3 for further detail). This explains the recurrent call amongst participants for further university-wide support of programming

and events hosted by Latinx groups, organizations, and centers.

Intersectional blindness

Finally, organizations would do well to welcome and account for different positionalities (within a Latinx identity). For both in and out-group members, the organizations needs to acknowledge multiple identities. Ignacio, a second-year student, felt that even in organizations where he felt welcomed with "open arms," such as SPACES or MEChA, "I guess I still don't really feel seen in my full identity as an undocumented student." Ignacio had attempted to alleviate his experience of isolation by building community and participation in organizations. But he still felt his total intersectional identity was not fully acknowledged outside of UCSD's Undocumented Student Services Center.

Lizbeth shared similar frustrations, with an on-campus collective she felt unknowingly pushed out students of color. She described, "And it literally happened to be right in front of my face where it's like, the most leftist space, most comfortable space, most XYZ space that's supposed to be not hostile to people of color is literally putting them out of these spaces." Unfortunately, Lizbeth's experience shows that spaces that are meant to be inclusive and welcoming for students can also be places of exclusion and discrimination. On the positive side, Lizbeth's experience led her to begin a dialogue on the racist experiences students of color face, offering an example of what student-led transformation for inclusion and equity looks like.

In contrast, Mateo, a third-year LGBTQ+ identifying student, shows how finding your crowd can be a lifeline. Mateo had been under the impression that the Raza Resource Centro was "attuned to heteronormativity" and thus anticipated a degree of invisibility and alienation within the Centro. However, upon participating in events for queer Latinx people there, Mateo found comfort and connection. He shared:

> The Raza basically is very attuned, at least to me, to heteronormativity. Thankfully this year, I had gotten not involved, but I had attended some events that were held, basically attuned to queer Latinx people. And so I was like: okay. And so to me that definitely expresses this kind of change that they're trying to implement, which is, I think, very comforting to see.

Mateo's story suggests an encouraging new direction in the RRC: fostering spaces that acknowledge intersectional identities. For Mateo, having space to come together with similar-identifying folks made a big difference in fostering a willingness to become involved in existing student organizations. These efforts to reflect the diversity of the Latinx student body should be acknowledged and strengthened so more people can feel welcome and encouraged to participate in shaping their university.

Conclusion and recommendations

This chapter has shown how Latinx students face significant challenges to participate politically in organizations at UCSD. While individually, students have to balance their work responsibilities and prioritize academics, at the university level, organizations lack support and visibility. In addition, they often fail to acknowledge intersectional identities within the Latinx student community. Therefore, efforts can be made to support students at the individual level as well as provide further assistance to existing organizations, so that these barriers to student participation can be overcome. Below we outline a few recommendations, many of which came from the interviewees themselves.

Recommendations

Things the University of California, San Diego can do:

The following recommendations are focused on increasing financial support for Latinx students and expanding Latinx student visibility, by promoting outreach and staffing. Sending frequent recurrent reminders about HSI initiatives and supporting Latinx student engagement will promote political activism by minimizing the barriers created by external responsibilities, first generation pressures, and communication gaps between Latinx students and existent student organizations. Hence, we ask that UCSD authorities:

- Allocate additional ongoing funding towards Latinx-specific DEI initiatives, with a focus on campus resource centers.
  - To alleviate financial hardships facing many Latinx students, the financial aid office should provide additional scholarships, equal-opportunity employment, and comprehensive financial aid packages to Latinx students, such as existing programs like the Chancellor's Associates Scholarship, where 55% of scholars identify as Latinx/Chicanx.
  - Through the student affairs office, the university should invest in the growth of further positions for undergraduate Latinx student programming interns within academic departments and campus resource centers. This would allow students to merge their work and student outreach responsibilities.
  - Through career development and academic departments, UCSD should provide flexible comprehensive year-round paid internship opportunities for Latinx students, requiring no prior experience or authorization, promoting opportunity for all students regardless of documentation status.
- Expand student outreach and increase staffing to meet student needs.
  - The university should invest in developing current and new programming (i.e., student orientation programs) to engage Latinx students, promote community and orient students about available programming, with particular consideration for first-generation students.
- Updates and reminders regarding ongoing and future HSI initiatives should be sent out on a recurring basis (weekly or monthly) to facilitate communication and transparency among Latinx students.
- Collaboration with Latinx community organizations on projects, events, outreach, and community service that can benefit the broader Latinx community through direct voice, participation, and decision-making.

Things Latinx + cross-cultural student organizations can do (including those like Raza Resource Centro, MEChA, SPACES, Undocumented Student Services, etc.)

These recommendations are directed at Latinx and cross-cultural student organizations seeking to promote political engagement. Organizations are usually the first places that Latinx students seek out support and inclusion. These organizations have the potential to help close the gaps that exist between Latinx students and the broader UCSD campus community. Therefore, we suggest these organizations:

- Address communication gaps with students by sending more detailed

announcements across multiple communication platforms and mediums.
- Host more tabling events and send frequent reminders about meetings and events.
- Organize recurring events for students with busy schedules who require additional planning to attend the event.
- Plan quarterly tours showing Latinx students campus resource centers and allowing them to connect with other Latinx-identified students.
- Design mentorship programs for students who require additional support from Latinx students who share their background, in intersectional ways, i.e., first-generation, out-of-state, international students, mixed-status, LGBTQIA+, transfer students, etc.
- Form a student-led DEI committee to create and facilitate collective discussions of the intersectional experiences and needs Latinx students. Students repeatedly expressed hesitancy to participate due to the lack of representation of ethnic diversity, indigenous identity, and/or queer/non-heteronormative identity.