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Latinx Students Higher Educational Trajectory Post COVID

By
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Abstract

COVID-19 caused many universities to go fully remote during the pandemic. Many Latinx students did not know how to navigate online learning. This paper examines the experiences of Latinx students in their university experiences while online to determine if their higher educational trajectory changed as a result of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. This qualitative project gathered data from 9 Latinx students using in-depth, in-person interviews. Recommendations are presented to help the university create resources that will help improve Latinx students' experiences within the context of online learning and the effects of the recent pandemic.

Introduction

COVID-19 also called the coronavirus, caused a global pandemic and killed millions. It led to many schools, workplaces, and institutions canceling in-person attendance. According to the U.S Census Bureau, Latinx people made up 17% of the COVID cases reported (as cited in Fariña et al., 2021). The Latinx community has faced many challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic which was especially difficult for Latinx students (García-Louis, et al., 2022). Many schools switched to online classes to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Online classes were especially demanding for Latinx students, who have been confronted with several hardships such as lack of technology, financial troubles, and family obligations (Bruhn, 2022; García-Louis, et al., 2022). Latinx students struggled with reliable laptops and internet access. For example, in Long Beach City College in California, where Latinx students made up 60% of the student population, Latinx students were using their smartphones to access the internet at double the rate as their White counterparts (Field, 2020).

Latinx students often needed to take care of their younger siblings because childcare is so expensive (García-Louis, et al., 2022). Time spent on increased familial responsibilities such as childcare decreased the amount of time and energy Latinx students have to spend on school-related activities such as meeting with peers, preparing for class, or working on school projects. Loss of employment to themselves or other family members during the pandemic, as a result of the pandemic, further increased Latinx students' financial stress.

This qualitative study explores how Latinx students' higher educational trajectory and experiences were affected after facing the hardships of COVID-19. Latinx students enrolled at a primarily white university (PWI) in the pacific northwest were interviewed and asked about their higher education goals, culture and education, first-generation college experiences, experience

with virtual learning, their views on the value of a college degree, and their view of their institution as an emerging Hispanic Serving Institution all within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Literature Review

Covid-19 and Latinx Communities

COVID-19 also called the coronavirus caused a global pandemic and killed millions. It also caused many schools, workplaces, and institutions to close their doors. According to the U.S Census Bureau, Latinx people made up 17% of the COVID cases reported (as cited in Fariña et al., 2021). For this essay, Latinx is used to represent a person that is of Latin American descent. This is interesting data because many Latinx families live with at least three generations in the house. Also, many Latinx families have trouble accessing healthcare due to a lack of health insurance, because providers are not bilingual/bicultural, and trust in providers understanding their families or culture (Oh, et al., 2020). Because of this lack of access, when symptomatic, Latinx families have lower rates of access to quality COVID-19 testing. Furthermore, when testing positive many Latinx people in the United States likely underreport positive COVID-19 test results. This underreporting has been attributed to a mistrust of the Western medical system, discrimination, and mistrust of the government's role in contact tracing (Garcini et al., 2022).

The Latinx community faced many disparities because of COVID-19 (Garcia, 2021). Many factors caused the Latinx community to become more likely to suffer from COVID-19. One of them is that there are more people in a household. Often Latinx households have multi-generations living under one roof making it difficult to quarantine. There is also the fact that the Latinx community made up a majority of essential workers. This meant that a large portion of Latinx workers had to go to work where they were more at risk of contracting

COVID-19. Many people in the Latinx community do not have access to healthcare which negatively impacted them from getting tests or medicine.

Latinx students and higher education

For this study, higher educational trajectory means the choice of major. A college major is important because it is something that will affect a student's life after college. Students may choose a major based on some factors. Students often choose their major depending on how much they think they can earn in their jobs (Berger, 1988). There is also the factor that some students must choose a major based on the probability of success they will earn a degree with that major (Montmarquette et al, 2002). This means that students will pick a major if they know they can pass all the required classes for a specific major. Another reason a major is important is that a student may have to pay more money if they have to retake classes they may fail when in a particular major. However certain majors will allow students to earn their money back by getting a job that has a high wage.

Before the pandemic, Latinx students struggled in higher education. Less than 20% of Latinx students will get their bachelor's or master's degrees compared to one-third of non-Latinx students (Errisuriz et al., 2022). This could have been because of many factors that caused many Latinx students to drop out of school. There could be the issue that a large number of Latinx students are first-generation, where their parent(s) did not have a college education and do not know how to navigate higher education. There could also be issues that were caused by the pandemic that increased the number of Latinx students that drop out of higher education.

Latinx Students and virtual learning during COVID-19

Some Latinx students either did not want to or could not stay enrolled in higher education. In the California community college system, Latinx student enrollment dropped by

16% in the Fall of 2020 (Bulman & Fairlie, 2021). Employment and financial stressors have been identified as contributors to this decision (Errisuriz et al., 2022). Loss of employment and increased financial insecurity were significant during this time. Losing their jobs is also something significant that people had to experience during this time (Couch et al, 2020) which compounds even more stress (Gedikli et al, 2022). This could have caused a lot of stress. According to some psychologists, losing a job is like losing a loved one (Blankenship & Jones, n.d.). Sixty-one percent of Latinx students faced housing insecurities in 123 colleges and universities (Goldrick-Rab et al. 2019). Many Latinx people lost their jobs in fact from February to April almost double the number of Latinx people lost their jobs compared to white Americans (Saenz, 2020). Debt is another reason that some Latinx students did not want to stay in higher education. Avoiding debt is something that is like a mechanism for Latinx students to help the larger family (Elengold et al., 2021).

Virtual learning was a term that many students during the pandemic learned to dread. Often this included partial or fully remote classes, often using Zoom technology. Many Latinx students had trouble with this type of learning. Many Latinx students had trouble accessing the internet. For example, In Long Beach City College in California, where Latinx students made up 60 % of the student population, Latinx students would not have access to the internet at double the rate as their Caucasian counterparts (García-Louis et al., 2022). This happens in other areas as well. Many Latinx students do not have access to certain technology causing their education at the time to suffer. Some institutions offered laptops and wifi hotspots. However, the laptops that were given out were at times not of the best quality. Family obligations also made it difficult for Latinx students to focus on their studies. Motivation was also a struggle for students. A survey of college students found that 36.1% of students lack motivation once the academic year began

(Madrigal et al, 2022). Motivation could have fallen because many students could not connect with classmates as they would when they were face to face.

These factors are brought up when people think of reasons why students quit college. However, these factors can also be used to justify why a student may have wanted to change their major. Virtual learning made school more difficult for certain Latinx students. This could mean that they wanted to switch to a major that required less time in higher education. There could also be the factor of financial issues. Students may have wanted more since they may have had a family member that lost their job. This could mean that students needed a job that offered them a higher salary. There is also the problem that some counties that have a high Latinx population also have a low counselor-to-student ratio (Puente, 2022). This just means that some Latinx students have less information about what major they want to pursue.

Research on Latinx students during the pandemic has largely focused on enrollment or the factors that may have caused them stress. This has branched into studies on mental health, financial stability, virtual learning, and family obligations. There has been no research that mentions how career plans may have changed. This is important so that more academic institutions know how to help better Latinx students seek the education they need. An example of this can be universities offering more scholarships for Latinx students in certain majors. This study seeks to figure out how COVID-19 impacted the college trajectories of Latinx university students.

Hispanic Serving Institutions

The location of this research project is an emerging Hispanic-serving institution (HSI). This is a designation given to higher education institutions that have 25% Latinx students full-time enrollment (U.S Department of Education, 2019). Once an institution gains the HSI title

there is no strict agenda that they have to follow. To keep the designation the intuition just needs to increase the number of Latinx students. The ways that universities use this title vary causing differences in degree attainment. HSIs are a very integral part of a Latinx student's education. They help Latinx students navigate the norms and systems in higher education.

Methodology

Study Context and Sample

The data presented in this study were collected as part of an honors thesis project to explore the impact of COVID-19 on the higher education trajectory and experiences of Latinx students. Data were collected through Zoom interviews and a short demographic survey. Criteria to participate in this study included respondents identifying as Latin/o/a/e, being over the age of 18, and being currently enrolled in a college or university at the time of the interviews.

We had a total of 9 participants. The respondents' ages ranged from 21-43 years old. The median age was 23 years old. A majority of the participants stated that they were Latin/o/a/e. Only one participant stated that they were not Latino/a/e. All the respondents reported that they spoke Spanish and English. The majority of the respondents stated that their grandparents also spoke Spanish. There was one that reported their grandparents spoke Mixteco and another that stated that their grandparents spoke English. The majority stated that their family of origin was from Mexico. In this context, the family of origin means the group of people that a person grew up with since childhood.

There was one participant that declared that their family was from the Caribbean. Three out of the nine participants were born in Oregon with one who was born in Mexico. Three others were born in U.S. states on the West Coast, midwest, and east coast. There were no DACA students that participated in the survey or interviews. The number of adults that lived in each

person's household ranged from one to five. Approximately half respondents lived with their family of origin. One-third of the respondents reported providing financial support for their family's bills. All the participants are currently employed, working 20 to +40 hours a week. Most reported receiving some financial aid support to help pay for college, whereas two stated they paid for schooling themselves. Many participants stated that financial aid alone has not been enough to pay for college so they have to use personal funds. All the participants were enrolled at Portland State University. The age when participants started to attend higher education ranged from 16-27 years old.

Procedures and Data Collection

To identify participants, emails were sent out to a university listserv with detailed information about the study so that participants could opt in. Once they had agreed to participate and were able to review and sign the consent form they were provided a link to the demographic survey and scheduled a time to interview. The demographic survey used online Qualtrics software.

Individual interviews were conducted through Zoom at a time convenient to participants. Interviews were conducted in English. Participants were asked if they consented to participate and whether they could be recorded. Interviews lasted approximately one hour each. Recorded interviews were automatically transcribed and checked for accuracy. We used a semi-structured interview guide to explore students' higher education goals, the intersection of their culture and education, first-generational college experiences, possible impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the value of a degree, and their thoughts on their institution's status as an emerging Hispanic Serving Institution. For example, we asked participants, "What were higher education goals for yourself pre-COVID?", "How did the experience of COVID-19 impact these goals?", "What are

your and your family's cultural beliefs about higher education?", "How do you see your cultural identity impact your decision-making about your higher education goals?", and "During the COVID pandemic, what has been your experience with virtual learning?". Participants were offered a \$40 Amazon gift card for this project.

Analysis

Data analysis was carried out in google docs. Transcripts were generated electronically, reviewed for accuracy, and coded for themes. A constant comparative analytic method was used to analyze data, where analysis began during data collection. A two-member team moved back and forth from data analysis until saturation was reached. The team met weekly to discuss and come to a consensus on emerging themes (Tracy, 2019). This is to reduce bias in the research.

As the focus of this research is a minoritized group, analysis was conducted with a foundation of critical race theory which seeks to center voices of those who are historically marginalized (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The following six central tenets of CRT guided our work. First, is the reality that racism is an everyday occurrence for people of color in the United States. Second, is that race is a social construct, not a biological truth. Third, differential racialization holds that racism should be viewed within the context of the given contemporary context. Fourth relates to the principle of interest convergence. This maintains that those in power will only relinquish power if their interests are being served. The fifth tenet of CRT is that dominant groups, to justify and legitimize their power, exclude the narratives of people of color from historical accounts. Lastly, it is imperative that CRT maintain an intersectional approach (Crenshaw, 1989) so that these patterns of oppression are not replicated across other minoritized identities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Data analysis was conducted in a multistage process using cumulative coding cycles (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). Stage one was initial coding, which involved reviewing the text and assigning codes to individual words or phrases using descriptive coding to summarize concepts (Saldaña, 2016). In stage 2, data were themed, where the coders were immersed in the data, and codes were compared to find similarities and differences. Thematic content analysis was used in stage 3 to develop a summary of primary themes (Ayres, Kavanaugh, & Knafl, 2003). The themes that emerged were cultural beliefs about education, experiences of being a first-generation student, lack of culturally specific resources and understanding on campus, virtual learning, and perceptions of the university being an HSI.

Results

As we were analyzing the data that was collected from the interviews some themes were generated. The themes were cultural beliefs about education, experiences as a first-generation student, experiences with campus support, virtual learning, and Hispanic serving institutions.

Cultural Beliefs of Education

All respondents shared that from a young age, their families and parents instilled in them the strong cultural value of education. One shared that education, *“was probably the biggest priority in our house... There was a lot of expectations and a lot of hopes and dreams laid on on my shoulders specifically, being the oldest and in the households”* Many talked about how higher education was specifically prioritized by their parents, and some shared how they were pressured to get into “good” schools. One student shared that while their parents were very mindful of the cost of education and were concerned about affording college this did not change the goal of getting a college degree and education remained a priority. One student shared:

“So my parents always prioritized (higher education). Me and my sisters always got the message that higher education... as a whole is a priority. Get good grades, study, learn like, engage in all of that. As first-generation students... I remember the conversations with my dad, It makes me feel like a lot of pressure was put on me, but like being first gen and my parents immigrated here. They didn't know how to help, so my dad when me and my middle sister, because we're 2 years apart, entered higher ed, my dad's like, “I don't know how to help you. I don't know the systems like you are our first children going through this.”

Education was seen by most students and their parents as being a means to move up the economic ladder, *“to be able to take care of myself and rise up through the middle class”* and break the cycle of poverty and provide a better life for the family and future generations. Many sacrifices were described by participants and their parents to realize the dream of high education. The college degree was seen as the primary tool.

When asked about the impact of the pandemic on the value of prioritizing education in their families, this was talked about as a cultural value that did not change. Throughout the early times of the pandemic through now all respondents talked about the continued role of this strongly held cultural value that education is important and continues to be prioritized. Some shared how ecstatic parents were for their children to be in higher education after the pandemic began.

Experiences of Being a First-Generation Student

A majority of the people that were interviewed were first-generation college students. There was a vast majority that mentioned their family does not know the activities or the time a college student spends. One student stated that *“The town I grew up in they definitely suggested*

to pursue college, but nobody talks about what that entailed even to this day my mom has no idea what getting a Master's degree is." Since the parents do not know what goes on in universities they often give the students chores that intervene with their learning. A lot of first-generation students stated that they do not have a space in their homes where they can study. An interviewee said, "*non-first generation college students they have more of a privilege to have a quiet time or a quiet space and I don't have that privilege to separate the two.*" There was this recurrent theme that many first-generation students had to become self-reliant when they had an issue related to college. A majority of the students did not reach out to campus resources but relied on online resources like youtube to help solve their issues.

Experiences of on-campus life/support

There was a majority of the students that stated that they did not access campus resources. One of the main reasons was that students did not know about all the resources that were available to them. The main way that information about resources was delivered was through email. The students stated that they get many emails and they cannot look over every single one. Another issue with emails was that the student could not get all the information about a resource. A program could have been mentioned in an email but there were not that many details about how much support they could provide. The media images that were used also felt that they were targeting the traditional-aged college demographic, and even when Latinx students were featured, there were obvious class differences.

Financial aid is another area where first-generation Latinx students overwhelmingly shared that they struggled. Some of the students reported that they had to work a full-time job to pay for college expenses. Online classes were beneficial to these students because they could maintain a full-time job and attend the university at the same time. Being a first-generation

college student was also something that the financial aid office did not understand, in addition to the layered experience of being Latinx and working class. The financial aid office interacts with first-generation students as if they have in-depth background knowledge.

Race and ethnicity of university faculty and staff is another issue that was brought up in the interviews. There are not that many BIPOC faculty in the university. This causes a problem with Latinx students because they shared that they feel uncomfortable when a white person, or someone who is not Latinx, is educating them about their own culture. One respondent talked about this in-depth, sharing:

“Being in a classroom, and being taught by, you know, a white teacher or an Anglo-teacher, and you're being like sort of taught. This content that's very much focused on communities of color, and how we, and us, have been studied in these very specific ways. It feels very strange to be in an environment where you're so excited to be learning and wanting to be engaged, and ultimately, learning skills that you know, I personally would like to use in my career and in my life, and so you're experiencing this duality of learning, and really wanting to be engaged in that way then this other side of it, which is that social work is based on like the perspectives of typically like Anglo, white, wealthy men and women who have treated communities of color like subjects. To be in a classroom and have a teacher be like isn't that so interesting. And they're like talking about my life, basically, or talking about like my mother's life or my father's labor, you know, and it's so, it's very bizarre.”

There are not that many faculty members that Latinx students can go to help when they have an issue that may be related to their culture. This also causes the students to feel that they are underrepresented in school matters.

Virtual Learning

Every student mentioned the experience that they had with virtual learning. A majority of the respondents mentioned that they could not concentrate on Zoom. There were too many distractions at home that caused their attention span to decrease. Most of the students that were interviewed brought up that they did not learn as much on Zoom as they did if they were attending in-person classes. Community building was a struggle to do according to a large number of participants. Cohorts did try to communicate with social media platforms however the connection was not as strong as when they could interact in person. This created a feeling of isolation where students felt that they could not communicate with people or that they were the only ones that were experiencing this type of isolation. One student said:

“One thing I missed was learning alongside people and being able to talk to people in between classes and it was so hard to make friends virtually. Going back to last year that definitely impacted the isolation I was feeling. Just because I didn’t talk to my classmates a lot outside of classes.”

There was a small percentage of subjects that stated that virtual learning was a positive for them. Virtual learning provided flexibility for some students that allowed them to work and get a degree at the same time.

Hispanic Serving Institutions

During this study, a lot of the participants discussed supportive services for the Latinx community and recent news that the university is officially an emerging HSI. While this was not the initial focus of the study, many respondents independently brought up concerns about the disconnect between their experiences and the noted emerging HSI designation. While this emerged in early interviews, we added direct questions to elicit experiences and thoughts. There

were often misunderstandings about the purpose and definition of the HSI designation. When the term HSI was defined and the process of becoming an HSI was described by interviewers, respondents were asked what they thought an HSI would do for the Latinx community. The vast majority of students were disappointed when they learned about how an institute becomes HSI certified. One student stated that “ *the title is nice but if it is not going to do anything why have the title.* ” Some stated that the university does not adequately provide the Latinx community with enough culturally specific resources. One student even stated, “ *I think that there needs to be more, resources, for, undocumented, students we have like dreamers at PSU, but that's a student-run organization.* ” Many want the university to live up to the expectations that students have when they hear that the university is going to become an HSI. There mentions how the university needs to do a better job of community building.

Discussion

The experiences that Latinx students faced while in virtual learning during COVID-19 were at times very different from their peers. These students could not navigate the educational system because they oftentimes did not know where to start or what was offered to them. There were resources available at the university during this time period, but they targeted broad audiences and were not specifically made with a particular minoritized group in mind. Once students returned to campus some felt that they were not prepared. Many felt that they did not learn the necessary knowledge about navigating the university during the time they were virtual, to be successful in their classes when they returned in person.

The cultural beliefs about education were the same among the participants. There was no change in the value of a bachelor's, master's, or doctorate for the students or their families. The main reason for this occurrence is that the students in this study are predominantly

first-generation college students. Getting a degree is still the fastest way to move up the economic ladder for many first-generation Latinx students. There is also the pressure that because their family members did not have the option to go to a university and get a degree that the student must be the first one in the family to attend.

Being a first-generation student impacted the way students interact with the university. Many of the first-generation students tried to be self-sufficient whenever they faced a problem. This was likely caused by them not having anyone in their immediate family that they can go to for help with university problems like financial aid. They did not go to academic resources because they did not know of resources that could help them. When they did know of resources, they described not reaching out because they did not see themselves reflected in the marketing of the resources, reflected in the personal, and they did not trust that their lived experiences would be understood or honored. Thus, their primary means of meeting their needs was to figure out their own solutions to problems that arose. This was not always an option for them though, specifically when it came to specific technical issues related to financial aid and financial wellness.

Broadly, for Latinx students, campus resources were a struggle to find and understand what they offered. This was mainly caused by bad marketing and not specifically stating how it might help the student. There is also the issue that many campus resources do not take into account that these students do not have the background knowledge that other students may have. This issue is also related to the representation of Latinx first-generation students. The university makes these resources in a way that does not take into consideration the lack of knowledge that these types of students have. The university does not have certain people working at these resources that can help explain the process to a first-generation student.

Students also had a difficult time finding a teacher that could relate to their cultural identity. This adds a barrier at times that some students cannot find mentors that can help them with the issues that they may face as Latinx first-generation students. A teacher that understands the student's background is necessary because that allows students to be able to go to them for advice when they face a situation or educational concept related to their cultural background. It is also strange for some students that they are taught about their own culture by an instructor that is from another culture. This causes students to feel that their lived experiences do not matter because they are not part of the culture with power and are not reflected in the material being taught other than in relation to the dominant perspective.

The majority of the students reported facing some hardship as a result of virtual learning. The major issue is that students could not create a community as they could in person. There were fewer opportunities for students to meet outside of class with virtual learning. The quality of learning was also impacted because of virtual learning. Many students could not retain as much information as they would in in-person classes.

There were some that stated that virtual learning was a benefit to them and led to positive experiences. Some shared that it allowed flexibility and easily added going to university to their schedules because they did not have to physically go to campus. For students where it was important to maintain a full-time job while attending college at the same time the pandemic opened up significantly more opportunities. This also offered the opportunity for students to stay closer to home and live with their families, removing the often costly and disruptive barrier of moving out of the equation.

The HSI status of the university was an emerging topic throughout the interviews. Many of the participants who discussed the HSI status did not know what the accreditation would

provide for the Latinx community. Many of the students that were informed about the qualification for HSI accreditation were disappointed. There has been no communication with students at this point about what the university plans to do after the university receives accreditation. There has been a keynote address with the university HSI exploratory committee about what it means for the university to transition from an emerging Hispanic-Serving status to a thriving Hispanic-Serving Institution. However, not that much information has been shared about the next steps the university will take after it receives accreditation. This leaves a large number of Latinx students with many questions about what will change and if they can be involved after accreditation is earned. Many Latinx students have a mistrust of intuitions because of past experiences and the lack of information being shared can make it seem that the university may not make the best decisions to help Latinx students in the future.

Limitations

This study was designed to meet the standards of rigorous qualitative research (Stige, Malterud, & Midtgarden, 2009). Given that, some limitations should be taken into account when interpreting the results of this study. This study sample includes respondents from one program at one university at a primarily white institution in the Pacific Northwest with a recent emerging HSI designation. Most respondents were undergraduate students, and none of the respondents identified as DACA recipients or identified as undocumented. Respondents ended up being primarily from one school at the university, the School of Social Work. In the future, in order to get a diversity of views across the Latinx community, this research should be conducted university-wide, or targeting multiple degree programs and specifically speak with students who are undocumented and who are DACA recipients. It might also be illuminating to speak with a

larger sample of students who were and who were not first-generation college students to explore the differences in their experiences.

Future Directions/Implications

There can be future research where there are interviews that are taken with students from different programs. This can help identify the common issues that Latinx students are facing at Portland State University as a whole. Research with DACA students can also be another way to understand the needs of the students that receive different resources than others. Some recommendations can be made to help with the Latinx student population at the university. There are measures that the university can make to help Latinx students reach higher education. This study found that Latinx families do care about higher education; they may not know about the resources that can help them achieve this.

Cultural beliefs

One way to help with this is to increase outreach at the high school level. The university has a tuition-free degree program for pell-eligible students that will help students pay for tuition and can make the financial burden of college decrease. The university can also send out fliers to families in Spanish. There can also be more marketing toward nontraditional students. There needs to be more information sent to students that are above the age of 30. Many adults want to go back to college and would like to get into another career.

There can be ways to involve parents in their child's education. We can have a parents' night. These events can be held by the program where the parents can come and learn about what their child is doing in the classroom and how that can apply to their career. Spanish translators can also be used during these events so that the family can understand what is being presented and they can ask questions. There can also be Spanish-speaking university faculty at these events

that can help answer questions. This will allow the parents to connect with more university faculty.

Study rooms are another way that the university can help students. Many Latinx students do not have an area in their homes where they can study without interruptions. They often have their family nearby which might be distracting for them. Families may not understand the needs or requirements associated with having to do remote learning at home.

Youtube videos would also be a useful resource for first-generation students. The videos can help students understand the aspects of certain college situations. There can be videos that focus on financial aid that will help students fill out the FAFSA or apply for scholarships. Multicultural student resources can also have videos that can explain how they help students and what they can provide. There can also be videos that are made specifically for the parents of Latinx students. These videos can focus on aspects of college life that will explain how different college is from high school. For example, one of the videos can focus on how the term system works. Another video can mention why students do not have a class in the morning and how students can choose their classes. These videos will be for parents that cannot make it to in-person meetings or serve as a refresher after attending a meeting.

Virtual Learning

Many students reported not knowing about community events or resources on campus. A way that the university can improve upon this is to increase social media outreach. The university can use multiple social media sites to post about resources on campus. Students use a variety of social media and the more social media that is the higher probability that a student will see it. The university also needs to do a better job of posting regularly. If a certain program or resource on campus posts regularly then students will be more engaged with the posts.

There can be adjustments made at the university to help with Latinx student retention. There can be more peer mentors for Latinx students. It would be beneficial to new incoming students if they can ask advice from a person in their community that knows how to navigate the educational system. GANAS is a program that has peer mentors for students however there are not that many peer mentors for every Latinx student at the university.

The university can also reach out to past Latinx students. The previous Latinx students can come in and talk about their experiences with being bicultural and bilingual. This will allow Latinx students to gain more knowledge about how to navigate the school system. There is also the opportunity for the Latinx students to acquire a mentor for their professional development that can understand the difficulties they may face because they are Latinx.

Helping Latinx students identify what certain fees mean would also be beneficial. Many Latinx students struggle with not knowing the fees that they are paying, especially online fees or building fees (if they are online students). If there was a person that could help explain what some of the fees are used for and why students have to pay these fees that would help a majority of first-generation Latinx students.

Community building is also another key factor that the university must work on. Many events on campus happen throughout the school year. These events do help with community building but there can be events that are held by specific programs. If programs started to hold events for Latinx students, that would help build a community within the program.

The university community can be used to gather information on campus resources or advice for first-year Latinx students. A Google form can be sent to university senior and junior Latinx students that allows them to submit resources that helped them and any advice that they have for incoming Latinx students. They can also give a brief description of the resources and

how they benefited from it. The information that is gathered will be put into a spreadsheet. When first-year Latinx students are admitted into the university they gain access to the spreadsheet and view the resources or programs that can help them navigate their higher education journey.

For online classes, lecture times must also be changed. Lectures that go for too long are hard for students to keep their attention on. That is why lectures need to be shortened so students do have to face Zoom fatigue after being in a Zoom meeting for multiple hours. Lectures can go for 45 min to an hour then for the rest of the lecture the instructor can upload it to Canvas so the students can watch it later.

One of the main ways that the university can help Latinx students is to help them with financial assistance. Many Latinx students have a hard time navigating the financial aid system. They may not know how to fill out the application or what they have to do after. They may also have mixed immigration histories or be undocumented which further complicates seeking federal, state, school, program, or private financial aid. If a student or their family is undocumented then they can have a fear that the information that they upload will be used against them. Another situation that can arise is that an undocumented student may not know that there are resources that they can access so they do not try to find resources. The university also needs to have more funding for Latinx students. The institution gets money because Latinx students are enrolling but does little to help with the financial burden. More funding can be used to help the students pay for tuition and class materials. There can be more money allocated so Latinx students can go to more conferences for their program of interest. The cost of travel and fees for conferences are too much for Latinx students to handle and if the university can help with this that will allow the students to build more connections in their field of study. A way that the university benefits from this is that it allows the university to market itself as diverse to other

universities and students in different states. This would also seek to support student retention and graduation moving from the concept of a Hispanic-serving institution to a Hispanic-graduating institution.

A major change that needs to be made is that classes need to include more work with Latinx populations and communities. More classes in the university need to have a curriculum that reflects literature about Latinx culture and ways to interact with the Latinx population. Attention should be paid that this is also literature and curriculum written by or framed by Latinx scholars and practitioners. The Latinx community has different needs and cultures so it cannot be handled in the same way as other communities. It is also helpful when the literature and the class reflect the student. This way the student can bring their own experiences to the work and classroom discussions.

Conclusion

COVID-19 impacted the learning of many Latinx students in higher education. The pandemic has been broadly devastating across the globe and in the United States. Latinx communities have been disproportionately affected. For those Latinx students seeking higher education, there has been growing research showing disparate experiences. Specifically, the transition from virtual learning to in-person has caused many challenges for students. This work looks at Latinx student experiences with and after virtual learning. This data was collected to get a better understanding of the way COVID-19 impacted the value these students had on a university degree.

This study gathered many stories about Latinx students and their interactions with COVID-19 that created many themes. One of them is that many Latinx students are first-generation which causes them to have to deal with issues that other students would not such

as access to nuanced financial aid services, a lack of generational knowledge from family members about higher education, and lots of family obligations. Another theme was how Latinx students interact with on-campus resources and their experiences of not seeing themselves reflected and not easily identifying what resources are offered. There was also the theme of Latinx students' experiences with virtual learning along with the difficulties they went through like not having a space to get work done, not being aware of campus resources, and struggling with building a community with classmates. Cultural beliefs about getting a degree and education were one of the themes that were also generated, we learned that these remained overall unchanged through the difficulties and challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The university's status as an HSI emerged and many conversations were had about the perception of this title and the real-life impact that this would have on Latinx students.

The results that were gathered give a better understanding of the many challenges that Latinx students encounter at the university. These results can be used to create on-campus resources that help increase Latinx student retention and graduation at the university. The results can also be used to improve the transition from virtual learning to in-person classes. While specific to one university in the pacific northwest, these findings can be added to the developing literature on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education, particularly for Latinx students.

Understanding the issues and culture that Latinx students bring into universities is crucial to creating resources that can help them. If the university is going to become an HSI it is important to take into consideration the opinions of the students. COVID altered the needs of Latinx students which is something that the university should consider when making certain programs and resources.

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