



American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education, Inc.

**Research Considerations and Theoretical Application for Best Practices in
Higher Education: Latina/os Achieving Success**

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It should be noted that translation of the *dichos* used are translated for understanding and application.

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Foreward

Without a rapid and consistent re-shifting of the methods used to teach curriculum and research to Latina/o students in higher education institutions, the limited improvement in the number of Latina/o graduates realized over the last three decades will not change significantly. It is clear that the current methods and pedagogy are not effectively supporting Latina/o students through to college graduation and beyond to graduate studies.

Professor Jeanett Castellanos of the University of California-Irvine and Professor Alberta M. Gloria of the University Wisconsin-Madison call for meaningful changes in the academic perspective used to address Latina/o educational issues, specifically by using a psychosociocultural (PSC) framework that includes the individual, environment, and culture. By applying values central to the Latina/o experience within the academic environment, shifting it to one that respects familiar and essential values, Latina/o student success will improve.

Taking a critical look at what general measures of success do and do not disclose about the Latina/o experience in higher education, Castellanos and Gloria set forth a reconceptualization of the elements of success within the PSC framework. Using *dichos*, or widely used sayings of wisdom using life lessons, the authors carefully describe these elements of success and offer strength-based practices to improve Latina/o student success. Institutions of higher education, historically slow to change, must rapidly reset the process and vision with which they support Latina/o student success.

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Research Considerations and Theoretical Application for Best Practices in Higher Education: Latina/os Achieving Success

The substantial growth of Latina/os in the U.S. (13% of the population) has positioned them as a significant constituent of the educational system. That a postsecondary education today is equivalent to a high school degree twenty years ago, it is imperative that Latina/os are proportionally represented within K-12 and higher education. Without doubt, the knowledge and credentials earned in higher education facilitates Latina/os advancement for upward socioeconomic, political, and social mobility in today's society (Gloria & Pope-Davis, 1997); however, Latina/o students experiences in the educational system are frequently not positive (Castellanos, Gloria, & Kamimura, 2006). In fact, students' academic achievement show limited improvement over the past three decades and the quality of experience continues to decline as few teachers teach from culturally-integrated frameworks and hold high educational expectations for Latina/o students (Quijada & Alvarez, 2006).

Similar to the K-12 experiences for Latina/o youth, Latina/o college students face unique challenges, feel alienated and discriminated, have limited role models, and are subjected to low educational expectations – all of which lend to a sense of normlessness and high academic attrition (Gloria & Castellanos, 2003). Researchers and practitioners have consistently proposed various academic dropout models for Latina/o students implementing a deficit perspective, blaming students and their capacities while overlooking the university climate, faculty-student interactions, programs, and the implementation of culturally-sensitive practices (Nora, Barlow, & Crisp, 2006). Despite the negative experiences and barriers, Latina/o students continue to navigate higher education (Castellanos et al., 2006; Gloria & Segura-Herrera, 2004).

Vital to understanding the current Latina/o educational pathway is a proposed re-shifting of the current academic perspective to address Latina/o educational issues using a comprehensive framework that includes the role of the individual, environment, and culture. In particular, this paper applies the psychosociocultural (PSC) framework (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000) to Latina/o educational experiences and proposes a success model for research and application. By interweaving core Latina/o values (e.g., *familismo*, *comunidad*, *personalismo*), strength-based practices of family and validation, mentorship, cultural congruity, research opportunities and professional development in higher education are addressed relative to Latina/o students' educational experiences, retention, and graduation.

Latina/os in Higher Education – A brief overview

Latina/os have made substantial academic progress in higher education, yet careful review of the data reveals a mere 7% increase over the past 20 years with most students attending community colleges (Castellanos et al., 2006). The representation of Latina/os in 4-year universities has been consistent, without any substantial increase despite growth in population, university programming (e.g., bridge programs), and national policy and recommendations (e.g., No Child Left Behind, Hispanic Dropout Project). Described as an educational crisis for Latina/os (Solarzano, Villapando, & Oseguera, 2005), students drop out as they go through the pipeline leaving few to pursue graduate education. For example, out of 100 Latina/o elementary students, only 21 will go to college, 8 will earn a graduate degree, and less than .2% will earn a doctoral degree. Specific to Chicana/os, the largest U.S. Latina/o ethnic group, only 15 of 100 students will graduate from college and 4 will earn a graduate degree.

Given the dismal academic attainment of Latina/os, their educational experiences merit investigation to advance success.

Defining Educational Success?

Over the past several decades, universities have been called to provide student assessment information regarding academic improvement and success. In particular,

National organizations and agencies, and some state legislatures, have been among those demanding more visible accountability and concrete verification that fiscal and human resources invested in educational institutions are being used in ways that result in high quality education. As one means to require accountability, many of these organizations and agencies are requesting that institutions of higher education use assessment of student learning outcomes as a means of demonstrating valuable and/or improving academic programs (Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System, 2004).

To provide verification of quality education, it is understandable that success is defined via outcome-based indices or academic assessment outcomes. These indices are plausibly determined through institutional baseline data, such as mid- and end-of-the year student enrollment rates or student grade point averages. Similarly, the number of credit hours generated at the undergraduate and graduate levels by program, department, or college; number of years to graduation; student funding via financial aid, fellowships, or assistantships are also frequently used as data-based markers of success.

With changing demography and growing emphasis on diversity and educational pluralism, a common and oftentimes visible success indicator is the demographic make-up of university student populations. For example, university's frequently document the number of students who are racial and ethnic minority, international, first-generation college, from low income backgrounds, or transfer students from community colleges, as demonstration of diversity and subsequent success. Given the low number of students from diverse backgrounds, in particular Latina/os, a sizable percentage increase (e.g., 5%) can translate into only a few more students added to the total headcount. Further, a 5% Latina/o student population could be deemed sufficient to demonstrate diversity, however, it might only represent 500 students at a university of 10,000. Similarly, a "mis-showing" of the data results when mid-year loss of students is circumvented by recruitment of new students such that the end-of- year "counts" remain approximately the same.

Claims of Success: At What and Whose Cost?

Undoubtedly the numerical representations and data-indices can in part provide an overview of success at the institutional level, yet overshadow and render invisible the individual stories of students whose "success" has come at personal, social, and cultural costs. Despite the credit generation or graduation of students, all too frequent are the continued difficult educational experiences of Latina/o students at all levels within higher education (Castellanos, Gloria, & Kamimura, 2005). The literature on Latina/os in higher education is fraught with issues regarding students' needs to negotiate invalidating classroom curriculum and pedagogy, unsupportive and demeaning faculty interactions, and daily campus events that discount, devalue, and deem invisible who they are as cultural beings and contributing members of the university

setting. As a result, students often question their abilities and realities, unfortunately doubting their right and role in higher education (Kamimura, 2006; Rosales, 2006).

Consistently identified as an educational process for Latina/o students, as well as other racial and ethnic minority students, the need to balance multiple perspectives, values, and priorities is a common occurrence. For example, many Latina/os find themselves negotiating home and school responsibilities differently than other students - - a complex and stressful process. Within the educational context, Latina/o students are often “pulled home” to attend to family needs and as a result are frequently subjected to stereotypes and competency questioning by faculty or peers as to whether they are really motivated to earn a higher education. Further, often the “lonely onys” in their classrooms, Latina/os are commonly and inappropriately challenged to give the “minority perspective.” From negative campus interactions to not finding mentors who understand their particular needs, Latina/o students continue to experience the university as an unwelcoming and often discriminatory learning setting. For further discussion on Latina/o educational experiences, the reader is referred to Castellanos et al (2006) and Gloria and Segura-Herrera (2004).

As a result, student dissatisfaction, distress, cultural incongruity, withdrawal from classroom interactions, or dismissal of continued education (i.e., graduate study) are aspects of the university experience for Latina/o students; yet, as these students graduate (or fulfill other assessment outcomes) they are claimed as successes. Indisputably, the end goal is for Latina/o students to graduate, however, can university personnel and/or institutions claim success if Latina/o students are dissatisfied and disgruntled with their previous educational experiences and unwilling to pursue further education?

An Examination of Latina/o Success – What does the Literature Suggest?

The previous educational literature on Latina/os in higher education is fraught with stories of failure and stereotypes, somehow suggesting that either their cultural values or cognitive skills prompt their lagging behind their counterparts across the educational pipeline. More recently, scholars have explored those positive aspects such as resilience (Arellano & Padilla, 1996), self-efficacy (Solberg & Villareal, 1997), ethnic identity (Torres, 2004), or well-being (Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005b) as a different means to understand Latina/os’ educational processes. For example, understanding how use of active coping approaches to negotiate cultural incongruity experienced in higher education and subsequent impact on one’s sense of well-being is a different yet instrumental measure of success (Gloria et al., 2005b). Indeed, examination of non-cognitive components of the educational experience has centralized and legitimized Latina/o student processes in the academic conversation.

Exploration of the environmental role and subsequent systems of support inherent within it has similarly redirected the scholarly discussion regarding Latina/o education. Hurtado’s work on campus climate and impact on perceived integration (e.g., Hurtado, 1992; Hurtado & Carter, 1997) has centralized the discussion of responsibility and role to the university. For example, the focus on faculty mentors and their influence on Latina/o students’ sense of cultural fit within the university (e.g., Bordes & Arredondo, 2005; Gloria, 1997; Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, & Rosales, 2005a) emphasizes the examination of the whole student in context. Further, how the university provides faculty role-models and mentors, programming, finances, “safe-spaces,” and meaningful curriculum for Latina/o students is a question that is directly reflected in the university’s campus climate. Thus, rather than assuming that Latina/o students individually decide to “drop out” based on cognitive aspects (e.g., grade point average) it has been cogently

agreed that they are instead “pushed out” of the educational process (Secada et al., 1998). As such, the need for an integrative and process-focused approach is further evidenced to address student success rather than solely relying on numerical “headcounts” as its measure.

Implementing the PSC Framework in the Redefinition of Success for Latina/o Students

In proposing a redefinition of success for Latina/o students, it is posited that specific and integrative examination of the intermediary elements warrants attention. In particular, three aspects of success include exploration of the psychological (e.g., self-beliefs, attitudes, perceptions), social (e.g., networks, connections, role models, mentors) and cultural (e.g., values validation, meaningfulness) dimensions within the university context. Known as a psychosociocultural approach (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000), these three aforementioned dimensions must be simultaneously examined within the university context to understand accurately Latina/o students’ educational experiences.

Originally developed as a theoretical framework for university counselors to provide services for Latina/o undergraduates (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000), a central tenet is that increased personal well-being will result in improved skills to negotiate the academic context and ultimately persist until graduation. The approach has been applied to faculty and university administrators working with Latina/o students (Gloria & Castellanos, 2006) and used as an empirically-tested conceptual framework to examine Latina/o student persistence. In particular, the approach has been utilized with different Latina/o students (e.g., Bordes & Arredondo, 2005; Gloria, 1997; Gloria et al., 2005a), as well other undergraduates (e.g., Asian Americans, Gloria & Ho, 2003; American Indians, Gloria & Robinson-Kurpius, 2001). Results have consistently indicated that each dimension both uniquely and collectively accounts for academic persistence decisions for students.

Developed as a meta-theory in which different variables of interest or concern can be implicated within each dimension (i.e., P, S, C), the approach emphasizes that variables contribute to each of the dimensions simultaneously. Also, as the variables within each dimension may be commonly identified issues given the area of study, they are not limited to these variables (See Figure 1) yet must be contextually and theoretically-related to Latina/os in higher education. For example, within the psychological dimension, issues of self-efficacy or confidence and self-esteem are frequently explored given their centrality to Latina/o student persistence (Solberg & Villareal, 1997); however, other self-belief variables such as motivation or resiliency could also be included. Within the social dimension, support from faculty mentors, peers, and family are consistently incorporated given the salience of these relationships for Latina/o students (Rosales, 2006). Other sources of support might range from influence of student organizations (e.g., Latina/o sorority or fraternity) to mothers’ encouragement for postsecondary education. Aspects such as ethnic identity, cultural congruity, or acculturation are commonly included in the cultural dimension. Issues regarding gender role adherence (e.g., *marianismo* or *hembrismo*) or sense of community responsibility are other cultural considerations. It is the concurrent examination of these different dimensions that provides a whole and contextualized understanding of Latina/o student persistence issues.

Centralizing of La Cultura: Infusion of Core Cultural Values into the Educational Process

As the university remains dominated by values such as competition (versus collaboration), independence (versus interdependence), self-importance (versus group-importance), or even worldliness (versus spiritual), Latina/o students often experience an incongruence of their

cultural values and those of the educational setting (Gloria & Robinson-Kurpius, 1996; Gloria & Pope-Davis, 1997). Core to the educational and counseling literatures, however, is the notion that students who interact with others of similar values and behaviors are validated (Gloria & Castellanos, 2003; Segura-Herrera, 2006). It is thus feasible to assume that Latina/o students who engage in learning settings which are consistent with their cultural values and practices, would have an increased sense of connection, well-being, and persistence toward graduation.

Steeped in the need for pluralist education, infusion of cultural values for Latina/os, as well as other student groups, is a logical, ethical, competent, and likely an outcome-effective means of ensuring education as culturally-relevant for undergraduates. For example, centralizing the core aspect of *familismo* for Latina/o students within the educational setting is essential. Tapping into the aspects of loyalty, solidarity, and reciprocity inherent to family, either fictive or nonfictive familial relationships can ensure that students are connected and “related” in ways that are simultaneously comforting and effective. As a result, the concept of *comunidad* (community), the caring for and responsibility to, is closely related to *familismo*. As the system of *compadizcgo*, or co-parentage of children within families and communities as *padrinos* (godfathers) or *madrinas* (godmothers), the responsibility to help take care and provide direction for (e.g., emotionally, physically, spiritually, or financially), is a system of interpersonal connections. Within these many informal and formalized relationships, the interpersonal processes and interactions are critical. For example, *personalismo* and *simpatia* are two interactive styles that emphasize personal connections that are harmonious and pleasing. It is through these person-focused relationships that *confianza* (trust) is established and the reciprocity of *respeto* (respect) and *cariño* (loving or tender interactions) are engendered. Focusing on the core aspect of family and importance of relationships, the *mestisaje* or *mestizo* (literal translation: mixed) notion that individuals are open systems in which all persons and things are interrelated (Ramirez, 1999), the presence of *espiritualidad* (spirituality) is vital. The belief in a higher power which connects and provides meaning is fundamental to many Latina/os who are interconnected and interdependent members of something larger, such as *familia*, with purpose and meaning.

Importantly, as a function of acculturation (level of adherence to values) and ethnic identity (the importance or meaning attributed to one’s ethnic group) not all Latina/os similarly personify these aforementioned values. Despite the heterogeneity of values adherence or importance for Latina/os, many embody these values in their daily lives. Whether they are exemplified within their educational contexts is questionable, particularly given the consistent and demoralizing process of “switching” or “juggling” their values based on context (Sanchez, 2006). In the end, interweaving core values into the fabric of the university experience will assist Latina/o students to have cultural sustenance and validation which will likely prompt both individual and group longevity toward graduation. For a more in-depth and comprehensive discussion of core Latina/o values within the context of education, the reader is referred to Gloria and Segura-Herrera (2004).

Reconceptualization of Success: Applying a PSC framework

Using a process versus outcome approach, success for Latina/o students should be re-operationalized as small or intermediary steps building toward academic persistence. Although the definitive end outcome is graduation or degree conferral for Latina/os, it is those “smaller” rudimentary elements leading up to the final assessment outcome that needs attention. Much like

the leaky educational pipeline, the loss of Latina/o students in higher education is tantamount to overlooking the intermediary aspects of persistence.

It is through the monthly, weekly, daily, and even hourly successes that the formulation of Latina/o students' persistence must be centered. Specifically, it is through elements of psychological validation, social networks, and cultural affirmation that Latina/o students are bridged and sustained to the endpoint of graduation. Below are specific and illustrative examples of Latina/o student micro-successes.

Psychological Elements of Success

- Receiving a monthly care package of foods from home.
- Students choosing to stay on campus rather than going home for the weekend.
- Talking with family to provide them daily updates about how they have managed their coursework.
- Having a faculty ask and be concerned about one's personal well-being.

Social Elements of Success

- Attending monthly Latina/o-based student organization meetings.
- Having weekly meetings with a faculty member to discuss educational progress and research interests.
- Meeting with others Latina/o students at the library to study.
- Seeing and greeting Latina/o peers on campus between classes.

Cultural Elements of Success

- Engaging in monthly community projects that address Latina/o issues.
- Engaging in a course assignment that requires examination of family and cultural values relative to the curriculum.
- Talking about one's family with a faculty member over coffee or lunch.
- Fluidly moving between an ethnic-specific student group and predominantly White classroom.

It is through incremental building of "smaller" successes from the varied dimensions of students' educational processes, as indicated above, that the whole student is attended. Use of a culture-specific strength-based approach for Latina/o students can increase positive experiences and daily educational successes. Aggregation of these successes over time can serve to increase persistence decision and subsequent graduation of a student who feels validated, valued, and willing to imagine and prepare for continued education. It is these types of micro-successes that define, achieve, and maintain Latina/o students for whom universities can truly claim success.

Elements of Success: From Dichos to Best Practices for Éxitos (Successes)

A *dicho* or saying is cultural words of wisdom which encapsulate life lessons through reflections on daily activities referenced by many Latina/os. From these simple yet poignant truths, values are upheld and suggestions for action are implemented. Taking each of the aforementioned elements of success, each is discussed and illustrated with strength-based best practices. In addition, common Latina/o *dichos* are provided as facilitating steps toward success.

*Family and Validation**Todo para la familia*
[All for the family]

Familia is a central component to Latina/o students' experiences from which they gain cultural affirmation and specific navigational strategies to negotiate the host culture of academia. By building family-like systems, Latina/o students can garner and maintain their academic momentum. University personnel question whether a family system of peers and faculty can be applied within higher education; however, research suggests that alternative family structures can offer substantive support and model active coping behaviors (Falicov, 1998). In particular, developing "academic families" support students by fostering sibling-like relationships in which informational, emotional, and academic supports are exchanged (Gloria, 1997; Segura-Herrera, 2006). Peers who share similar experiences can help shape others' understanding through their educational insights and encouragements. Further, faculty who can provide cultural affirmation and rootedness and serve as educational and navigational beacons within higher education can facilitate adjustment, ease cultural incongruity, and serve as an "academic parent" or *padrino* or *madrina*. In this role, faculty provide cultural sustenance for Latina/o academic *familias*.

Donde hay comida para uno, hay para dos, tres, y cuatro.
[Where there's food for one, there's food for many.]

Strength-Based Practices

To ensure *familia* is a primary element of the educational experience of Latina/o students, create family during summer and bridge programs for high school students. Summer bridge personnel demystify college processes, unveil academic culture, and provide tools to overcome transitional challenges within an oftentimes unfamiliar system and environment. Given the focus on transition, these units introduce first-generation college and Latina/o students to peers, faculty, and staff who can serve as extended family. In addition, these programs should introduce families, who are often unfamiliar with the institution, to the curriculum, environment, and demands, providing suggestions for how they can facilitate their students' adjustment. By bringing together these different family-systems a larger familial network is established to support student successes.

Another means by which to integrate family into the entire educational process is for universities to move beyond the routinary "*dia de la familia*" during Latina/o heritage month. Instead, include families in year-round events, creating a seamless environment between home and school. An example of this practice is evidenced in a local community college program, *Padres Promotores*, which educates Latina/o parents about the educational system and its requirements. Parents become resource agents to guide their children and simultaneously participate in the child's retention in higher education. Such programs integrate culture within the school; promote family, student and school relations; and centralize Latina/o families in education.

The redress of student cultural centers' (SCCs) roles within academic units is warranted given that they maintain "home-like settings" and "safe spaces" for Latina/o students to express themselves, feel connected, integrate within their student communities, and gain insights into the educational system (Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002). Often functioning as the frontline

structure for Latina/o retention, SCCs offer programming that connects the university experience to home and community. In many institutions, however, university offices redirect Latina/o students to SCCs for their academic issues and financial needs instead of providing services within the respective and appropriate department or unit. Rather than used as “rescue grounds,” SCCs should be sought out as consultants to supplement department and university Latina/o student assessment outcomes. Further, reorienting the perception of SCCs as “spaces of segregation” to bastions of validation in which familial relationships are generated and should be utilized to this effect.

Creating knowledge-based programming that affirms cultural and familial interaction is another practical tool. That universities are grounded in traditional theory, paradigms, and pedagogies of research and practice, different resources to validate familial generation must be utilized. For example, inviting community elders to discuss leadership, personal development, and healthy coping strategies is culturally-rooted in the practice of *compradiazgo*. By serving in the expert role, community elders provide guidance and direction for students to engage in cultural practices and to create family beyond the boundaries of higher education. Similarly, workshops or events by grass-root Latina/o organizations or businesses can engender a sense of *comunidad* for students within and between campus and the larger community.

Finally, fostering activities that encourage students to create different family-like roles for themselves and others lends credence to infusing family within education. That is, group study sessions, research teams, or cohort activities prompt connection with peers who affirm their experiences. A research team that focuses on diversity issues can attract students interested in graduate school and offer a natural mentoring system for younger students where group cohesion contributes to overall well-being. Faculty leading the research team should also engage in interpersonal and academically-focused relationships with students. Most faculty follow a traditional and time-limited advisement model primarily attending to skill development for select students, with minimal focus on individuals or relationships. Instead, hosting research or professional development dinners at one’s home (e.g. *Mi casa es su casa*) promotes belonging and *cariño* for Latina/o students. The interactions outside the university humanizes faculty and connects students to peer-sibling relations.

Mentorship

Quien a buen árbol se arrima, buena sombra le cobija.
[A person who’s close to a good tree receives good shade.]

Mentorship is an instrumental educational process that promotes and accelerates student success. A high-contact relationship in which students address professional and educational experiences, mentorship focuses on students’ academic performance and progress, skill development, networking, and overall quality of educational experience (Johnson, 2007). Mentoring models offer different ranges of interaction, involvement, and investment by the faculty. Some faculty foster mentoring relationships that are restricted to academic and research progress, dismissing issues of adjustment, family, emotion, or personal well-being. Mentorship that encompasses interpersonal competence and relational abilities (e.g., communicating empathy and respect), however, is most effective (Johnson, 2007) for academic transition and integration, and scholarship development. Specific to Latina/o students, effective mentorship encompasses the personal and professional of academic progress while integrating *cultura* (e.g., *familia*, values, practices, beliefs).

A pesar de que ya soy mayor, sigo aprendiendo de mis discípulos.
[Even though I have grown old, I continue to learn from my disciples.]

Strength-Based Practices

As university personnel seek seamless transition for Latina/o students from high school to college, institutions must ensure an infrastructure of comprehensive and culturally-relevant mentoring programming. To do so, campuses must establish resources and departments that will pursue year-round grants to secure and maintain funding for research and scholarship development (e.g., CAMP, McNair). Such pursuits require multi-tiered commitments, involving a team of grant writers, directors (e.g., director for each program), assistant staff members, and work study students to ensure continuity of programming.

Although mentorship can develop naturally between faculty and students, the implementation of formal mentoring relationships and programs promotes a culture in which interrelationships are valued. Many Latina/o students are challenged to identify and approach faculty members and often feel intimidated by not knowing the expectations and processes within mentoring relationships. Formal mentorship programs (e.g., UROP, SERP) provide structures for faculty and students, setting both general and specific guidelines for a clear outcome (e.g., research project, conference presentation, publication). Such programs underscore faculty-student relationships and foster out-of-the-classroom experiential learning. Further, research-based mentorship programs engage students with other peers who are also interested in research and who may pursue graduate school, fostering a sense of *compradrazcgo* based on scholarship and professional identity. Within these relationships, Latina/o mentees can mentor their “junior” peers (i.e., multi-tiered mentoring model) in which students at different skill and professional levels learn and teach one another within a supportive and family-like setting.

Providing quality mentorship includes integrating the PSC elements to engender dimensionalized relationships. More specifically, mentorship should address students holistically, considering their self-beliefs as they relate to the college experience (e.g., confidence, motivation), social connections and networks, and their overall cultural and personal well-being. Each dimension is influential to the mentoring relationship as this approach accounts for students in context. Similarly, getting to know students outside of the university dimensionalizes the mentoring relationship that lends to Latina/o student success. For example, by attending a community or familial function of a mentee, faculty get a better sense of the student’s cultural and familial practices. At the same time, mentees can have a more personal perspective of their faculty, thus demystifying the notion that they are consistently working. Such interactions underscore that mentorship entails a social component of support, guidance, and reciprocity, reinforcing the value of *personalismo*. Bringing together Latina/o students to create *familia* outside of the university will strengthen a sense of interconnection and validation to foster personal and professional development through shared insights and perspectives.

Analogous to the bridging of cultures, implementing Latina/o values within mentoring interactions will prompt positive experiences for students. Faculty should engage in Latina/o value-centered interactions such that interpersonal exchanges are grounded in students’ values. For example, effective mentorship occurs when students feel *respeto*, *confianza*, and *coneción* (connection). Faculty and university administrators must engage in interpersonal interactions that reflect *personalismo* by being attentive and person-centered. Similarly, the facilitation toward a sense of *familismo* or *compadriazgo* will assist in students’ retention by fulfilling the role of an

academic *padrino* (godfather) or *madrina* (godmother). Such practices are culturally-relevant, effective, and fundamental to provide quality mentorship for Latina/o students' success.

Cultural Congruity

El que la sigue la consigue.

[The person who persists is the person who will achieve it.]

Cultural congruity is the fit between students' personal and institutional values, which prompts their interpersonal connectedness and subsequent cultural validation within their university environment (Gloria & Robinson-Kurpius, 1996). A "fit of values" can involve students' sense of collectivity evidenced in the classroom (e.g., use of group activities), value of *familismo* displayed openly with peers and faculty (e.g., out of the classroom learning experiences), and embracing of *comunidad* (e.g., Latina/o scholars and leaders in residence). Directly impacting college adjustment, psychological well-being, and persistence decision-making processes (Gloria et al., 2005a; Gloria et al, 2005b; Gloria & Segura-Herrera, 2004), university officials are called to ensure and enhance cultural congruity as a central aspect of educational experiences for Latina/o students.

Querer es poder.

[To want is to have.]

Strength-Based Practices

Significant educational factors contributing to cultural disconnection include a non-inclusive curriculum that best reflects White history and values and traditional pedagogies which reinforce individualistic learning. The curriculum must reflect Latina/o communities to offer a connection between the learning objectives and the students' lives. Group activities, shared communication, and mutual reciprocity between faculty and students must be established to develop a quality learning environment that promotes cultural congruity. To increase cultural congruity, implement multiple speakers and guest lecturers who address cultural issues, practice Latina/o-centered pedagogies, and reinforce Latina/o students' identities and educational experiences in the classroom.

To facilitate cultural continuity within scholarship development, implement cluster or opportunity hires to develop a critical mass of Latina/o faculty who can advocate for Latina/o students, mentor and guide them through their educational experiences, and serve as role models in bridging cultural affirmation and scholarly identities. Making evident the connection between one's value of *comunidad* within the context of scholarship (e.g., research) can shape one aspect of congruence for students. In particular, scholar programs that promote academic integration through cultural learning (e.g., Summer Academic Enrichment Program) can generate ethnic exploration, affirmation, and community understanding, whereby heightening the fit of values.

Last, support the establishment of Latina/o student branches of nationally-based associations across disciplines (e.g., Latina/o Student Psychological Association) to enhance cultural congruity. Such groups facilitate connectedness, counter normlessness and the *lonely only phenomena*, and provide a sense of collective identity. For example, increased individual and group congruity can emerge by developing networks in which students communicate through the internet (e.g., sharing of resources), congregate at conferences, and create internal

communication systems with one another. Through these networks, Latina/o students develop multidimensional professional identities grounded in cultural values and practices. As a result, students can expand their scholarly identity beyond their undergraduate degree to embrace the possibility of pursuing professional and leadership roles as future practitioners or academicians.

Research Opportunities and Professional Development

Lo que bien se aprende, nunca se pierde.
[What one learns well will never be lost.]

Academic success is tied to students' sense of efficacy as contributing members of their fields. Consistently, Latina/o students question the connection between their education and the needs of their community as their educational experiences are oftentimes only remotely reflective of or connected to their lives and realities. As a result, offering opportunities and development activities that parallel Latina/o student interests and passions, familial considerations, and community and social issues are warranted. Such activities enable students to connect fully their lived experiences and academic learning.

Un tropezón puede prevenir una caída.
[A trip can prevent a fall.]

Strength-Based Practices

As academic environments develop and promote Latina/o student scholarly identities, a long-term educational plan addressing student preparation and transition for graduate school is in order. In fulfilling this need, universities must embrace service-learning in which Latina/o students can become involved in activities that provide community service and implement the values and practices of advocacy and social justice. Via field practica and field studies, the role of culture in scholarship can be underscored and Latina/o students' personal responsibility and potential impact as researchers through non-profits and grass-roots organizations for their communities can be equally highlighted.

To facilitate an academic environment that promotes a seamless transition to graduate school, universities and academic departments must develop an infrastructure that prepares students to conduct research, refines one's sense of professional identity, and encourages the pursuit of graduate education. For example, develop a multi-layered research team (e.g., faculty, graduate, and undergraduate members) for students to gain presentation and publication experience. Also, encourage Latina/o specific organizations to integrate graduate education into their mission statements, provide programming that make for competitive graduate student candidates, and enhance scholarly efficacy.

Equally important, establish graduate school partnerships with top-tier universities that create a network for Latina/o students to work with other Latina/o faculty conducting culturally-relevant research. The partnerships parallel family social systems, with host faculty serving as extended family members and Latina/o graduate students serving as "elder" academic peer-siblings. Developing a summer academic family can add to Latina/o students' sense of having a broad and far-reaching academic family. For example, graduate peer-siblings can teach undergraduates about graduate school expectations, scholarship development, and navigation skills of home and school to refine their academic sense of self. Such experiences can set in

motion a shift of identity from an undergraduate student to a junior scholar while affirming graduate school and their role in it.

A camino largo, paso corto.
[A long road needs short steps.]

As suggested by the above *dicho*, it is the small steps in combination that are needed to successfully travel or negotiate a long road. The educational pathway to a higher education, such as an undergraduate or graduate degree, requires a series of multiple complementary successes for Latina/os. These successes range from finding a single mentor to establishing a network of resources and individuals who can serve as academic family, validating educational experiences and propelling academic successes for Latina/o students.

“Revisioning” success ultimately requires a balance of academic outcome indices (i.e., student assessment outcomes) and psychosociocultural educational processes. Simply stated, if Latina/o students’ experiences are not appropriately attended it stands to reason that the end outcomes (e.g., graduation) will not truly evidence a holistic and culture-centered success. Having a vision of the sequential steps involved in success processes and the strategic planning and commitment to achieve this end goal are necessary. The commitment must come from upper administration and provide tangible awards for faculty and staff who implement culturally-dimensionalized and integrated means of success for Latina/o students. That is, for each of above suggested practices, enforcing institutional accountability for diversity will create family and subsequent validation, increase mentoring relationships, and provide opportunities for professional development activities. Developing a critical mass of Latina/o students allows access to other culturally-similar individuals with whom family can be created and different academic relationships can ensue. An integrated and family-like numerical mass can translate into *comunidad*, multiplying the sense of belonging, reciprocity, and interrelatedness, however, the key ingredient to produce successful Latina/o undergraduates is the integration of *cultura*.

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Figure 1.

Psychosociocultural Framework for Latina/os in Higher Education

