

ABSTRACT

Sarah M. Wright, “SÍ SE PUEDE”: IMPROVING LATINX ACCESS AND COLLEGE COMPLETION (Under the direction of Dr. Marjorie Ringler). Department of Educational Leadership, May, 2024.

Demographics change in even the most homogenous areas. The challenge resides in proactively meeting the needs of those driving the change. Life is not a one size fits all and needs are different based on socioeconomics, education, health, generational wealth and myriad other factors. Across the South, the Latinx population has increased their overall share of the population exponentially, and their journey, no matter what it was or is, carries with it, a unique set of circumstances and challenges. In higher education, those challenges are significant and represent many barriers for students in terms of access and program completion.

Students are often unwilling or feel uncomfortable sharing their struggles with college personnel that they are unsure whether they can trust, so instead of feeling like a burden or sharing with someone who does not support them, Latinx students may choose not to seek help or support. This study is an endeavor to determine the challenges that Latinx students encounter by discussing their experiences in their own words in one on one interviews. Additionally, because it is important to equip personnel with knowledge of how to support Latinx students and increase their sense of belonging, personnel were surveyed to determine their level of understanding. Using both student responses and personnel surveys, the students' level of feeling othered and in the “borderlands” is measured, as well as personnel's level of cultural competence on the Bennett Scale. The findings were converted to a brief report with suggestions to improve the experience of students and reduce barriers has been suggested as well as additional ways to measure the progress.

“SÍ SE PUEDE”: IMPROVING LATINX ACCESS AND COLLEGE COMPLETION

A Dissertation
Presented to the Faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership
East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

By
Sarah M. Wright
May, 2024

Director of Dissertation: Marjorie Ringler, EdD
Dissertation Committee Members:
David Siegel, PhD
Roshaunda Breeden, PhD
JuanEs Ramirez, EdD

©Copyright 2024
Sarah M. Wright

DEDICATION

For my students, especially Teresa—thank you for teaching me as you have made your journey and allowing me to celebrate your accomplishments with you. I will always be here.

Y creo que sí puedes hacerlo.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work would not be possible without my students and their trust in me. Thank you for providing me a chance to learn about you and your experiences. My sincerest gratitude is extended to my former colleagues who engaged in difficult conversations in an effort to understand and make a difference in the lives of Latinx students. That list of colleagues includes, but is not limited to, Anna, Emily W., Jami, Melissa, Ashley, Sabrina, Dr. Cozzens, Maria, and a host of others who cared about the Latinx experience in the rural service area. I also thank my mentor, Dr. Jami Woods, for supporting me and believing in me and mostly reading each 3 am idea I sent her and responding as enthusiastically as warranted (or not). Additionally, there are many people outside of the institution who helped ensure that we supported students in unique ways, such as Vivian, Juana, and others. I am indebted to your willingness to help.

I appreciate former colleagues who became family. Your support and belief in me has meant more than I can convey in this document.

For my godsons, Kody and Brayson, there were many times that I could not come outside and play or hang out just a little bit longer, but in the seemingly endless days of writing and revising, you kept me going. I want you to know that anything is possible. I hope this doctorate serves as evidence for you.

This doctorate would not be possible without my closest friends, Heather E., Heather R., and Joey. Unwavering and endless support is putting their effort in this degree minimally. In addition, my doctorate would not be possible without my mom. She has helped finance most of my dreams, but even more than financial support, I am most grateful for her belief in me and her pride in my accomplishments. Brooke and Emily G., thank you for always believing, being invested in my success and life, and making sure I kept working even when I did not want to.

To my family: original, legal, chosen, known, unknown, speaking terms, and non-speaking terms, thank you for your role—you have shaped me and the work I feel led to do. Finally, my unwavering gratitude is pledged to my dissertation committee. I appreciate your willingness to work on this project, and I appreciate and respect your advice, especially when you demanded more of me than I was giving. Thank you Dr. Siegel, Dr. Breeden, and Dr. Ramirez, I could not have done this work without you, and I will always feel special knowing that Dr. Marjorie Ringler wanted to work with me on this dissertation.

I am graduating 25 years after I graduated with an undergraduate degree from ECU, and I am a Pirate for Life, but I am so grateful to have experienced this program with the classmates that I have, and the Spain crew—we will always be family. Dr. Kristy Wilson, you amaze me. You have been through so much during our time in the program, and you were unflappable. I am so proud to have been with you from the beginning (from interviews to classes to Spain to graduation and everything in between) and to have spent the last three years calling you friend (at a minimum).

Lastly, to my colleagues and leadership at my new institution, thank you for the opportunities you are providing. I will never take the opportunities for granted, and I look forward to seeing all the great support we can provide students. Eibhlin, Germán, and Louise, thank you for always celebrating me. The mention of your names makes me smile. I am certain that will always be the case.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
TITLE.....	i
COPYRIGHT.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	xi
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background of the Study.....	7
Context of Study.....	13
Statement of Focus of Practice.....	16
Focus of Practice Guiding Questions.....	22
Overview of Inquiry.....	23
Inquiry Partners.....	23
Theoretical or Conceptual Framework.....	24
Assumptions.....	25
Scope and Delimitations.....	27
Limitations.....	27
Significance of Inquiry.....	28
Advancing Equity and Social Justice.....	28
Advances in Practice.....	29
Summary.....	29

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	30
Demographic Trends.....	31
Fearing Loss of Superiority.....	35
Adapting to Demographic Changes.....	38
Barriers to College and College Completion for Latinx Students	41
Systemic Barriers.....	42
Poverty.....	42
Immigration Status.....	44
Cost of College.....	44
Language and Forms of College	45
Cultural Barriers.....	46
Familial Pressure.....	47
Imposter Syndrome.....	48
Perceived Barriers.....	49
Conocimiento.....	49
Borderlands Theory.....	49
Bennett’s Model of Cultural Competence.....	50
Conclusion.....	50
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.....	53
Focus of Practice Guiding Questions.....	54
Inquiry Design and Rationale.....	55
Context of the Study.....	57
Inquiry Partners.....	63

Ethical Considerations.....	64
Inquiry Procedures.....	66
Phase I.....	69
Description of Participants and Recruitment Strategies.....	71
Instrumentation.....	72
Pilot Study/Baseline Collection.....	73
Data Analysis.....	75
Summary of Phase I.....	76
Phase II.....	76
Inquiry Approach/Intervention.....	78
Summary of Phase II.....	78
Phase III.....	79
Inquiry Design Rigor.....	79
Delimitations, Limitations, and Assumptions.....	80
Role of the Scholarly Practitioner.....	81
Summary.....	83
Important change in my role.....	83
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS.....	84
The Focus of Practice.....	84
Focus of Practice Guiding Question(s).....	85
Participant Demographics.....	86
Pablo.....	86
Jose.....	87

Estrella.....	87
Isabella.....	87
Carmen.....	87
Data Collection.....	88
Qualitative Data Collection—Semi-structured Interviews.....	88
Qualitative Data Collection—Online Survey— Faculty/Staff/Administrators of the College.....	89
Data Analysis.....	91
Qualitative Data Analysis of Phase 1.....	95
“Othering”.....	95
Identity and Rethinking Borders.....	97
Identity.....	102
Qualitative Data Analysis of Phase II.....	104
Results	108
Analysis of Research Question 1.....	108
Analysis of Research Question 2.....	110
Analysis of Research Questions 3 and 4.	111
Summary.....	111
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	112
Data Analysis.....	115
Summary of the Findings.....	116
Interpretation of the Findings.....	117
Theoretical Framework.....	118
Limitations/Delimitations of the Study.....	119

Implications of the Findings for Practice.....	120
Social Justice, Diversity, Access, and Equity Implications Recommendations for Future Studies/Research.....	122
Implications on Roles as a Scholarly Practitioner.....	123
Conclusion.....	124
REFERENCES.....	126
APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL.....	134
APPENDIX B: STUDENT GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION.....	136
APPENDIX C: FACULTY AND STAFF LEVEL OF UNDERSTANDING SURVEY.....	138
APPENDIX D: SURRY COMMUNITY COLLEGE IRB APPROVAL.....	140
APPENDIX E: REPORT OF FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS TO THE COLLEGE.	143

LIST OF TABLES

1. Personnel Respondent Breakdown	90
2. Bennett Scale Description.....	106

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Bennett's Model of Cultural Competence.....	26
2. Four Major Tenents of Borderlands Theory.....	65
3. Data collection plan.....	68
4. Bennett's Scale with respondents' placement on the scale.....	93
5. Bennett Scale with respondents' position on the scale.....	94
6. Specific length information for each recording.....	99

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Latina in me is an ember that blazes forever.
Sonia Sotomayor (1996)

Throughout the history of the United States and prior, there are a few truths and characteristics that continue to reign and seem likely to continue through the foreseeable future. People have proven themselves resistant to change, even if they outwardly express interest in progress; they seem dedicated to developing and maintaining social stratification, and to be mostly fearful creatures, particularly in conservative, rural areas. Both my observations and business and organizational change gurus such as John Maxwell and no doubt others concur, but part of one's resistance to change is often denial of said resistance. Change occurs on international, national, state, local, and personal levels whether people are prepared for said changes or not. Nick Sinclair (2014) in reflections of the book *Who Moved My Cheese* claims "John Maxwell once said that change is inevitable, and growth is optional." Additionally, Sinclair, offers that "We have to acknowledge the fact that the things we want in life are constantly changing." Lastly, Sinclair (2014) offers that "Acceptance is the first step in moving forward." While Sinclair's article is about inevitable changes in business, and that arena tends to be where change is most often examined and its impacts documented, there are, however, certainly parallels to inevitable changes on a larger scale: life.

People who have advantages and privilege often seem terrified to lose those privileges. And because change often appears as a threat to privilege, those with advantages often hold tightly to what they have, which makes the road to equity and access obstacle laden for those outside of the traditional power paradigm. Yet, more access for one group does not mean less access for another. More equitable practices for those historically underserved do not mean less equity or opportunity for those who have basked in the glowing light of privilege. Essentially,

access and rights are often viewed either in ignorance and completely overlooked or ignored, or they are viewed via the lens of Zero-Sum Game in that they are finite and more for one group means less for another. Rights and access are not zero sum; the more one access afforded one or one group can and should mean an expanded capacity.

One of the preeminent scholars of privilege, specifically, White privilege, Peggy McIntosh (2019), documents the ways in which seemingly “good” people are fearful of change and its potential to shift power structures and challenge the deeply engrained status quo. These attitudes first had to be experienced firsthand by McIntosh. Arguably all people do not have to place their hand on the hot stove to realize it will burn their hand, McIntosh had to experience something similar to grasp the idea of privilege.

As a scholar of Women’s Studies, the consensus among male scholars was that the discipline was somewhat important, but not important enough to be studied prior to a student’s junior or senior year. This, albeit minimal, infringement on McIntosh’s ability to operate in the world with maximum privilege and power became the catalyst for her study and understanding of privilege. From this realization, she was able to see those who had control of the purse strings were predominantly White men, and thus was born her understanding and research on White Privilege.

The aforementioned sentiments about change and privilege can be applied to any historically marginalized group in any place in the United States or abroad, but the focus of this research is nestled in the foothills of rural, northwest North Carolina, with the shadows of the Blue Ridge Mountains casting an ever-present pall of the Appalachia of the past, almost an anchor holding the region back from social and economic progress. The focus area, specifically, is the service area of Surry Community College: Surry and Yadkin Counties, the increasing

Latinx population in the community and on campus, and the obstacles they must navigate to attain higher education. In the pull of traditional Appalachia, though complicated and complex, there is a reverence for nostalgia and the “wholesome” ideal of the past, which means White, and when it does not, it still does not mean equality or holding the notion of equity in high regard. The truth is that the past that many cling tightly to and hope to see return, does not exist, if it ever did. It exists on the same Hollywood set that the most famous native son of the area shared his childhood stories and created purely fictional ones for *The Andy Griffith Show (TAGS)*. Little was ever discussed of race or inequality in *TAGS*, but viewers knew it was just offset, lurking, and that is still where it exists (Leonard & Thomas, 1960-1968). People who struggle, as people in this region often do, lack empathy for others who struggle and often refuse to acknowledge the privilege that comes with being White because life has been difficult for them in some other way. This lack of empathy, specifically, in the classroom is highlighted in Eric Jensen’s (2009) *Teaching with Poverty in Mind*. In essence, empathy is taught and survivors of difficulty or overcomers of obstacles, cannot necessarily make connections between their battles because they do not look the same. Unfortunately, this lack of empathy often ignites the aforementioned zero-sum game. Some examples of these common, though usually slightly different, difficulties include being poor, first-generation college students, and lacking resources. People often do not see that not being White and having those difficulties plus others, such as serving as a *defacto* interpreter for family with language barriers, the pressure of carrying all the hopes and dreams of parents who often made dangerous, life-threatening journeys to reach the United States, and having other significant responsibilities in one’s family only exacerbates the difficulty the impact of systemic racism and other barriers ushered by race and ethnicity that is not White and southern.

Even though, in general, it seems that many people are remiss to admit the overall shifts and changing composition of Surry and Yadkin Counties, their refusal does not make the changes any less so. Data from the 2020 census shows both counties at 12% Latinx and that both counties had an overall decline in population, as well as a decline in the White population; however, in both counties, the Latinx population increased (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020a, 202b). That want for nostalgia will not bring back the times for which they long. The area was once a relatively racially homogeneous farming and manufacturing community (*North Carolina & Tobacco: Historical Background*, 2005). There were a host of seasonal migrant workers, but they were here in the heavy crop months sans families. As time went on, former migrants stayed and built lives centered around those same “wholesome” values as their White counterparts. Peace, religious practice, opportunity, prosperity and family were among the cornerstones of those values. However, when regulations limited tobacco farming and either contracts were limited/non-renewed (Flagg, 2016) or government buyouts made it more profitable to not grow tobacco than to do so, the agrarian society would have normally returned to the manufacturing plants that manufactured all sorts of brands and types of clothing and specifically socks. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) moved many of these manufacturing jobs to south of the border and eliminated thousands of jobs. White people with strong family ties and connections to the community tried to stay. Those with less reason to stay often left. The Latinx population stayed. According to Dr. Hannah Gill, work was still available to them, and numbers increased as their family and friends came to join them locally, which was a trend all over the state and in the South as a whole region (Q&A: North Carolina’s History of Latin American migration, 2019). These changes in the economy and demographics also led to changes in the public sector and a large swath of the population that needed to be served.

In 1995, when I graduated from high school in the very county in which my Focus of Practice site is located, I had gone to school for six or so years with one student who could be identified as Latinx, and his family was from Puerto Rico. However, I doubt he had ever lived on the island territory himself. In that same year, having taken four years of Spanish and considering myself proficient, if not fluent, I was sent to intern in a third-grade class at an elementary school, where there was a student who transferred in and only spoke Spanish. My charge was to teach her to count, teach her how to multiply, and communicate with her parents. She was, as far as I am aware, the first Latinx student to attend that school—the largest elementary school in the county. She was completely isolated because she did not speak the language of her classmates or teachers, and I butchered her language in my attempts to communicate with her. She was transported into a class of students who smiled at her, but she was a novelty. In the twenty-five plus years that have passed since that moment that I was in twelfth grade, and she was in third grade, I have never forgotten her or lost empathy or compassion for her and for her situation.

As most people do, I moved away without the intention of ever moving back, but things happened, as they often do, and I moved back. In the ten years that I had been gone, the diversity of the population appeared to have changed. Just anecdotally, I saw more of a Latinx presence. I heard more Spanish speakers in the grocery store, and I had more people engage me in Spanish with a question or to attempt a friendly conversation. All of my encounters certainly support the documented shifts in demographics (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020a, 2020b).

The desire for those in power and those with the loudest voices to return to “Mayberry” has been shouted at a deafening decibel and well-documented on the national scene (Bailey, 2017). The other voices, which counter those of power and nostalgia, are sometimes inaudible, a

whisper, shaky, or spoken with some form of uncertainty, but they do exist. While Mount Airy is not the county seat of Surry County, it is the hub and one of the few cities in the county. Shortly before Donald Trump moved into the White House, the *Washington Post* came to Mount Airy to seek some answers of how rural America bought into Donald Trump's platform. Sarah Pulliam Bailey (2017) interviewed several prominent locals on the idea of "How nostalgia for White Christian America drove so many Americans to vote for Trump," which ended up being the article title as it appeared in the paper. Locals believed the article was an attempt of outsiders to stir up trouble. Those locals could not see that trouble already lived here so long that it was engrained in the culture and could not be seen by those who agreed with it or even those complicit if they did not necessarily agree.

As the writer waxes nostalgic in her set-up of the article, describing the exterior façade of the town that both looks like *TAGS* and has been made to look like *TAGS*, she gets to the heart of the matter quickly. The mayor, speaking with great authority, quipped with all earnestness that he and many of his constituents longed for a return to the 1950s and assumed that most of America would want the same and would be better off for it too. The mayor shares with the author, "'Now it's about secular progressivism, not the values you get out of this book, such as honesty and hard work,'" said Rowe, 72, jabbing his finger at the leather Bible on his office desk." The author surmises that "as Donald Trump prepares to move into the White House, Rowe and many of his constituents are hoping for a return to the past." And local citizens interviewed on the street concur with Rowe and the idea of promise that Trump's election brought with it. The idea that jobs would return from Mexico and the other places they moved in order to reduce production costs, and "a yearning for an earlier time, especially prevalent in rural American towns and cities like Mount Airy, helped spur White evangelical Christians to vote

overwhelmingly for Donald Trump.” Additionally, as Bailey (2017) posits, this “desire for change also could be viewed as a desire to change *back*, to what they perceive as a more wholesome and prosperous time, when high-paying manufacturing jobs were plentiful, White Protestants were indisputably in charge and same-sex marriage and the Black Lives Matter movement were unthinkable.”

The article spirals from that point forward. It is interview after interview of White locals who espouse that those who are not White make things more difficult for themselves by criticizing how people dress, their views, their lack of Whiteness, really. These attitudes, though, are at the heart of the matter. How can any Latinx student attend school of any level, especially college, if at every turn, they have been made to feel unwelcome, less than, fear, and even loathed? Our Latinx students experience these types of attitudes outside our campus borders, and we can certainly try to influence that from our sphere of influence, but the area that we need to ensure students do not face racism is on campus. There is no place for racism in society, but yet it exists. We can start at “home” and work to eliminate overt racism and microaggressions.

Background of the Focus of Practice

Because of many of the changes in the service area that have been and will be discussed in this document, the make-up of the college’s student body also has changed. Students with barriers to overcome to attend and complete college is not a new concept, but our Latinx students have a whole set of challenges or may have a set of challenges that are intertwined with their culture. The focus of practice endeavors to identify those challenges and any knowledge deficits that faculty, staff, and administrators have. Through these efforts, the goal is to increase knowledge of the latter and work together to help students attend and complete college.

As many rural areas across the South and Rustbelt have experienced, the populations of cities and towns that relied and flourished on manufacturing and farming have been in a steady decline. According to one *Newsweek* article, the declines resulted in a significant exodus “as residents presumably began to flee the region's toxic financial atmosphere” (America’s dying cities, 2011). These declines in population have often had negative impacts in many humanistic ways, not just the economy. In “A Dying Town,” Brown and Fischer (2019) discuss the far-reaching impacts of communities in decline due to lowering populations, which have been precipitated by industry exodus. One of the impacts is health. People lack resources for insurance, to eat healthy, or to receive care. Additionally, education suffers because there are fewer tax payors to pay into the system to properly educate the children left in this town and others like it.

While Surry County is a prime example of these stagnant or dying counties, we do have some resources that perhaps other places do not. For example, the county seal has three historically prominent industries emblazoned on it. There is a rocking chair symbolizing the furniture industry, tobacco representing the former large cash crop of tobacco and overall ties to agriculture, and granite, which represents the largest open face granite quarry in the world and located in the most significant city in the county, Mount Airy. The latter represents the only industry that remains prominent. The quarry is believed to have about five-hundred years of mining left, and this area is fortunate enough to have capitalized on the popularity of *The Andy Griffith Show* and the wine industry.

Additionally, these industrial declines have often led to shifting demographics, which is the trend across the country. These demographic shifts influence the overall culture and especially education. These shifts are evidenced in the changing make-up of North Carolina

Public Schools from 2000-2016. The White population declined 8% in that period, and the Latinx population increased 325% in the same period of time (Johnson, 2017). At Surry Community College, in the same timeframe, we have had [insert numbers]. In light of these widespread demographic changes, the educational institution and its employees need to be acutely aware of changes in constituents and adapt accordingly. If the adaptation does not occur, then the needs of all students will not be met. The general public often claims that educators try to utilize their platform to indoctrinate students, which is a claim as old as formal education systems themselves (Snyder, 2022); however, acknowledging and accepting cultural differences is not indoctrination. According to Snyder (2022), attributing the observation to educational philosopher, Kieran Egan, “we use the term indoctrination whenever children are taught ideas, beliefs and values that conflict with our own.” We, as educators who are part of an educational community, adapt to the situations that present themselves from the outside world and holdfast to preparation of students. We may or may not factor in cultural, ethnic, racial, or other traits that do not apply to the educators themselves. But given the knowledge and chance to adapt, most educators will accept the opportunity to learn, change, and support their students, and we are rarely motivated by indoctrination.

I like to think that I have always been willing to listen to and support my students, but if they have not known that they could share certain obstacles with me, then I have failed and more specifically, failed them. The same can be said if I understand the nuanced obstacles that often serve as barriers to student access and success and do not share the knowledge with my colleagues. In that case, I will have failed, failed the students, failed my colleagues, and overall, failed the college.

In fall of 2010, I taught an English class specifically for 9th grade early college students from our on-campus Surry Early College High School of Design. The experience was a completely new one for us to offer such a class and for me to teach it. I had never taught anyone so young, and I had never taught a group that knew less about English. The racial and ethnic make-up in that class was all White with two exceptions (which we would not see in 2022 or in the previous few years), there was one Hmong student and one Latinx student. Because of the newness of us offering the class and those students taking a college course, that class and I formed a bond that still exists. In that class, the Latinx student, *Jamie*, excelled. Over the years we talked about her abilities and success, and she said her family taught her to excel in both Spanish and English. And excel she did. I went on to teach her for several classes, and she remains one of the strongest students that I have ever taught. Her experiences and circumstances were the first that made me pause and realize that our Latinx students really lived some cultural differences, and they were dealing with some cultural barriers that had never crossed my mind. For most of the time that I knew of her in school, she had the same boyfriend. He was a young man who was her age, and they seemed like a perfect couple. It was not until a casual conversation with her that she told me that her parents did not know she was in a relationship with him, and they were setting her up with someone older than I was who was acceptable simply because he was Latinx. She shared with me that in her culture that age was not an issue. Age being an afterthought was news to me, but it indicated that there were likely some other cultural priorities, such as maintaining their heritage that most of us teaching and advising her did not know. I had come from a graduate school experience where diversity and unity were revered, so I simply took any information that I gained and tucked it away. But I began to

wonder how we could support this student and guide her to her academic pinnacle if we did not understand these other factors in her life.

It was not until this student was set to graduate and attend UNCG and study fashion that her world started to crumble. Her father, the almost sole provider for the family, left. Her mother did have a job, but she did not have a documentation status that made things easy for her, and the job she had would certainly not sustain her or Jamie at a four-year university. Jamie believed her only option was to stay home, work multiple jobs, help her mom, and save. And that is what Jamie did. It was almost unfathomable that the child would make such sacrifices for the parent. That responsibility she felt and had was also a cultural difference that I tucked away as knowledge. (Jamie is now a student at Virginia Tech.)

Over the years, based on topics discussed in class, readings, and various other signals, students realized that I was a safe person to discuss obstacles with, but these unburdening sessions often occurred in final exam disclosures, in which I was still grateful for the knowledge, but there was often little I could do to help at that point. I had deep regrets that I didn't know earlier, so I could offer or find assistance—or simply listen. One such incident occurred with a very talented art student, who I taught in the second in a series of composition courses, once a week on a Wednesday night for three hours. I enjoyed reading her work and knew she was pursuing her own version of the *American Dream*, and I knew that not everyone had the same opportunity.

In this particular class, because it is a writing in the disciplines course full of students from a variety of disciplines, we base our readings on themes. The first and last theme addressed is always identity. Students come into the final exam period without knowing the exam topic. They receive a simple prompt after watching Chimamanda Adichie's *The Danger of a Single*

Story—what is the story people assume to be your single story, and what is the rest of your story? Of course, students have two hours to write, so they cannot possibly write their *whole* story. On this December evening, in which both students and I were ready for the semester to end, I can point to this one final exam from this one student, fittingly with the middle name America, who changed not only my future but the future of Surry Community College.

This final exam and the discussions that ensued helped us realize we did not know how to help our Latinx students fulfill their *American Dream*. We did not know how to help because, in most cases, we could not fathom their lived experiences. Through this student's disclosure and the happenstance that I read it while she was still in the room and the conversation that followed, we realized we did not have the answers, but we did know from that point forward that there were questions, and we owed it to our students—a growing portion of our student body—the Latinx population, to find the answers. Our quest to find answers began that night, and we have found some of those answers, but we unfalteringly look for more, and this focus of practice is the continuation in that pursuit for more answers, more resources, more access, and more success for Latinx students.

In the past, we have sought to listen to students when they have had information, opinions, or issues to share, but being open to listening, while better than the alternative, is a relatively passive approach to improve the situation of all students and especially those Latinx stories with barriers to access and completion. In this research, we will ensure that we seek information from a variety of students and graduates and disseminate the information we gather to faculty, staff, and administration. Additionally, I think there will be an opportunity to share with our feeder school partners because many of the barriers to access will likely need to be addressed at their level—at least initially.

Context of Study

Surry Community College, founded in 1964, nestled in the picturesque foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, is the resource and opportunity hub of the area. With a main campus located in Dobson, the county seat of Surry County, North Carolina, the service area is both Surry and Yadkin County, two rural, economically disadvantaged counties. The counties face many obstacles with declining populations and an exodus of companies and jobs that began in the 1990s with the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the impact of which is still felt. Surry Community College has served and continues to serve as a lifeline for the community. Those who suffered job loss often enrolled in a program to retrain in a skill that remained marketable in the area or a larger area that many residents commute for employment such as Winston-Salem or beyond. Trade Act recipients flocked to the classrooms in the late 2000s. In both cases, the students were diverse in age, as one would expect, but there remained little ethnic or racial diversity on campus. It, perhaps, made sense that there would not yet be a shift in demographics and the student population would remain primarily White, middle or lower middle-class, and conservative for at least a little while—though there was a slightly increased presence of Latinx students on campus. The increasing Latinx population in the community in the late 2000s had not yet enrolled in the college *en masse*.

With a mission statement “to promote personal growth and community development to a diverse population through excellence in teaching, learning, and service,” Surry Community College truly serves as *a*, if not *the*, central figure in the community. And while the current mission is inclusive and all-encompassing, and I think we want to use it as a guiding principle and execute it, historically, as many things were, the school was founded to prepare young men (also read: White men) to transfer to a four-year university or receive trade training and to live a

knowledge-filled life. In the 1960s, the mission was to “offer to its community a program to improve skills and develop an intellectual understanding of life. The education of the whole man—the development of all men and of all man’s capabilities—aesthetic, social, intellectual and manipulative—will be its goal” (*Exhibits: Surry Community College*, n.d.). Surry Community College was not among the initial wave of community colleges, but it was approved and founded about a year after the general statute was enacted to establish community colleges and the community college system (*Mission and History*, n.d.).

Specifically, in Surry County, the desire to bring a community college began at a Mount Airy Lions Club meeting in 1960. At that time a group was established to conduct an information gathering mission to see if there was interest and to liaise with the Division of Higher Education in Raleigh. Within a couple of years, all civic groups in the county held a seat on the committee determining the feasibility of the college. Newspapers and radio stations supported the formation of the college. By 1963, the college received support from the Surry County Board of Commissioners and Elkin City, Mount Airy City, and Surry County school systems. The decision was made to apply to bring a community college to Surry County, specifically on land in Dobson, NC. On January 10, 1964, the application was approved and the rest is history as the saying goes (*Exhibits: Surry Community College*, n.d.).

Surry Community College began with three buildings in 1967 on the main campus, the only campus. Noticeably missing from planning for the college is any mention of Yadkin County. Just as Yadkin County was originally part of Surry County until 1850 (*About Yadkinville*, n.d.), and the socioeconomic status, racial make-up, industries, proximity (17 miles from the main campus), and rural nature are similar, it logically stands to reason that Yadkin County would be part of the service area. With the recent state budget for 2021-22, the college

should now be eligible for multi-campus funding, as the Yadkin Center should become the Yadkin Campus with more than 300 FTE. In addition to the two previously mentioned sites, there are others: the Elkin Center, which is located in Elkin, NC, and housed in a former grocery store that left the region; the Pilot Center, which is located in Pilot Mountain, NC, and housed in one of the many mills that had been left vacant with closures and movements; and the Center for Public Safety, which is located in Mount Airy, in a multi-purpose building that also houses some county offices, and was formerly a Lowes Home Improvement store. Clearly, Surry Community College is strategically located across two counties to literally and figuratively meet students where they are.

The main campus has grown to 17 buildings, greenhouses for sustainable agriculture, a vineyard, the aforementioned North Carolina Center for Viticulture, a baseball stadium, and one on-campus early college and another at the Yadkin Center, which has three buildings (*Main Campus Map*, n.d.). These facilities on the main campus serve more than 3000 curriculum students per year and over 18,000 Workforce Technology and Community Education (WTCE) students annually (*About Surry*, n.d.). Surry Community College certainly impacts a large segment of the community.

Even with an undeniable, far-reaching role in the community, Surry Community College is classified as many other rural community colleges are by the Carnegie Classification system. Surry Community College is categorized as a small (roughly 3,200 students), two-year, undergraduate, public institution with an open-door policy (*About Surry*, n.d.; *Institution Lookup: Surry Community College*, 2017). Interestingly, the Carnegie Classification also indicates that the college is a part-time institution (*Institution lookup: Surry Community College*, 2017). Most economically disadvantaged and rural areas do have more part-time students than

full-time. The nature of responsibilities that are shared in less advantaged families require that students work significant hours for negligible pay. This designation that implies the college as part-time only seems inaccurate. There are full-time students, though only about 21% of the student population. Regardless of the designation as a small school, Surry Community College's reverberations are felt strongly in the community, the border communities of southwest Virginia, and across the world with a robust online program. And while already a resource for treasures such as Old-Time music and the eponymous festival held annually on campus from which people all over the world attend for the region's unique style of bluegrass music, and obviously educational attainment, the college is poised to propel students and the community forward. So, while it can seem improbable that one college can be the Old-Time music capital of the world *and* adapt to and support changing populations and help turn a decimated economy from losses in manufacturing and agriculture into a leader in the wine-making industry, it is happening, and the people of Surry and Yadkin Counties are the ones who will harvest the rewards. We have proven we can be a catalyst for change. We help fuel the region's wine industry, which has been a significant share in the local economy and the local wine industry itself serves as the center of North Carolina's wine industry (Radford, 2017). We can and will find a way to serve our increasing Latinx population.

Statement of FoP

The focus of this inquiry is to ascertain, assess, address, and alleviate as many obstacles as possible for Latinx students to attend and complete college, particularly at Surry Community College. From a purely logistical and survival standpoint, many rural community colleges in areas that are considered to be dying or stagnant in population growth, require a strategic plan of growth that necessitates paying particular attention to the growing numbers of Latinx students

completing K-12 education. Essentially, these students are necessary recruitment targets for many colleges to maintain existence. We, unfortunately, have not engaged in focused recruiting. I have, however, set-up for several years at the Latin Festival in Dobson, which takes place down the street from our main campus. I take student groups with me, because I believe it is important that we are present. We are a community college, with an emphasis on community, so we show up and prove that we value the entire community. Beyond the goodwill, there are clear business and financial incentives based on the community college funding model and the population's increasing share of the community population. However, I maintain the most important role of the community college, as previously mentioned, is to provide opportunities and support for the community.

The previous are the logical reasons to shift or at least acknowledge the need for recruitment and support of Latinx students through practices that are culturally appropriate and appealing as well as through traditional methods. We can continue to recruit through traditional ways, but knowledge of cultural differences and nuances as well as barriers that exist for Latinx students should make their path to college less cumbersome. In the case of Latinx students, they are often driven to succeed at a cost that cannot be imagined by those not in their situation because they carry the hopes of their families with them. There are often unique cultural factors such as the inclusion of families in academic decisions and responsibilities of helping contribute to the family financially or through interpreting that result in obstacles for Latinx students or potential Latinx students, and certain cultural beliefs (example: students must put school first, but family must also be first, which results in a difficult conundrum to navigate) can exacerbate those barriers (Del Real Viramontes, 2020). Combining systemic and perceived barriers, Latinx students may see higher education as an unattainable goal. Given the political climate since at

least 2016 through 2022, there is an overall sense of fear and distrust among the Latinx population. In the late fall of 2018, we held our first event specifically for our Latinx population. We called the event Sueños or Dreams; it was the first community college sponsored event in the state to specifically help Latinx students with information about access to college. We had more than one hundred people (hopeful college students and parents). The event was deemed both credible and safe because we had the Consul General of Mexico (now former) in attendance. Immigration is as a contentious of topic as it has been in decades. People make unfair assumptions about Latinx people and their status and place in this country with little basis. Goldsmith (2017), in writing about the long history of immigration in North Carolina, acknowledges the ebb in the flow fear current immigrants face: “As in the past, anti-immigrant rhetoric has brought difficult times for many North Carolina newcomers, says Allie Yee, associate director for the nonprofit Institute for Southern Studies. And under the Trump administration, it's only ratcheted up. ‘I've been hearing that there's a lot of fear and a lot [of] confusion about what's going to happen,’ Yee says. ‘There is a sense of people being emboldened around anti-immigrant hate’.” Offering culturally aware advising, programming, and support can certainly help build trust among college officials and Latinx students.

The responsibility rests predominantly with the college to allay those fears and sense of mistrust when it comes to education. Our efforts can serve as a catalyst for other educational partners, community members, and other entities to help ensure Latinx student needs are met, and students are and feel supported in their educational efforts.

Even if the Latinx share of the population were a less significant portion, the same need for building trust and improving the process of attaining access and completing would still be necessary. However, with 19% of the enrollment comprised of the Latinx population, improving

access, completion, and trust with this population is requisite. Additionally, this percentage of enrollment has increased steadily, if not significantly, for several years. Looking at the fall enrollment of 2016 through fall 2021, the share of Latinx population has risen from 15% to 19%, averaging less than a full percentage increase per year. But those numbers do not represent the full picture. In the fall of 2016, the “other” category for racial demographics was just over two percent and hovered in that range from fall of 2016 to fall 2018 when there was a jump to over six percent, with fall of 2021 being more than eight percent. Two factors, simply from anecdotal evidence, seem to impact that percentage: Fear—*Will marking my true identity impact my or my family’s safety from law enforcement agencies/the government?* Or Uncertainty—*I am not sure how to mark my identity; I am mestizo, indigenous, or any number of identities that make marking a generic demographic questionnaire more difficult than many people ever imagine* (Labossiere, 2010). Logic indicates that a significant portion of that eight percent is also Latinx, pushing the total percentage up toward 25% or so. About half of the college’s population is comprised for high school students, both early college and College and Career Promise, and about 50% of that population is Latinx, which clearly provides more evidence that while at 19% the Latinx population of the college is significant on a state-wide level, the percentage is likely even more significant and uncaptured in the data. Because the official data does not indicate that we are at 25% Latinx, we are not considered to be a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), but we are certainly on the verge and expect to reach that designation in a short time. The designation will help increase our eligibility for certain programs that offer support for HSIs (Surry Community College Institutional Research, 2021).

With data establishing why this population is strategically important due to the rise in population (Johnson, 2019), the mission must be to build trust with our potential and current

Latinx students, as well as their families. One way to build trust is to understand the unique situations that the Latinx population may face. Many of these scenarios lead to obstacles in a lot of different areas of life. The focus, of course, is the barriers impacting access to and completion of a college credential. One aspect that makes the barriers seem more insurmountable is the fact that oftentimes school (high school) and college officials are unaware of their existence (Del Real Viramontes, 2020). Barriers cannot be removed if those with power to remove them or mitigate them are not aware they exist. If people are unaware, they are less likely to display the support and empathy that leads to trust and disclosure of issues that may impede access and completion of higher education.

Significant research on first generation college students and the barriers that exist for their access and completion of college is plentiful (Cobb, 2018) but being Latinx can increase the barriers exponentially and researchers' acknowledge some of the shortcomings in scholarship in examining situations unique to Latinx students. According to Benson and Lee (2020), "Scholars and campus policymakers alike tend to conceptualize first-generation students as a homogenous group, focusing on their collective differences from those students who have at least one parent who is a college graduate (i.e., continuing-generation students)" (p. 3). Lack of cultural understanding on the part of education officials and systemic barriers tied to any number of culturally specific aspects such as immigration status of students and/or their parents have implications for access in terms of even applying to college, not to mention paying for college. It is imperative that faculty, staff, and administration become educated on these barriers and the individualized, often overlooked nuances of each student's situation, particularly for Latinx students.

While there is some research that exists regarding barriers, we need to ascertain what Latinx students and potential students in our service area perceive as barriers. Through interviews with current and former Latinx students, the goal is to gain insight into barriers they face or anticipate facing, as well as barriers they have witnessed. Because the Latinx community is a word-of-mouth community (Rhodes et al., 2018), I will rely on students and former students to be participants and to help locate respondents in order to gain a variety of perspectives. Once the information about specific barriers is gathered and synthesized, the attention will turn to disseminating the information to Surry Community College faculty, staff, and administration and developing a plan to mitigate the barriers through training. The goal is to remove ignorance on the part of any support personnel with effort, planning and training. Ensuring that all college officials who come into contact with Latinx students and potential students have the ability to interact with empathy, knowledge, and openness is imperative to provide access to Latinx students. Dr. Pamela Senegal (2021), President of Piedmont Community College, upon learning that some people in her service area either were not interested or did not believe college was for them writes: “It is impossible to get potential students to walk through an open door they do not believe exists.” That is the precipice we are on at Surry Community College and across many other avenues. Students may know they can technically attend college (or may not know), but knowing something is not believing something, especially if actions are counter to that demonstration of acceptance or welcoming. Lastly, these Latinx members of our community will be the doctors, nurses, teachers, accountants, business owners, public safety personnel, and every other profession that makes our world more functional, more efficient, more effective, and simply: better.

Focus of Practice Guiding Questions

This study is guided by four questions:

1. What do Latinx students, in the Surry Community College service area, wish that college officials were aware of, or understood, about their unique experiences in general and those driven by cultural differences as they endeavor to attend college?
2. What do faculty, staff, and administrators at Surry Community College know about the experiences of Latinx students in our service area?
3. What interventions might support Latinx student needs at Surry Community College?
4. What effects will interventions have on Latinx students at Surry Community College?

Answering these guiding questions and others that may arise during conversations will help determine a helpful intervention so we can successfully mitigate some barriers to education for Latinx students. Additionally, the process of implementation will also be an opportunity to access the process and learn more from students about their experiences. In consultation with the literature and inquiry partners and as informed by data collected in Phases I and II, for Phase III of my inquiry, I will design an intervention to enhance employee practices in their interactions with Latinx students and potential students. I will present a professional development intervention to college stakeholders. Additionally, while the focus of the research is ascertaining what Latinx students wished college personnel know and arguably understand, the ultimate goal is completion for these students. While the research questions are knowledge and information driven, culturally significant support will also likely be implemented as part of Phase III, should Phase I findings indicate a need. Time permitting, in Phase IV, I will, with my inquiry partners, find a way to assess all implemented interventions as a result of this Focus of Practice.

Overview of Inquiry

To answer these Focus of Practice guiding questions, I will use a qualitative design, resulting in student narratives. Phase I is the stage in which data is collected from students. Additionally, prior to Phase I, there were several thoughtful and conscious decisions that had to be made about the form the interactions with students would take, who the students would be, how they would be identified and various other logistical steps. Phase II involves Surry Community College personnel, and much planning and determining went into the final decisions about the instrumentation for that phase. Ultimately, I decided to utilize an anonymous, open-ended, electronic survey to administer to the Surry Community College, faculty, staff, and administration. My inquiry partners helped me validate the survey in terms of construction validity of the questions. Phase III will be developing and implementing an intervention to address areas of concern that arise from Phase I and Phase II. Phase IV will be a tool to determine the effect of the intervention. Another way to examine the effect of the intervention will be to follow internal demographic data and graduation demographic data. Since the numbers of Latinx students are helping drive this inquiry, it is important to continue to review those numbers.

Inquiry Partners

First, my colleagues will be my inquiry partners. Specifically, the dean of instruction; the executive director of institutional research; director of advising and student success; diversity, equity, and inclusion committee; various faculty and staff will be involved in this focus of practice. This group of inquiry partners will provide advice and insight into the type of information that is being sought. The inquiry partners will serve as reviewers of both the Phase I interview question guides and the Phase II survey for college personnel. Their role in Phase II is

integral, as they will serve in a capacity to determine whether the survey is fit for purpose in place of a pilot group. Their feedback will serve the same role as the information that could be obtained with a pilot group. The inquiry partners will also offer opinions on data and intervention options. Secondly, former Latinx students will serve as advisors and help recruit current students and future students to share their insights. To ensure the integrity of these partnerships, I will periodically and regularly communicate with these partners. Additionally, I will utilize relationships with outside partners that have been cultivated over the last several years as vital advisors. They include, but are not limited to, partners at Spanish Services at College Foundation of North Carolina and Hispanic League of Forsyth County. Additionally, there is no umbrella organization under which local Latinx people fall, so there are some creative ways to develop those partnerships through churches and local tiendas. All questions I take to the inquiry partners will be documented, as well will information they provide me.

Theoretical or Conceptual Framework

There are several applicable lenses in which to view this study. Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) Borderlands Theory is an excellent lens to view the experiences of students because the entire premise of her theory establishes that students, especially Latinx, who are influenced by multiple cultures and sometimes identify with both, experience obstacles based on being stuck around or within the borders of each. If students are caught in those margins, they need help honoring and seeing the full versions of themselves from an identity standpoint, and they need help traversing these borders that serve as obstacles, and in this case: higher education.

The faculty and staff responses will be assessed on the continuum using Milton Bennett's (1986) Model of Cultural Competence. This model is comprised of six levels from ethnocentrism and ethnocentric ideas such as denial and defense to ethnorelativism and ethnorelative ideas such

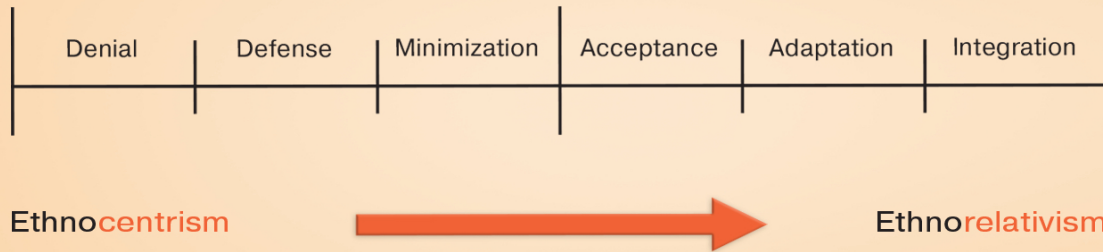
as adaptation and integration. The model is represented in Figure 1. For close to a decade, I have led cultural competence on campus, and we have made significant strides in honoring a multitude of cultures, but there are areas in which we need to improve.

As a campus overall, I posit that we have made positive moves on this scale. Most of that movement can be attributed to our campus efforts at increasing global competence through course globalization and through weekly campus-wide intercultural events. Arguably, we are right in the middle or just left of center. The goal is to move on the continuum toward acceptance, adaptation, and integration. This movement will help ensure that we understand and support our Latinx students as they enroll and work toward a credential on campus. This scale, or at least the ideas of this scale will be a way to gather an overall pulse of the Surry Community College employees. The responses of students and of college employees will likely lead to some form of professional development for intervention, but I want to be open to the data that is collected in Phase I and II and look at it with fresh eyes.

Assumptions

Entering the focus of practice, there are several truths that I assume to be accurate. Perhaps the most important assumption is that there is a need to address the needs of Latinx students, which also insinuates that there is something more that we, as an entity, and sometimes as individuals could be doing to support Latinx students. Another assumption is that most students want to have the choice to attend higher education. I assume that students have questions about attending institutions of higher education. I also assume that all students are not aware of opportunities afforded them. Additionally, I assume that students are fearful of governmental agencies, of which school is considered. And I assume that students want college employees to be knowledgeable and offer help. Lastly, I assume that student participants will

Experience of Difference



Note. (Bennett, 2017; Bennett, 2004; Bennett, 1986).

Figure 1. Bennett's Model of Cultural Competence.

provide honest answers and not feel any undue burden to respond in a certain way. The same assumption of honest responses is also held for Surry Community College faculty in which they will not offer any responses that are outside the truth regardless of motivations of college loyalty or trying to answer as they think I want them to. The survey's anonymity, for college personnel, should eliminate any concerns in this arena.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this focus of practice will encompass people that I have access to, which will not necessarily mean that I know them. Once the focus of practice is complete, there should definitely be opportunities to look at the same data regionally, state-wide, and beyond; however, at this point keeping the scope manageable and in my actionable space is imperative. While there are inquiry partners who are external, the research and practices are to benefit the college and the students of the college. Thusly, all strategies will be implemented under the same premise and be locally prescribed.

Limitations

Since my focus highlights the knowledge and experience of faculty and staff as it pertains to Latinx students and Latinx students' experience acquiring access to and campus experiences, some of the limitations will be beliefs and views of those respondents. Many, and arguably most of the faculty and staff will be open to the information they gain, but others will maintain their privileged thinking, which referring to the Bennett scale could be denial, defense, or minimization. My own biases of believing in and supporting the Latinx population can also be evident at times, which can be viewed as a positive in many cases, but regardless, they should not be an issue in regard to the focus of practice, but it could be an overall deterrent on campus. I also have a biased belief that people are unaware of the unique experience of Latinx students.

However, collecting information and sharing it is the ultimate goal, so any of these shortcomings should not impact the research.

Significance of Inquiry

Over the last three to four years, Surry Community College has identified a need in that some Latinx students simply do not know how to navigate the higher education system, which does not have to be a huge deterrent, but if students do not know who they can reach out to for support and answers, then there is an access gap in college attendance. And that is only the beginning because from that point, we often lose the true talents those students can hone through an education, and they are never able to share the fullness of their talents and abilities with the world. Upon realizing there were some challenges for Latinx students, and us, as personnel, by extension, we sought answers and some of us have some of those answers. However, we need to make sure there are not additional questions that we need answers to. And the information must be shared and celebrated. Having some knowledge of circumstances unique to Latinx students fosters empathy and from empathy, trust can be established. And through both, we can help Latinx students gain access to college and to a credential. Helping a few students locally is not enough, but it is something, and it is the place that we need to begin.

Advancing Equity and Social Justice

My hope is really simple: make sure that Latinx students feel at “home,” seen, welcome, and supported at Surry Community College. Accomplishing these goals will advance equity and place social justice at the forefront of focus at the college. Additionally, the Latinx community will have prime and clear evidence that they are part of the community and welcome on campus and beyond. There are tertiary goals that should prove to be by-products of the focus of practice such as a more knowledgeable faculty and staff, and an absence individual actions on the part of

the latter that hurt our Latinx students and show the college in a negative light. We should also increase Latinx enrollment, which should help mitigate a dwindling population in the service area. Finally, if students feel welcome and supported, they should be successful.

Advances in Practice

My focus in practice should certainly help center the voices and mitigate barriers that exist for Latinx students at Surry Community College. Faculty and staff should feel more knowledgeable and as if they can help Latinx students. Enrollment and completion among Latinx students should increase. Upon completion, we can show the ability to apply the process to other groups as well. Our process and intervention can certainly become a roadmap for other colleges and communities in building goodwill, implementing actionable change, changing a culture, and impacting success.

Summary

At the forefront of everything we do on campus at Surry Community College has an end goal of supporting students and improving their experience. That is a lofty goal and arguably should be the goal of all colleges. We cannot fall into the trap of one size fits all approach. Through this study, we can ensure that we have cultural implications in mind and seek to help students see their identities as superpowers and not obstacles, and we, as college personnel, can enhance our empathy, support, and action.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review currently has sections that focus on factors that contribute to the importance of Latinx students and factors that contribute to the barriers that prevent access and completion of college. There are also several more specific sub-sections, which allow more avenues for exploration of the literature surrounding the educational pursuits of Latinx people. Initial, cursory research was conducted on the equity gap of Latinx students and their access to higher education. And while, there is certainly an equity gap in higher education attendance for Latinx students, there doesn't necessarily appear to be one at Surry Community College. However, there are some caveats that influence whether we claim there is or is not an equity gap in access. One such caveat is how we define access. If access is acceptance, a student email, and formal admission into the school, then there is likely no issue at all on campus.

There are so many analogies that would work here, but in an effort to avoid digression, we can hand the proverbial keys to the kingdom to students, but if they do not know how to traverse the moat or the code to the security code in the castle, they just have a set of nice keys. So, access cannot simply be viewed as admission. There must be a lighted pathway with instruction for students. Once the complexity of access was reconciled, and it is important to note that access was not without barriers, but the barriers seemed smaller than generally witnessed throughout the North Carolina Community College System. I moved to a few sections that I have encountered with students and other research. Namely, demographics and demographic shifts/trends and barriers that exist in preventing both access and success for Latinx students. The barriers are not monolithic, nor are they always the same for each student, but we can ascertain that there are categories and sets within the categories that are common.

Demographic Trends and Their Impact

Across the United States, there is a shifting of demographics. The projected course has been apparent for some time, but the projections are coming to fruition and not just in large, metropolitan areas already steeped in diversity, but also in once homogenous, rural areas that are often ill-equipped for the trends and shifts. Dr. James H. Johnson, Jr., a demographer at the University of North Carolina's Kenan Flagler School of Business, researches, writes, and presents a series of reports that he calls "Disruptive Demographics" plus a field. For example, "Disruptive Demographics and Implications for K-12 Education" or "Disruptive Demographics and Implications for Health Care" are just a couple of his reports. He updates his data every couple of years, and the current focus for much of his research is two-pronged: the "browning" and the "graying" of the United States, which aptly captures the increasing diversity, mostly Latinx, especially in the South, and the overall aging population.

In less than thirty years, the United States will no longer be predominantly White. While it is projected that White people will still possess the largest share of demographics, they will comprise less than fifty percent of the population (Johnson, 2019). Both the Pew Research Center and Dr. Johnson project by 2050 that the Race/Ethnicity of the United States will still have a majority White population at just under 50%. Black and Asian populations are expected to change very little in their share of the percentage; however, the Latinx population is expected to essentially double its 2005 percentage of 14% to become 29% by 2050 (Johnson, 2019). The United States will visually appear much different than it does now in terms of race and ethnicity. These demographic shifts will impact most aspects of life including the power structure and dynamics in politics, education, values, culture, and many other interwoven threads of life.

While these trends address the future, there are also immediate byproducts and immediate implications for those trends. North Carolina public schools have increased over 300% in Latinx population from 2000 to 2016. In that same time, the White population in schools has decreased, though only marginally (Johnson, 2019). However, these shifts indicate there are some clear drivers of population growth.

A few significant factors contribute to these transformations and trends in demographics. Johnson and Lichter (2019) use the nomenclature of “depopulation,” which they define “as chronic population losses that prevent counties from returning to an earlier period of peak population size.” The authors conclude that depopulation is occurring in both metropolitan areas and non-metropolitan areas, but the difference in the two is the significance. While the depopulation of metropolitan areas is insignificant, the same cannot be argued for rural areas. As Johnson and Lichter (2019) claim: “the prevalence, timing, and magnitude of depopulation in America have unfolded unevenly across the geographic landscape.” There are several demographic drivers that lead to this decline in population or “depopulation” in the rural United States. Society, in general, is aging, which means there are lower births, and more people are leaving for opportunities, or they are leaving through natural decreases (death). There are also few migrations into areas—national or international (Johnson & Lichter, 2019). While migration is not greater than the exodus from rural areas, there is likely more migration than is captured in data. Those migrants sans papers or unauthorized immigrants are unlikely to appear in official demographic inquiries. In fact, one way to mitigate depopulation is through migration, and while their numbers may not be census official, they can be identified in schools via per pupil funding. If official census data declines or stays constant and school enrollment increases, plenty of assumptions can be made about migration and demographics in rural areas.

Specifically, in viewing the Latinx population, Johnson and Lichter (2016) offer: “the geographical spread of America’s Hispanic population has affected virtually all parts of the United States, but it has also been accompanied by exceptional growth in a much smaller number of receiving areas.” This growth in rural areas is, in part, due to job opportunity in certain industries such as agricultural (farming) and food processing (Johnson & Lichter, 2016). Additionally, the Latinx community is a largely word of mouth culture, so movement will be due to both opportunity and an established culture in the area. As highlighted in Johnson and Lichter (2019), in-migration is one way to offset the depopulation that is occurring, but in-migration of Latinx people either through moving in or being born to those who move in will continue to shift these demographics. Johnson and Lichter (2016), sum up some of the positives of the changing demographics that “in some rural areas, Hispanic growth has provided a demographic and economic lifeline that has offset depopulation among non-Hispanics.” Even though these demographic trends are statistical facts and foreshadow more changes to demographics that will look much different than the “White baby boom culture” (Frey, 2014) that has preceded it, people fear change even when inevitable and positive. As of 2011, more minority children were born in the United States than White children, so it is beyond evident that these demographic changes are shifts, trends, and movements. They are not data anomalies; they are the present and future.

These demographic trends have implications for many systems: healthcare, economics, labor, politics, education, and others. “Implications” often has a negative connotation, much like “change” does; however, in this case, the word is used to simply highlight systems that are historically slow to change that will need to adapt to these demographic changes. Frey (2014) in his chapter titled “A Pivotal Period for Race in America” explains:

I am convinced that the United States is in the midst of a pivotal period ushering in extraordinary shifts in the nation's racial demographic makeup. If planned for properly, these demographic changes will allow the country to face the future with growth and vitality as it reinvents the classic American melting pot for a new era. (p. 3)

As Johnson (2019) and others point out, in addition to the racial demographic trends, there are also age trends. And the United States is “graying” as well as “browning.” This country and other developed nations are experiencing a labor shortage, often of low and unskilled workers, but not exclusively. And according to Frey (2014), in his book *Diversity Explosion: How New Racial Demographics are Remaking America*, writes:

. . . a growing diverse, globally connected minority population will be absolutely necessary to infuse the aging American labor force with vitality and to sustain populations in many parts of the country that are facing population declines. Rather than being feared, America's new diversity— poised to reinvigorate the country at a time when other developed nations are facing advanced aging and population loss— can be celebrated. (p. 2)

However, fear is not always as easily mitigated as simply claiming necessity. Even though humanity, growth, and success all hinge upon increasing diversity, it does not mean that people easily give up their role as the “ruling class,” which has certainly been the role of White people in the United States since lands were stolen and people were eradicated or relegated to comparatively tiny strips of land and upon the next chance to embrace diversity, those who were different, were enslaved.

Fearing Loss of Superiority

While an aging workforce and economic contributors necessitate and seek to embrace the fact that young Latinx families exist and are contributing to the population does not mean their presence does not bring with it complexities and basically, fear. And of course, there is vast historical evidence to demonstrate just how adverse to change the United States is. With a history of Jim Crow Laws, Asian Exclusion Acts, Native American Boarding Schools, and other systemic attempts to maintain White superiority and exclude/eliminate others, which was rooted in at least two underlying factors: fear and the notion of supremacy, it is not shocking that fear serves as a major barrier to a smooth transition into these demographic changes.

A few studies have been conducted on the idea of zero-sum theory as it pertains to support and specifically “allyship” for those groups considered to be disadvantaged. The literature points most specifically to White people as being those considered advantaged and Black people being those as disadvantaged. However, the claims can be applied along racial, ethnic, gender, or socio-economic basis. The authors use the Black Lives Matter Movement as an example. There have certainly been people they categorize as advantaged who have been strong proponents of the movement, but many other people who are also categorized as advantaged, chose to engage in a competing movement, the All Lives Matter Movement (Stefaniak et al., 2020).

Further examining this fear White people have of changing demographics is important to the shift and the aforementioned preparation required for it. Loss of privilege and supremacy drive these fears and even lead some White people to claim anti-White bias. According to Craig and Richeson (2017) and their research, they point out the circumstances that Whites tend to “perceive discrimination against their group [. . .] suggests that one trigger of perceived anti-

White racial bias is the perception that minorities are making considerable societal progress.” Some of those areas of progress are education and voting, though both also have considerable barriers for minorities and specifically the Latinx population. Frey (2014) acknowledges that “fears are evident today in the public backlashes that sometimes occur against more permissive immigration and voter registration laws” (p. 3). He, overall, has a more positive outlook regarding the changing demography, and perhaps it is because his book was written and published before the 2016 election. Of course, the election did not usher in the division between Whites and minorities and conservatives and liberals, but it did bring the division to a mainstream conversation that had not been audible or visible in the United States in decades. In this division and fear of otherness, people often forget that advancement is not a Zero-Sum Game and people can make progress and not reduce the progress of others in the process. The ideas and desires to remain in the current racial and systemic hierarchy of power does not bode well for the smooth transition of Whites as a minority in the next few decades.

In fact, Craig and Richeson’s (2017) attempt to gain understanding of Whites and their ideas about discrimination based on changing demographics provides qualitative and quantitative data, but truly serves as a stark warning about the ideas that (some) Whites have about discrimination, diversity, and themselves. Their research and discussion have a tone of division instead of unity and hope, which is not required, but it is divergent from Frey’s (2014) belief that “if demography is truly destiny, then these fears of a more racially diverse nation will almost certainly dissipate” (p. 3). Frey’s logic is sound. If the demography changes and there is more diversity, fears will lessen because there are fewer people who will be in a group to fear someone else. Yet, the results of Craig and Richeson’s (2014) research do not support his belief. They actually call the results or the implications of the results “sobering” (p. 17). Their findings

suggest the opposite of Frey's belief. The findings point to a real possibility that even as diversity increases that White people will feel more discriminated against, and they will believe that minorities are less discriminated against. Craig and Richeson (2017) write that "despite these perceptions, discriminatory practices against racial minorities still occur with alarming regularity" (p. 17), and they further offer that these discriminatory practices exist in virtually all parts of life: "health, education, criminal justice, and wealth" (p. 17). And these discriminatory practices have been shown to result in "substantial racial disparities (favoring Whites)" (p. 17). In fact, White people are attempting to litigate their perceived discrimination at alarming rates and espouse their theories of the absence of minority discrimination. The truly sobering finding from Craig and Richeson (2017) is that the "findings reveal the underlying psychological processes through which the growing racial diversity of the nation may unwittingly make it increasingly difficult to address these troubling disparities and cultivate a nation that is both diverse and just" (p. 18). And such beliefs and disparities, despite evidence supporting otherwise, will likely increase division.

The fear of losing relevancy is real and timeless, as is the fear of losing superiority, which can be traced back to Irish immigration of the 1830s. This fear and reaction to it is known by several names, but at the heart of the matter is the same ideology. Known as the great replacement, the replacement theory, or White replacement theory, the idea remains unchanged from its origin. It is characterized by xenophobia. Dr. Bill Mulligan, historian offers: "Our founding principle of equality for all seems to be forgotten in times of particular stress or when demagogues create the perception of stress" (Craig, 2021). While most stress, in this case, is self-inflicted, the rise of anxiety and fear is present. Because these times throughout history have

waxed and waned, there is a chance the attitudes can dissipate, though that seems to be the most unlikely movement.

Adapting to Demographic Changes

Much of the demography discussion is about the impact that these shifts will have on the future and how these trends will shape the landscape of the future, but these trends in demographics are already transforming the way people interact and the way institutions operate around or with the aforementioned people. While the focus of the demographic trends is the impact of and experiences of the Latinx community, the overall increase in minorities and declining or remaining constant of Whites is important to consider too. Many of the trends are playing out in the South as opposed to the North or Midwest, but there are certainly rural and urban areas in the Midwest that are experiencing significant demographic changes. The movement to the South is considered so significant though that some refer to it as the Reverse Great Migration. One such area that has grown and transformed significantly is the area surrounding Atlanta. The following case study examines the adaptation that has been required, what the outcomes are, as well as a plethora of biases on display. No doubt there have been changes in local government, services, entertainment, etc. in this area of suburban Georgia, but education is the area of life with the most to offer in terms of immediate assistance and future preparation for students and gain in terms of enrollment and increased diversity, which increases learning, so examining how demographic shifts are addressed in schools is extremely important and can provide a roadmap for the future or a cautionary tale—or something in between.

Grooms (2019) writes in the article “Straddling the Boundaries of the Zone of Tolerance: One District’s Response to Rapid Demographic Change” about Sewall County, Georgia, and the rapid change in demographics. In about ten years, the population went from about 81% White to

about 50+% White and 40+% minority. The county remained majority White but by a small degree. As Grooms (2019) offers there was some “White Flight,” which can be defined as the act of White people moving from an area to a presumably more affluent area. “White Flight” is pretty common when significant demographic changes occur, and of course, that movement factors even more into the overall demographics. In this area, there was a large in-migration of African-Americans and not a statistically significant in-migration of Latinx people based on the census data. However, the schools did experience a majority minority population and a more statistically relevant number of Latinx students than the census suggested. As Grooms (2019) provides in the form of interviews and responses with school officials, it is evident that they did make some rapid changes to accommodate the demographic shifts, but they suffer from extreme stereotypes and clear bias against minorities.

One of the areas that Grooms (2019) finds to be a theme among the people interviewed (school board member, assistant superintendent, and assistant principal) is student achievement. Grooms (2019) writes:

The majority of racial change in the county was due in part to the large numbers of Black families moving into the county. School and district perceptions of the diverse families moving into the county varied according to the race of the family. Black families moving in were viewed as dual-income and college-educated and Hispanic/Latino families were regarded as highly transient and lower income:

(Assistant Principal, Southwest City Elementary School), We’ve lost a lot of Latino students recently but they’re actually going, either back to Mexico or to wherever their family was before they moved to Georgia, you know Texas or something that like because—and that’s following the employment because a lot of them were in—a lot of

their Dad's were in construction type work . . . So as the Black families were more on their feet and able to buy homes there and then we were seeing a much larger influx of Hispanic families coming in because construction was good, all these sub-divisions were being built, lots of jobs and so families were moving in and so now the majority of the trailer park is Hispanic, the vast majority. (p. 956)

Based on the assistant principal's answers, it would be hard to imagine that they are truly aware of the factual demographics or truly what is trying the changes. There is also a clear, and often present, hierarchy of minorities at play in this school district.

Grooms (2019) also writes:

Even with the change in student population over time, student achievement across the district remained high. One participant expressed surprise when there was no noticeable change in student success in a school serving high numbers of students of color, another example of deficit thinking:

(Assistant Principal, Center City Elementary School), What's so interesting to me about our school even though we've had a large strain in population and shift from being mostly Caucasian to an increase in minority students, we still have a good population of students, like if their test scores still remain high, still remain great, our behavior here at the school, as far as student behavior is great. We don't have a lot of discipline problems that we have to deal with. So basically as far as our test scores, student behavior and that kind of stuff, it's about the same that it was whenever we were mostly Caucasian . . . It's amazing to me even though we've gone from a primarily Caucasian population to almost a comparable minority population, it's amazing to me that our discipline is very low, our

test scores are still staying good, so that's amazing to me to see that with the changes that we've had. (p. 957)

In this response, the assistant principal flaunts their implicit bias and essentially tosses a litany of microaggressions around.

Demographics are important. They are drivers of the economy, education, and as previously addressed, virtually everything in people's daily lives, but demographics—just sheer numbers—without their implications, without the reasons for their shifts and changes, without preparation for the future, without the people behind the numbers, mean very little.

Demographics play a pivotal role in my study. The students who are at the core of this study look around and see more people who look like them, but do they feel as if they have the strength in numbers to have a modicum of power? Or do they still feel as if they have if not a silent voice, a muffled one? Do our employees see these demographic trends and the implications for students, our enrollment, and our overall change in service area?

Barriers to College and College Completion for Latinx Students

Barriers often exist for students that must be overcome before they can gain access to and then complete a higher education program. Anything short of completing a credential program is considered to be outside of the measures of success established by institutions or system-wide measures. Access can be almost as complicated as success. Where does access end and success become the goal? Does the focus on access end at acceptance? Are all access-oriented barriers overcome at that point? Most people in institutional research, admissions, and administration tend to think of access ending at the door of acceptance. Students of many races and ethnicities are more likely to see access as an ongoing process. Many barriers exist that can make access seem insurmountable, but once overcome, they do not disappear. So, keeping those barriers

mitigated and providing support can equal success. The measures and definitions of success are also up for debate. If someone improves their knowledge or situation, are unsuccessful if they do not obtain a credential? Those people who improve their lives would likely argue that improvement is the greatest measure of success. While there are myriad barriers that Latinx students must overcome, they can be categorized into three mostly distinct barriers with minimal overlap: Systemic Barriers, Cultural Barriers, and Perceived Barriers.

Systemic Barriers

Systemic barriers can be defined as barriers that stem from the mainstream educational system and regulations that are thought to simply be the way that students matriculate into higher education. In most cases, these barriers equal the established bureaucracy. These barriers often require outside assistance to overcome. And sometimes they cannot be overcome, so students must find an alternate way to attain the same goal.

Poverty

According to Maritza Sloan, in speaking of her own experience, “I am the first person in my family who graduated from high school and obtained a college degree. Education was important for my parents, but poverty outweighed the possibility for me and my siblings to go to school and for some of us to obtain an education beyond high school” (Henderson et al., 2021). The very real barrier of poverty is not a new barrier or one simply exclusive to Latinx students, but poverty does mean that students can feel pressure to excel and often find a way to pass, even if they do not have the knowledge. Faking it rather than asking for help both staves off embarrassment and means students are not “burdens” on teachers, or taking too many of the resources available for all students. In the book *Suddenly Diverse: How School Districts Manage Race and Inequality*, by Erica O. Turner (2020), she presents two town case studies of

divergently leaning political affiliations, and essentially, both areas, the conservative Milltown and the liberal Fairfield, both in Wisconsin, worried that low income students were diluting resources from the mainstream middle-class students. The low-income students did appear to have diversity as a common denominator. The claim can be made that some view diversity as equal to poverty and little is done to help students overcome it because of racism—the rise of nationalism, xenophobia, nativism, etc.

Poverty, while in a K-12 environment certainly has a negative impact, for the most part, one's basic educational needs can still be met. However, once students matriculate into college or attempt to, poverty often becomes a giant wreaking havoc and destruction. According to Gándara and Mordechay (2017), "Poverty is the major driver behind low educational attainment. It determines to a very large extent where children will go to school, with whom, and by whom they will be taught" (p. 149). Gándara and Mordechay (2017) claim that the answers to making poverty less of a factor in educational attainment for Latinx students is known and it starts in the K-12 setting. They point to the success of bilingual or dual language programs. Yet they know the demand and need is far greater than the resources.

Lack of educational attainment for Latinx students due to poverty is not just a singular issue; it becomes cyclical. Without education, it is often unlikely that students will rise above their current socioeconomic status. Studies show that those without education are more apt to avoid healthcare, so the overall society benefits from educational attainment by Latinx students. The purpose of one such survey was to ascertain the "overall health and well-being of vulnerable populations," of which they considered the Latinx community. Participation and response are not always favorable "because of demographic and sociopolitical factors." Some of those political factors are due to people having "mixed immigration status who live in low-income, socially and

geographically isolated enclaves in the Southeast” (Calva et al., 2020). Particularly interesting to note about this study, is that it was a 50 questions survey with strong response, except for three questions, which were about income, education, and immigration. While it is not clear explicitly what that information means, it does seem to indicate that those are three areas for which people could feel shame about their status.

Immigration Status

Another systemic barrier is a student’s immigration status. Students are often limited in their ability to change their own immigration status. Those people who frequently call for immigrants to enter the country legally do not have even a remote idea of how complicated and often impossible the process is for some. There has long been a call for the Dream Act, which would allow students who are DACA recipients to receive in-state tuition and federal aid, which is not currently available to them (Crawford & Dorner, 2019, p. 37). However, the act has been heavily opposed, though some states have taken up the mantle and deemed DACA recipients as in-state students. North Carolina is not among those, but that could change in the future since higher education systems are enrollment driven.

For undocumented students, there are very few options to attend college due in large part to finances (Crawford & Dorner, 2019, p. 38), though there are some via private colleges that can offer aid, an employer as a third-party payor, and paying full price for out of state tuition, which would be almost unfathomable for most students.

Cost of College

Another systemic barrier for Latinx students is the cost of college, which, as already explored, is a barrier to most things for this group based on the prevalence of high levels of poverty, and additionally, the cost of college can be exacerbated by one’s immigration status. As

mentioned, out of state tuition is mandated in most cases for Latinx students who have DACA and those who are undocumented.

Language and Forms of College

Additionally, a systemic barrier is filling out applications, residency determination status, and FAFSA. The forms are in English and perhaps all of the students speak and read English, but the language of college forms is a language of its own. Latinx students are less likely to have some close who has navigated college before, so if there is no trust established with school personnel, there is a chance that students do not pursue college because of these types of barriers. As one author offers:

It is possible that, by eliminating the need for students to answer residency questions on each college application, the RDS will ease the college-going process for students and increase access to the state's two and four-year colleges. However, when considered alongside literature that analyzes a similar form, the FAFSA, it is also possible that the RDS will serve as a barrier to college for underserved populations, such as low-income students and students of color. (Worsham, 2021, pp. 7-8)

She goes on to discuss the similarities between the two forms. Worsham (2021) points out that “both forms are completed during the college application process, both are online, both ask for similar information from the student and the parents or guardians, and both involve post application documentation requests for selected applicants” (p. 8). Both forms are places of concern and anxiety for Latinx students in the application process. The Department of Education or schools to which they apply are not going to freely share the information they offer with other arms of the government, but their answers on those forms provide answers to their immigration status and perhaps even more importantly, their family's status.

Cultural Barriers

Cultural barriers can be those of the student or their parents. Language can be a cultural barrier in a variety of ways. One way language can be a barrier is if parents or students either only speak their heritage language or prefer to receive information in it. That heritage language could be Spanish or it could be an indigenous language. Also, language is a bit more nuanced in that often parents have low levels of education and interpreting by anyone other than the student or their family may be at a level that is unrecognized by the parents. Another related cultural barrier is the involvement that parents have in all decisions in their student's lives, especially the educational decisions that will impact the entire family.

Majority group, first-generation students have barriers to access, but those barriers are not as complicated or culturally entrenched as those of students of color. Bragg and Durham (2012) offer: "Whites from low-income families fare better than African-Americans and Hispanics who pursue immediate college enrollment . . ." (p. 111). The low-income barrier a student from a majority group has is less prohibitive than for minority groups. According to Elliott and Parks (2018), "Language, demographics, and politics are three . . . factors that often hinder Latinos from pursuing higher education" (p. 11). Those are barriers, but the picture is more complex than the authors claim. College-aged, non-citizen Latinx students, even if eligible, will not have DACA designation because of DACA's previous suspension. Lack of DACA designation perpetuates financial barriers due to ineligibility of scholarships. Any discussion that omits or glosses over finances as a barrier to Latinx students attending higher education is an incomplete discussion. Moreover, students face the bureaucratic barrier of Residency Determination Status (RDS) and FAFSA. Students who know they will be considered out-of-state must complete RDS (even if they mark that they are accepting out-of-state status). While it may seem simple, it is

not. In a culture where family names are sometimes hyphenated and sometimes not and sometimes all names included and sometimes not, it takes a level of persistence to continue to ask the right questions to the right people. Many traditional-age college students do not have the emotional intelligence and intellectual resiliency to seek assistance. Additionally, and anecdotally, birthright citizens often have complications with RDS and are initially determined to be out-of-state when they are in-state. This complication is not a final decision, but it does require more effort—often a trip to a utility company to gather evidence of residency. Again, these barriers require knowledge and perseverance.

Familial Pressure

The barriers continue. Latinx students carry the weight of their ancestors' decisions to immigrate and must study the discipline and pursue the career that will be the most beneficial to their family. Other students are influenced by their family's wishes, but not at the level of Latinx students. To truly understand, one must listen to the expectations that students carry. Latinx students often have few role models who have been to and completed college, and for a significant number of students, they would not only be the first person in their family to attend college, they may be the first person in their family to go to and to complete high school.

In a qualitative study conducted to determine barriers and support that Latinx students have, the family pressure and responsibilities maintained a prominent place. The findings suggest that "Family responsibilities resonated strongly with the participants as barriers to going to college. As family members, students have to contribute to regular or unexpected family expenses" (Manzano-Sanchez et al., 2019). In the words of one respondent, identified as Bella: "They need to get a job to help their parents, like . . . pay for the rent since they're still going to be living at home . . . or to help their parents with other stuff." According to participants, "family

responsibilities are assigned according to gender: females are responsible for household chores and males for economic support” (Manzano-Sanchez et al., 2019). Of course, there is some variation to that and some females must contribute to both chores and economics.

Additionally, some Latinx students have even more responsibility such as caring for younger siblings. And while working while attending school is common, sharing the burden of significant financial contribution to a family can make the duality of work and school seem insurmountable. One respondent in their study, Jesus, points out the difficult navigation of work and school and that people often feel compelled to choose one or the other: “They aren’t able to advance [higher education] because they have to worry about their job and pay the bill and all that” (Manzano-Sanchez et al., 2019).

Imposter Syndrome

Low academic confidence as caused by a previous absence of academic success or previous academic success that they somehow believe they did not earn or it was a mistake is at the center of imposter syndrome. Additionally, “students with low grades feel defeated in their college aspirations. Academic competition with peers also decreases their self-confidence” (Manzano-Sanchez et al., 2019).

Jessica Cobb (2018) examines some of the impacts of imposter syndrome as it pertains to first generation students in general. For students to move to the next level of academics, their success is predicated on “moments of connection with academic material and mentors,” and, as she posits, the “absence of some of the obstacles” that often prove to be major hurdles for students (p. 96).

Perceived Barriers

Are barriers still barriers if no one knows they are not actually barriers or do not have to be barriers? Of course, the question is rhetorical and facetious. However, the question is worth asking. If someone has answers to questions—or help to overcome a barrier—and the student is not aware of the help, then the help may as well not exist. Lack of clear communication to and with students can be a perceived barrier that becomes an actual barrier.

Conocimiento

At a purely meaning of a word level, conocimiento means knowledge or consciousness; however, in the writing of Gloria Anzaldúa, conocimiento is an amalgamation of the two definitions and more. To understand the theory or concept of conocimiento is to endeavor to understand Anzaldúa who refused to be defined by the definitions of others, but was a self-proclaimed lesbian, feminist chicana—at a minimum—at her core. In addition to *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa examines the process of consciousness, knowledge, and transcendence to one's full and complete self.

Borderlands Theory

Borderlands or La Frontera is a concept that has myriad meanings based on the eponymous work of Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), a sixth generation Chicana (p. 3). The literal meaning of the borderland is the geographical area surrounding the border of Mexico and the United States. However, to only acknowledge the geographical space is to diminish the complexity of identity that people of that region often possess. The people of that area often consider themselves as caught somewhere in the middle of that actual and figurative border and cultural quagmire. The theory is the forced culmination—sometimes melding and sometimes

disengaging—the juxtaposition of those things that cannot be unified. It is in those spaces that the borderlands, the sentiment, and the theory reside.

In one of Anzaldúa’s most anthologized essays “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” the borderlands of language are illuminated in all their complexity. She captures the connection to language and how people fight, no matter the strength of the enemy in an allegory of tongue versus dentist. The dentist invades her mouth with wads of cotton and metal drills, but he is met with tongue, all muscle and taste buds, and he declares that he’s “never seen anything as strong or as stubborn” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 75). Anzaldúa’s description is literally of the strength of the part of the body, the tongue, *la lengua*, but also she is describing the strength of the tongue, the language, *la lengua*, and that it is powerful and it fights to survive.

Milton Bennett’s Model of Cultural Competence

Milton Bennett’s work spans several decades. Through his work, he examines the ways in which educators and anyone working with the public can prepare to work with a diverse breadth of people. The work is expansive in the entire process of realizing, understanding, becoming more competent, and finally a realization that transcends competence (Bennett, 1986; Bennett, 2004; Bennett, 2017).

His work allows for placement along a continuum (see Figure 1). At one end of the continuum is ethnocentrism and at the other ethnorelativism. Most attitudes can be clearly placed on the continuum, and thusly, an organization can ascertain where they stand in terms of cultural competence and what work needs to be undertaken to improve that placement.

Conclusion

Throughout the course of this review of literature, many insights and new avenues to explore have been illuminated. Certainly, the emphasis on demographics as a catalyst to the need

to ensure barriers are mitigated for Latinx students is imperative. And exploring the barriers themselves is of paramount importance. The Borderlands Theory helps explain the situation Latinx students face as well as some of the barriers that they encounter. Additionally, the framework of Milton Bennett's cultural competence helps provide insight into the status of personnel and their ideals about Latinx students. Once we can assess where we are, we can make plans to address where we are, where we would like to be, and how we get there.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, and it will be mentioned again in Chapter 3, Surry Community College, barring any significant shift or new trends in demographics, will reach the status of an HSI (Hispanic Serving Institution), which simply means that the enrolled population is at least 25% Hispanic. However, reaching that designation is not enough. Demographic trends alone will allow the college to reach that threshold, but how are the students going to be served. Across the country, the idea of what it means to serve students is being discussed and specifically what it means to serve Hispanic students. Throughout this document, I call for culturally relevant support. Some scholars, often organizational theorists, focus on shaping the organization in an effort to serve minoritized groups, of which low-income and first-generation students are included. Following the advice and research of scholars such as Gina Garcia when determining the potential organizational shifts to support and serve Latinx students makes sense. The remainder of the Surry Community College population would mostly fall under low income and first-generation students.

Garcia offers a potential barrier to schools that become HSIs. She and others write:

Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) are colleges and universities that enroll at least 25% Latinx students. Despite being recognized by the federal government since 1992, HSIs lack a historical mission to serve Latinxs. As such the idea of 'servingness' has become

an elusive concept. An abundance of literature centering HSIs has been published, yet there continues to be a debate about what it means to serve students” (Garcia et al., 2019, p. 745).

Paramount in Garcia’s work is the intersectionality of the H in HSIs. As we know, the Latinx community is not a monolith and serving Latinx students will not look the same in all cases. So long as there is awareness of variety and intersectionality, schools can plan and prepare to support and engage in “servingness” for Latinx students. At this point, there is no required programming or policies for HSIs. However, without systemic supports and shifts, then colleges are not necessarily serving Hispanic students—they are available in terms of access, but they are not, in fact serving students without programs to meet the unique needs that Hispanic students often have. Some of those unique factors are low-income without access to state or federal subsidies due to their documentation status. Schools often have food pantries, but the food found in those are not always commonplace for Hispanic palates. Additionally, there can be cultural and language differences among those who identify as Hispanic. Understanding the diversity that exists in the “H” as Garcia writes, allows the college to work to mitigate barriers to access and completion.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS OF INQUIRY

The focus of this inquiry is to ascertain, assess, address, and alleviate as many obstacles as possible for Latinx students to attend and complete college. From a purely logistical and survival stance, based on the North Carolina Community College System funding model, many rural community colleges in areas that are stagnant in population growth need to focus on Latinx student access and completion. The growing numbers of Latinx students entering K-12 education are necessary recruitment targets for rural community colleges to maintain existence. The Latinx population is predicted to reach 111 million by 2060 and be almost 30% of the share of the population by the same time (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018), which has been driven and will continue to be driven by the fact that Latinx women on average have more children than White or Black women (Yen, 2010). Additionally, beyond the business and financial incentive, the population is becoming a significant share of the community. The role of community colleges, as previously mentioned, is to provide opportunities and support for the community (*Mission and History*, n.d.). At my rural community college (referred to as *the college* or Surry Community College), located in northwest North Carolina, this focus of practice seeks to find and improve our level of success in helping the Latinx population reach success.

In order to help students attain success and overcome barriers, we must truly understand the barriers that students encounter. We learn about their barriers from listening to their stories, which is at the core of this study, but there is also literature that documents some of the barriers as well.

Throughout this chapter, the research methods, participants, and study questions will come into clear context, and the steps to gain information to mitigate barriers for Latinx students will become more obvious.

Focus of Practice Guiding Question(s)

In the scenario with Latinx students, we are at the juncture of understanding or lack thereof. This position is often the intersection or crossroads of culture and an academic present and future for Latinx students. When students are driven by cultural values, as most Latinx students are (Hobbs, 2020), it is important that the college community understands that this group, and other minoritized groups, for that matter, are not motivated only by success, potential wealth, or the sense of accomplishment that many non-historically minoritized groups may be. Their motivation is much larger in scope. Their motivation is the generations of poverty, the decades of violence and struggle, lifetimes of sacrifice. Their motivation is the ability to offer repayment for an opportunity. Borderlands Theory provides a theoretical and conceptional framework for examining the unique position that Latinx students are in as they navigate higher education. Borderlands is a crucial feminist theoretical interdisciplinary concept. The focus of the theory is on “marginalized identities.”

Anzaldúa “conceptualized a space of belonging defined by the border itself, a painful physical space ‘where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds’ (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 25; Borderlands: A feminist concept, n.d.). Additionally, the space transcends the literal and physical border to the concept of the space between.

This study is guided by the following questions:

1. What do faculty, staff, and administrators at Surry Community College know about the experiences of Latinx students in our service area?

This question helps to establish the gap between faculty, staff, and administrator knowledge and student needs. It is important to ascertain what the people interacting with students or those making decisions for students know about the unique experiences of said

students, specifically the Latinx students who do not share the same culture or cultural values. People are hesitant to admit bias because we do not appreciate facing our own flaws. Because of this factor, determining the role of bias will be difficult, but a concerted effort to gain results in this arena must be put forth.

2. What interventions might support Latinx student needs at Surry Community College?

Answering these guiding questions and others that may arise during conversations will help determine a helpful intervention so we can successfully mitigate some barriers to education for Latinx students. In consultation with the literature (Anzaldúa, 1987; Bennett, 2017; Bennett, 2004; Bennett, 1986) and inquiry partners and as informed by data collected in Phases I and II, for Phase III of my inquiry, I will design an intervention to improve employee practices in their interactions with Latinx students. There may also be an intervention implemented to directly impact student access, experience, and completion. I will present a professional development intervention to address manageable barriers for students and assist college personnel in increased knowledge about the Latinx student experience and ways to help students mitigate barriers.

3. What effect will interventions have on Latinx students at Surry Community College?

Time permitting, I will implement the intervention and include results in this Focus of Practice. Borderlands provides a lens to determine how students feel about their place in the campus community (Anzaldúa, 1987).

Inquiry Design and Rationale

Student engagement and sense of belonging on college campuses has long been considered important. Research after research reports that there remains a strong correlation between sense of belonging and persistence on the part of students. Sense of belonging becomes more important with diverse student groups. National studies such as the Student Experience

Project and more localized studies such as the one on the campus of University of Colorado Denver, provide data to support the correlation. Students who have little access to people who have navigated college previously are less likely to feel as if they belong (Marks, 2022).

Marks (2022) offers insight into the university's strategic plan: "Make Education Work for All." The plan proposes empowering students and moving them away from the notion of self as an imposter, which, in turn, provides a framework for successful academic performance regardless of previous stumbling blocks. One of the lynchpins of making a system work for all, is to accept that the current or traditional system was not built for all to succeed. While the intervention will not be a school-wide strategic plan, the same sort of introspection is necessary.

From the outset of the study, gathering information about student experiences is at the crux of the focus. Phase I will allow for the gathering of student experiences (focusing on, but not limited to) the knowledge that they wish college personnel knew and/or understood about their experiences. Phase I data should yield information about experiences of Latinx students that we can improve. Sense of belonging and knowledge of and access to resources are potential findings from Phase I. Phase II consists of a survey for college personnel surrounding their knowledge about unique experiences that Latinx students may encounter. Understanding what personnel know and assessing their attitudes using Bennett's Scale of Cultural Competence. Understanding where college personnel are on the continuum will inform professional development intervention/s for Phase III. Phase I narratives will also inform the professional development intervention, but may also yield changes in practice, specialized orientations, advising, etc. The goal is to truly allow the need and data to dictate the interventions through discussions and collaboration with inquiry partners. In order to ensure service to the Latinx population, an inquiry designed to focus on qualitative data is the most appropriate approach

because the primary goal of improving access and completion can only be accomplished through understanding their experiences—their narratives. Though, there will certainly be plenty of opportunities to examine numerical data most often associated with quantitative data, specifically in the form of enrollment and demographic numbers, and the study could be replicated using comparative, quantitative or mixed method approaches, I am choosing a qualitative approach, so I can share the stories of the students through their narratives, which provides anecdotal experiences of students and potentially some college personnel depending upon the information they choose to offer in the survey.

While there are myriad approaches to qualitative methodology, collection of and dissemination of narratives can place the center of the study on the stories of participants themselves. I can tell you that I have observed something in my years working with students, but if you can “see” their experiences, there is more value in their lived experiences than my observed experiences. For this study, specifically life-history narratives will be sought from student participants. Life-history narratives often work well with feminist frameworks, as *Borderlands* is, because they support the often complex postmodern aspects of life (Hatch & Newsom, 2010). Life-history narratives also often presuppose that the researcher and the participants have different lived and socioeconomic experiences.

Context of the Study

Surry Community College, founded in 1964, nestled in the picturesque foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, is the resource and opportunity hub of the area. With a main campus located in Dobson, the county seat of Surry County, North Carolina, the service area is both Surry and Yadkin County, which are two rural, economically disadvantaged counties. The counties face many obstacles with declining populations and an exodus of companies and jobs

that began prior to the 1990s, but the magnitude of progressively declining manufacturing with some industries as early as the 1970s and with the apparel manufacturing industries in the 1990s finally reached the pinnacle of the decline in the 1990s and beyond with the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Because the cornerstones of industry and survival in the area were manufacturing (apparel and furniture), farming (tobacco), and granite mining, the impact of NAFTA and other manufacturing declines are still felt. Surry Community College has served and continues to serve as a lifeline for the community. Those who suffered job loss often enrolled in a program to retrain in a skill that remained marketable in the area or a larger area that many residents commute to for employment such as Winston-Salem or beyond. Trade Adjustment Assistance recipients, those whose jobs were shipped to Mexico or Canada, flocked to the classrooms in the late 2000s (Benefits and Services, n.d.). In both cases, the students were diverse in age, as one would expect, but there remained little ethnic or racial diversity on campus. It, perhaps, made sense that there would not yet be a shift in demographics and the student population would remain primarily White, middle or lower middle-class, and conservative for at least a little while—though there was a slightly increased presence of Latinx students on campus. The increasing Latinx population in the community had not yet enrolled in the college *en masse*.

The increase in the Latinx population was fueled by several factors. North Carolina in general had a large seasonal population since the 1970s that continued to grow exponentially over the next couple of decades, especially in areas like Surry and Yadkin County that relied heavily on farming and agricultural endeavors. Eventually, migrants stayed in the area, or people immigrated to the area because they had family who had made the journey before them (Gill, 2014). Travel north was simple and easy from central Mexico. Several bus companies had daily

trips from Guanajuato and Michoacán and several other central Mexican states to North Carolina. Additionally, companies advertised, specifically targeting Latinx workers because the pay, while menial by most standards, was significantly higher than workers made in Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Colombia, and others (Gill, 2014). While the majority of the area's textile and manufacturing jobs vanished, the ones that remained were the ones that others (read: White) did not want. However, Latinx workers earned the reputation of being hard workers and willing to do the difficult tasks as needed.

The changes within the community itself may not seem as if they are part of Surry Community College's identity, but these changes require additional or different knowledge, resources, and outreach. Similar adaptations have been made as the community also saw the agricultural cash crop of tobacco decimated by sanctions, payouts, and overall understanding of the dangers associated with its use. In that case, land owners realized that the dry red clay soil found in much of the area not only allowed tobacco to flourish, it also was the prime environment for grapes to grow and eventually produce wine. The fact that the area has shifted from producing one vice to another one is a bit ironic at a minimum, but much closer to a paradox. White, middle-class conservatives left with only two things that may save their communities: Andy Griffith and wine.

With a mission statement "to promote personal growth and community development to a diverse population through excellence in teaching, learning, and service," Surry Community College truly serves as *a*, if not *the*, central figure in the community. Thus, when grapes and wine became a central product of and the livelihood of the community, Surry Community College became the home of the Shelton-Badgett North Carolina Center for Viticulture and Enology, which "serves the grape and wine industry, not only in North Carolina, but the entire

Southeast by providing workforce training and industry support” (*About the Center*, n.d.).

Through the center and the academic programs that support winemaking, Surry Community College has and is continuing to adapt to the changing needs of the community. The same must also be true as other changes occur in the community and through the guiding foundation of that mission statement, the college is poised to remain steadfast.

While the current mission is inclusive and all-encompassing, historically, as many things were, the school was founded to prepare young men (also read: White men) to transfer to a four-year university or receive trade training and to live a knowledge-filled life. In the 1960s, the mission was to “offer to its community a program to improve skills and develop an intellectual understanding of life. The education of the whole man—the development of all men and of all man’s capabilities—esthetic, social, intellectual and manipulative—will be its goal” (*Exhibits: Surry Community College*, n.d.). Surry Community College was not among the initial wave of community colleges, but it was approved and founded about a year after the general statute was enacted to establish community colleges and the community college system (*Mission & History*, n.d.).

Specifically, in Surry County, the desire to bring a community college began at a Mount Airy Lions Club meeting in 1960. At that time a group was established to conduct an information gathering mission to see if there was interest and to liaise with the Division of Higher Education in Raleigh. Within a couple of years, all civic groups in the county held a seat on the committee determining the feasibility of the college. Newspapers and radio stations supported the formation of the college. By 1963, the college received support from the Surry County Board of Commissioners and Elkin City, Mount Airy City, and Surry County school systems. The decision was made to apply to bring a community college to Surry County, specifically on land

in Dobson, NC. On January 10, 1964, the application was approved and the rest is history as the saying goes (*Exhibits: Surry Community College*, n.d.).

Surry Community College began with three buildings in 1967 on the main campus, the only campus. Noticeably missing from planning for the college is any mention of Yadkin County. Just as Yadkin County was originally part of Surry County until 1850 (*About Yadkinville*, n.d.), and the socioeconomic status, racial make-up, industries, proximity (17 miles from the main campus), and rural nature are similar, it logically stands to reason that Yadkin County would be part of the service area. With the recent state budget for 2021-22, the college should now be eligible for multi-campus funding, as the Yadkin Center should become the Yadkin Campus with more than 300 FTE. In addition to the two previously mentioned sites, there are others: the Elkin Center, which is located in Elkin, NC, and housed in a former grocery store that left the region; the Pilot Center, which is located in Pilot Mountain, NC, and housed in one of the many mills that had been left vacant with closures and movements; and the Center for Public Safety, which is located in Mount Airy, in a multi-purpose building that also houses some county offices, and was formerly a Lowes Home Improvement store. Clearly, Surry Community College is strategically located across two counties to literally and figuratively meet students where they are.

The main campus has grown to 17 buildings, greenhouses for sustainable agriculture, a vineyard, the aforementioned North Carolina Center for Viticulture, a baseball stadium, and one on-campus early college and another at the Yadkin Center, which has three buildings (*Main Campus Map*, n.d.). These facilities on the main campus serve more than 3000 curriculum students per year and over 18,000 Workforce Technology and Community Education (WTCE)

students annually (*About Surry*, n.d.). Surry Community College certainly impacts a large segment of the community.

The ever-increasing segment of the population which is at the core of this inquiry has markedly boosted its share of the local community and even more so the campus community. The 2020 census data show the Latinx population in Surry and Yadkin Counties at 12%, which is an increase from the previous census data of 2% and 3%, respectively, but there is strong evidence that the true population is not captured. There is an extreme fear of government entities on the part of Latinx people, and while the census seeks to capture data of all people inhabiting the United States, fear of deportation or other unknown repercussions ensures that all data is not captured. However, those percentages are likely relatively accurate. One such support for the relative accuracy of the population share is that the K-12 systems that feed into our college all have at least 25% of their populations identified as Latinx. And lastly, our own 2021 fall demographics show 19% of our population as identifying as Latinx. That percentage is higher than the system office average at all 58 community colleges, which has remained steady at 13%. We have some indications to think that our percentage of Latinx students is a bit closer to 25% than our current 19% shows, but even at 19%, we are identified by several publications and entities as being one the top emerging Hispanic Serving Institutions in the state (Excelencia in Education. . ., 2020; MacCracken, 2020; Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, n.d.). Due to the precipice we find ourselves upon, we owe it to our students and ourselves to ensure that our college is prepared to address the unique circumstances that our Latinx students carry with them to our doors. Through our increased awareness and preparedness, we can help students enter those doors when they reach them and successfully exit those doors with a degree or credential.

Inquiry Partners

In the previous work that has been accomplished on campus, I have had myriad partners on and off campus. We have successfully established a Global Education Advisory Committee, which focuses on increasing global awareness through globalizing classes, providing weekly intercultural events, and faculty professional development, study abroad opportunities.

Additionally, we have revived our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee, which works to ensure the college is a fair and equitable institution for all faculty, staff, and students through advocacy, guest speakers, and professional development. I have also consulted outside resources such as Latinx leaders such as Irving Zavaleta, Juana Hernandez, Vivian Perez Chandler, and Moises Serrano who have personally navigated some of these barriers that our students at Surry Community College face and those partnerships will continue as well. I will be open to seeking additional partners as the need arises.

First, my colleagues will be my inquiry partners. Specifically, the dean of academics; the executive director of institutional research; the director of advising and student success; and the diversity, equity, and inclusion committee will be involved in this focus of practice. Secondly, former students will serve as advisors and help recruit current students to share their insights. The list could grow, but I currently have two students who have attended and graduated from the community college and matriculated to four-year institutions. In one of the instances, the student is a senior at UNC-Chapel Hill and the other student is a junior at Johns Hopkins University. To ensure the integrity of these partnerships, I will include the inquiry partners in true collaboration. At the end of cycle one of Phase I, which is the pilot study, the inquiry partners and I will meet and walk through identifying and analyzing the tenets of the Borderlands Theory that arise in each of the recorded interviews with student participants. There can be far more than four

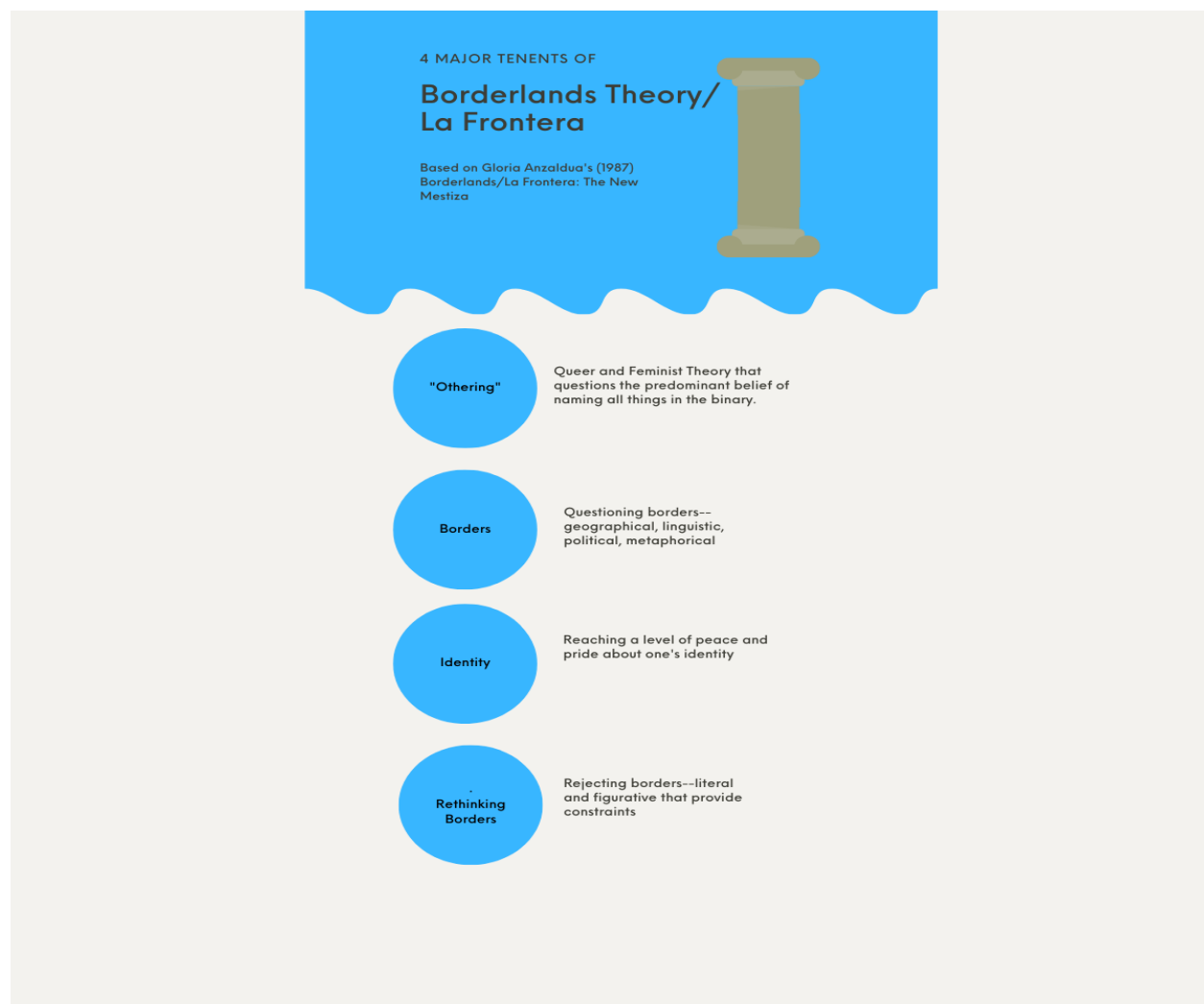
significant tenets of Borderlands Theory, but I am emphasizing these four specifically:

“Othering,” Borders, Identity, and Rethinking Borders (see Figure 2). We will work together in a meeting and walk through one to two interviews. And then we will pair-up and each pair analyze and interpret one interview, determining the prevalence of the four major tenets of Borderlands Theory. The same process will be repeated with additional cycles of Phase I.

Phase II analysis of the survey will be me assigning each college personnel respondent a place on Bennett’s Global Awareness Continuum. From there, I will look for trends and groups from the college and where each group resides on the continuum. I will share this data with the inquiry partners. We will use the prevalence and significance of the tenets of Borderlands and the results of the placement of college personnel on Bennett’s scale to discuss and ultimately establish a comprehensive plan to address the findings. I anticipate some form of professional development and establishment of formal support for Latinx students, but the findings will drive the intervention/s. Additionally, my inquiry partners will help determine how we will measure the effect of the interventions.

Ethical Considerations

I did seek and gain approval from my college’s IRB (see Appendix D). In the time between the submission and approval, I sought to establish who, when, and how I would interview students. And I made sure to pay particular attention to anyone who was in a class with me at the time. I did not want those students to feel any undue pressure. In the case of current students, I had an initial conversation about my study, what I hoped to find out, and that my goal was to find out their barriers in the hopes of helping support them but also students in the future. So, simply a general overview conversation, followed by a discussion about interest, and an email was sent to schedule an interview. In the initial discussions, I talked to two current (at the



Note. (Anzaldúa, 1987).

Figure 2. Four major tenents of the Borderlands Theory.

time) students. Both seemed willing and enthusiastic to participate at the time. One responded to my email to schedule the interview and one did not. I did not follow-up or approach the student in the class. We maintained our normal teacher/student relationship, and he was not penalized in any way for not participating in an interview with me.

Inquiry Procedures

The study was designed to be conducted in four phases. Each phase builds on the previous and informs the next. The study results will be quantified in some ways if none other than reviewing changes in overall Latinx enrollment and completion. However, the study is centered on qualitative data, specifically, narratives of Latinx students through the lens of Borderlands Theory.

There are myriad studies in which narratives are collected or woven together from interviews. Qualitative responses from the participants will capture the experiences of the students in their own words. The power of the students' experiences and their experiences in their own words cannot be minimized. One researcher whose work I admire in terms of use of narrative is Lori Santamaría (Santamaría, 2014; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2011). Much of her work centers on educators of color and their leadership styles. One line in one of the studies is "This work serves as a departure from rhetoric toward real conversation with solutions for the public good as opposed to greater personal gain" (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2011, p. 22). These narratives of Surry Community College students can have a similar impact. We can move beyond the rhetoric of what leaders and other experts think we should do, and we have a true chance to implement policies and actions that can impact greater public good for Latinx students. These experiences of the students, their feelings, and their needs, which will be ascertained in the inquiry, will be the drivers of the intervention. Phase I of this study initially involved interviews

of 5 Latinx students enrolled at Surry Community College. Fifteen was my goal, but that target shifted. However, additional research could be conducted to garner more data and fuller, more varied responses. I wanted to get a variety of types of students, so fifteen seemed like a large enough but also manageable number of students. However, if needed, the number can be increased or even slightly decreased. Some students will be interviewed in Phase I as part of the Pilot (five students). Students will be asked a series of prepared questions, and follow-up and probing questions, which are influenced by Borderlands Theory and will be utilized as needed (see Appendix B). These questions are open-ended and serve to help ascertain the obstacles that students have faced thus far in their higher education experiences. See Figure 3 for research questions, their influence, and the purpose they serve in the inquiry.

The Pilot Phase helped determine the validity of the questions in that the participants answered the questions in a manner that provided answers as anticipated. Additionally, these interviews are semi-structured in the sense that organic conversations are welcome and invited. The sampling of students will be mostly a convenience sample because I know many Latinx students on campus (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). There will also be some snowball (Snowball Sampling, 2022) sampling with some participants inviting friends to contribute as well.

Phase II of the study will be conducted after information is collected from students. Faculty and staff across the college will be asked to complete a survey, which will be informed by data collected from the student perceptions in their interview phase (Phase I) and questions that help determine where college personnel on Bennett's Cultural Competence Scale. A variety of college personnel, across as many departments as I can receive a response from, will be surveyed to find out a few specific things: do employees understand the nuanced situation that



Figure 3. Data collection plan.

many Latinx students face in order to attend higher education institutions, most specifically ours, and what role is bias (implicit and explicit) playing in the opinions of the college personnel. Initially, my intent was to have at least one response from each department, but since I decided to create an electronic, anonymous survey, I will open the survey up to all college personnel. Once data is collected from students and college personnel, we can identify obstacles for current and future students at Surry Community College based on Borderlands Theory and Bennett's Model of cultural competence based on responses from students and college personnel, respectively. Additionally, we can seek ways to mitigate the barriers that exist. The bottom line in this quest is to find out ways that we can offer solutions to mitigate obstacles that present as barriers to students. And in the process, we can also learn of potential obstacles about which we may be unaware. Additionally, in this endeavor, I will seek to determine what a broad-spectrum sample of faculty, staff, and administrators know about the unique situation that many Latinx students face in order to attend college—even ours with an open-door policy. Lastly, measuring the knowledge personnel have about the Latinx experience is important, as well as understanding the potential impact of implicit conscious bias on the part of Surry Community College personnel through the student experiences and the disclosure of information via the open-ended survey from personnel.

Phase I

Research question one, what do Latinx students, in the Surry Community College service area, wish that college officials were aware of, or understood, about their unique experiences in general and those driven by cultural differences as they endeavor to attend college will be answered by collecting data from current and former Latinx students. The interviews with students serves as the data collection tool based on Borderlands Theory will collect qualitative

data. Phase I of this study will initially involve interviews of at least 15 Latinx students enrolled at Surry Community College. I will seek a representative group of students, around nine females and six males to represent the proportion of the student population, but these numbers are simply guides. And while I do believe that gender could be a factor that impacts the experiences of Latinx students, no student who meets the simple criteria of being Latinx will be excluded regardless of whether they identify as female, male, or non-binary. The students will be a sample of convenience since I will have a prior relationship with most of them from having taught them, being their advisor, or through working with them through a diversity, equity, or inclusion, or global awareness initiative. Participants will be allowed or even encouraged to invite friends to participate, so the remainder of the sample will occur through snowballing.

Students will be asked a series of prepared questions for a semi-structured interview, and follow-up and probing questions will be utilized as needed (see Appendix B). The questions are based on Borderlands Theory and seek to determine what tenets of the Borderland Theory that students have or are enduring while a student at Surry Community College. These open-ended questions help facilitate organic conversations. Phase I will consist of two rounds, the Pilot and Phase I. The Pilot Phase provided insight on the efficacy of the way the interviews were conducted, whether the questions or points yielded strong conversation, and ultimately, after discussion with some inquiry partners, I realized we needed the voices of previous students as well. Both rounds will be conducted under identical procedures.

The procedures consist of recruitment, communication, scheduling interviews, completing the interviews on Microsoft Teams so I can have a verbal recording and a written transcript. While the order is basically linear, I do offer students assurances about the privacy and safety of their personal information and the anonymity of their responses. I asked each

participant to provide me a pseudonym to assign them. Throughout the course of the narratives that will appear later in this document, the pseudonyms will prove to be an interesting and unexpected facet open for analysis and interpretation.

Description of Participants and Recruitment Strategies

For student participants, I gathered a sample of convenience and utilize students that I know for interviews. I will know the students from either having taught them or knowing them through a few different initiatives and organizations that I lead on campus. I lead Global Education at the faculty and staff level, and I also lead the student organization, Scholars of Global Distinction. I also lead Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion efforts on campus. Additionally, I have been recruiting for membership to start the Hispanic Student Association (HSA). I also serve as the college's liaison to the system office for Latino affairs, and in my role as Lead Instructor of Languages and Humanities, I lead our Spanish Language programs including the Community Spanish Interpreter program that is almost exclusively comprised of Latinx students. Lastly, I plan and organize all cultural events on campus, so I am the face and voice of at least one event a week that promotes diversity, inclusion, and the space to hear various voices. Students, particularly our Latinx students, seem to know based on word of mouth who I am and that I support them. However, my major focus on student participants will be on students that I know. Knowing the students will be helpful because we will not have to build a rapport of comfort or trust because we already have that in most cases. The reason that the participants will not unanimously have a prior relationship with me is that I am opening the sampling up for students to bring friends who meet the criteria to be interviewed (current Latinx student at the college). This snowball sampling will complete the number of remaining participant slots for a total of at least 15 participants. The process of utilizing snowball sampling will also allow for

some variety in the participants, which will likely result in all students not being known to me. Students will nominate their friends to be participants if they choose. I will offer the option to all participants. In the Pilot study, one of the five students was nominated by another participant. I had never met that student, but we quickly developed a good rapport, and like I feel about so many of our students, I am grateful to have met him and honored that he willingly shared his story with me. I would also like to have a representative group, so I will base the percentage of self-identified male and female students of the target 15 sample size on the college's population. Based on fall 2021 demographic data, there will be around 9 females and 6 males comprising the 15 participants. Non-binary students will not be excluded from participating. This goal of proportionate representation is simply a goal because I think cultural and societal gender roles could certainly influence the college-going experience, but since it merely a goal, no Latinx student should feel excluded—male, female, non-binary, or any person located elsewhere on the gender spectrum. The only criteria initially was to identify as Latinx, Latino/a, or Hispanic and be a student at the college. However, through preliminary findings in the Pilot study, I realized that the decision to only use current students eliminated some voices, so students who have been former students at the college will also be included in Phase I. Throughout the interviews the Borderlands Theory, borne of Gloria Anzaldúa's eponymous work, *The Borderlands* (la frontera), will be the lens through which the interviews are conducted. The Borderlands Theory offers explanation for a lack of belonging, but also a path to support transformation necessary for students to attain a sense of belonging and success at school, but most specifically our school.

Instrumentation

Phase I and the overall study are guided by the following research question pertaining to students: What do Latinx students, in the service area of Surry Community College, wish that

college access officials were aware of or understood about their unique experiences in general and those driven by cultural differences as they endeavor to attend college, which can be the intersection or crossroads of culture and an academic present and future? Individual interviews with students will begin as prepared open-ended questions and transcend into conversations rather than call and response interviews. At the core, I want to glean information about their experience getting to the educational level they are (college) and their feelings and worries about moving forward. Within the conversations, the hope is that the students already have a sense of trust with me, or that I can establish enough trust that students will willingly share their difficulties and concerns and ideas for how we, as a college, could have or can help them. Overall, the interviews will offer me the chance to listen. I will also be afforded the chance to offer any potential resources that we already know about that could mitigate some of their obstacles.

Pilot Study/Baseline Data Collection

I conducted a scaled down pilot study to see if I needed to make adjustments or seek information from additional sources. I was rushed to recruit and conduct the interviews, so I ended up with five participants versus the fifteen that I wanted initially. However, reducing the number of participants helped me see the differences in some responses based on the type of student, so as I interview more students, I need to ensure that I get a variety of types of Latinx students (traditional college aged students post high-school, college and career promise—previously known as dual enrolled students—high school and college, and early college—from one of our two affiliated early college high schools). Because I was pressed for time and concerned about accurately capturing data from students, I sought the counsel of my inquiry partners who offered their feedback about my idea to meet and interview the students on

Microsoft Teams. I went the route of virtual because scheduling offered more flexibility. I interviewed participants beginning at 7 PM on a Thursday and finished at 4 PM on a Saturday, with one Friday night at 10 PM slot. I wanted to be accommodating to my participants. I wanted them to feel comfortable. This level of comfort existed for four of the five participants because we have known each other for several years. However, I knew from the beginning that I would have some snowball sampling, I met one participant for the first time when we met online at the time of our interview on a Saturday afternoon. We chatted a little to establish a rapport, but we were quickly familiar and comfortable with one another. He understood that my goal is to make a positive change and as a leader in his community, he wanted to be part of driving that change. Ultimately, I wanted to use Microsoft Teams so I could have a recorded video and transcript. There could have been a negative tradeoff due to utilizing a virtual platform, but any loss in rapport or information from the participants was insignificant.

During the course of the semi-structured and in-depth interviews from Appendix B, the participants and I had excellent conversations. All of the questions were answered, plus more information was gathered. We met at an individually established time at my and their convenience outside of school hours on Microsoft Teams. All the participants in the Pilot understand the nature of research, so they were familiarized with the inquiry and my plans for recording and generating a transcript. They were more than agreeable to those parameters.

I have started manually conducting thematic, inductive coding from the responses (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). However, I am in preliminary analysis. I have been able to quickly ascertain that the students do face significant obstacles, but they do not always or even generally use that nomenclature or even have the attitude that they are enduring an undue hardship in the quest for their education. These students have faced racism. However, more often, they have

been dealt or overheard microaggressions. These microaggressions are most often experienced when students are taking high-level STEM oriented classes. Additionally, I had thought that asking students to provide me with their chosen pseudonym would simply be a moment of levity or even mostly innocuous, but the sharing of why they chose the name, or the cultural implications has been seemingly significant, and while the students do feel marginalized and very much in the margins of academia, they have impeccable resiliency and cultural pride.

Data Analysis

Initially, I planned to conduct thematic coding and started manually conducting said coding from the responses. In the preliminary analysis, I looked at the transcripts and found common words, phrases, and themes individually. Then, I looked at the other transcripts by using the control + f function to determine prevalence of the word and the context/scenario in which it was used. And the approach seemed to be the most logical for preliminary data, but as the study moved forward, I soon realized that the narratives were too powerful and too important to relegate them to their themes, which would have then been analyzed for alignment with the Borderlands Theory. The manual thematic coding also did not utilize the expertise and value of my inquiry partners.

Now my inquiry partners will be utilized more fully. I will include them in analyzing the interviews by determining the prevalence of major tenets of the Borderlands Theory. We will meet and complete an interview or two together for a model, and then I will pair the partners up and assign an interview or two to each pair. We will come back together and determine if we need any adjustments to Phase II. And we will start discussing the potential ideas for interventions to be implemented in Phase III.

Summary of Phase I

My intent was to transition from Phase I to Phase II, addressing a separate population, college personnel; however, I paused because I realized some important voices were missing. One of the most apparent findings was not about the data itself, but instead the realization that a valuable student perspective was absent. Those students who have moved from campus into a professional world or matriculated into a four-year institution will have valuable insight into their experiences either from a potentially deficit driven or comparative vantage point from their other institutional experiences. I was not willing to forgo the value in interviewing a population of alumni to maintain the original plans. Those former students may have a unique perspective because they have moved beyond our campus and may have a different perspective based on those additional experiences. Additionally, as previously alluded to, I need to seek more traditional (not also a high school student) Latinx students as their experiences are likely consistently different than those students who are also in high school. Phase I, while not ideal in scope or administration, has provided solid information to implement adjustments, move forward, and still gather the information to advance the inquiry. My plan moving forward is to conduct more student interviews and simultaneously administer a survey to gauge information about college personnel's knowledge level and beliefs about Latinx students and their experiences. Based on my career change, I did not seek that second round of Phase I interviews, but I hope to continue this research in the future and include more voices.

Phase II

Phase II of the study was conducted after data was collected from students. Faculty and staff across the college were asked to complete a survey (see Appendix C), which complements the data collected from the student perceptions in their interview phase. Initially the intent was to

gain a representative sample of surveys of college personnel—one from each division, I thought that data could be extremely limited. Since the survey is electronic and anonymous, I had the opportunity to disseminate the survey widely, so that is what occurred. However, I captured departmental affiliation. Having more respondents helps offer a fuller picture of the knowledge and attitudes of college personnel, which should lead to a more effective intervention. The survey will help us find out if employees understand the nuanced situation that many Latinx students face in order to attend higher education institutions, most specifically ours, and what role implicit bias playing in the opinions of the college personnel. The survey is an open-ended, electronic survey that will maintain the anonymity of the respondents. The survey was validated through my inquiry partners in determining whether it was fit for purpose and would yield the information that we were seeking. Additionally, this process resulted in the survey being shortened for a couple of reasons: brevity increases the likelihood of response and some of the questions bordered a bit on personal politics as opposed to understanding about our students. Obviously, the latter can and would influence student experience and belonging, but since the ultimate goal of this survey is data about what faculty understand about our students, it only made sense to eliminate some of the questions that could appear damning to respondents. Once data is collected from students and college personnel, we can identify obstacles for current and future students at Surry Community College, as well as ways to mitigate the barriers that exist. The bottom line in this quest is to find out ways that we can offer solutions to mitigate obstacles that present as barriers to students. And in the process, we can also learn of potential obstacles about which we may be unaware.

The purpose of this inquiry is to ascertain, assess, address, and alleviate as many obstacles as possible for Latinx students to attend and complete college, particularly at Surry

Community College. The most important desired outcome is a less encumbered path to higher education for Latinx students. Gathering information from the students themselves will, of course, be at the crux of the research, but the findings from Surry Community College personnel will also enable us to address any training needs that may be necessary regarding cultural and specific scenarios of Latinx students.

Inquiry Approach/Intervention

This phase will also be one of data gathering. A survey has been designed and validated for its construction and its fitness for purpose in order to gain information from faculty. The survey has a few intentions. It will assist in determining whether bias, unconscious or conscious is a factor on campus. Additionally, the survey will help determine what faculty and staff know about the lives of our Latinx students, which will provide answers to the research question. Through both of the previous findings, we can place faculty responses on the Bennett Scale to determine our level of cultural competence. Since Phase I should be completed in early spring semester of 2023, I will ensure this survey for personnel does not need any changes. Once determined, the survey will be disseminated in late March and April of 2023. The survey will be disseminated through campus in a couple of ways. I will send the survey out through department heads. This approach will ensure that all personnel have an opportunity to complete the survey. Additionally, we have an internal “portal” located on our internal system known as MyKnightLife (MKL), and I will seek permission to have the survey linked in that location as well. The survey is located as Appendix C in this document.

Summary of Phase II

Upon conclusion of Phase II, we will have the data from this phase and the previous to be able to utilize data analysis and determine an intervention to be implemented. It is too early to

speculate what the intervention will entail. And it is too early to draw any conclusions from the survey for Phase II because it has not been administered yet.

Phase III

Phase III is yet to be determined, but either concurrently or immediately after Phase III is implemented, we will also need to develop a tool to measure the efficacy of the intervention. While the intervention cannot be determined, there are multiple avenues that we can take. It seems pertinent that the intervention result in support for students, but that may also require some training and intervention for college personnel as well. Thus, it is likely that a multi-faceted intervention will follow.

Yosso's Cultural Wealth Model may provide the appropriate framework to capitalize on the assets that all parties have as opposed to focusing on the deficits that must be overcome (Locks, 2017). Garcia's research on "servingness" could also be an additional framework to explore interventions (Garcia et al., 2019). Additionally, organizational theory, cultural capital, and others are possibilities for examining and then developing an appropriate intervention.

Inquiry Design Rigor

Recording interviews does not ensure that the information that makes it to the page is rigorous and reliable, but it certainly indicates that the researcher intends to be ethical, capture information, and share it for what it is, not what they hope it to be—if anything. All aspects of my inquiry, design, instrumentation, and analysis can be easily digested and easily replicated—for this population or any other one. In fact, the approach could be used in other qualitative, quantitative, and comparative studies. While discussing the results of these findings, my intention is to provide thick description of the participants through narratives that will most likely be thematically organized, but one of the most important roles I have as a researcher is to

be willing to adapt and provide the data in the way that serves and values the stories that students have entrusted to me. Throughout this entire endeavor, I am guided by a two-fold promise to the participants, their culture, and myself: the data must remain reliable and to honor the participants' stories. To meet the expectations of reliability that have been established, I will likely request participants to partake in member checking to ensure their true and full experience has been captured.

Delimitations, Limitations, and Assumptions

Since my focus highlights the knowledge and experience of both faculty and staff and students, some of the limitations will be beliefs and views of those respondents. Many, and arguably most of the faculty and staff will be open to the information they gain, but others will maintain their privileged thinking. On May 24, 2021, one of our instructors at the college posted a meme on social media with a picture of a section of the Mexican border wall with people climbing over and a picture of Lori Loughlin and Felicity Huffman that read: "If you cheat getting into college, you can go to jail. If you cheat getting into America, you can go to college." While she is one of the prime examples of someone needing training and to gain understanding, there are many people who will share her attitude and perhaps even worse. My own biases of believing in and supporting the Latinx population can also be evident at times, which should not be an issue in regard to the focus of practice, but it could be an overall deterrent on campus. I also have a biased belief that people are unaware of the unique experience of Latinx students. However, collecting information and sharing it is the ultimate goal, so any of these shortcomings should not impact the research.

Entering the focus of practice, there are several truths that I assume. One such truth is that all students want to have the choice to attend higher education. I assume that students have

questions about attending institutions of higher education. I also assume that all students are not aware of opportunities afforded them. Additionally, I assume that students are fearful of governmental agencies, of which school is considered. Also, I assume that students want college employees to be knowledgeable and offer help—specifically culturally responsive help. And lastly, I assume that faculty and staff want to know more so they can do more.

Role of the Scholarly Practitioner

At the youngest of ages, I realized that my ability to connect with people was innate and would be a strength. Around the same time, a few weeks into kindergarten, I realized that I could speak-up and support others—not as a savior—as an ally. From the day I learned that my voice did not quiver when injustices were occurring, and it had a power that I did not really feel I had. I realized I wanted others to harness their power. Maybe it was through a connection, or maybe it was empathy, or maybe it was speaking out and standing up to the bully, but from that time, I have found myself in a situation as an advocate for those who needed one.

Academia was not my first career or my second, but everything in my previous careers led me to the place I am in this moment advocating for our Latinx students, providing culturally diverse programming for the entire campus, and teaching hundreds of students each year that words matter—their words matter, and they have power.

My work began with the Latinx community in a completely benign way. The details of that earlier mentioned kindergarten revelation happened while the class stood in line, pseudo single-file and waited for the restroom after lunch break. One of my classmates shared with those in line that she was adopted and much of the rest of the line started laughing and making fun of her situation. And I am not sure how I knew, but I knew the people laughing would not laugh at me, so with little thought, I announced I was adopted too. A few classmates quipped that I was

not. I assured them I was. As far as I knew, I was not adopted. A weeks later, my parents announced to me that I was adopted. For years, I thought I was being punished for lying, but I have never once regretted standing up for my classmate who needed me to. Being adopted did not make me part of the Latinx community, nor am I part of it biologically, but I do share brown skin and dark features enough that people do, on occasion, make assumptions and speak Spanish to me. However, the one commonality that I share with the Latinx community is that for more than 40 years, I have existed in spaces that I felt like I was in the margins and in la frontera. My goal has always been to help minimize or mitigate that feeling for others.

Throughout the years I have been in the classroom, I have learned from my Latinx students. They have shared their values, their dreams, their families' stories, their fears, their questions, and simply themselves. I thank them for helping me see them. I honor them and the parts of themselves that they have shared with me.

I know that change and leadership ultimately need to come from the Latinx community. My role is to help provide a foundation and facilitate an education with less barriers so Latinx students can become agents of change, policy makers, and ensure their voices have a "seat" at the proverbial table. In the end, this focus of practice plays a small part in helping create a system in which all voices are heard and valued.

I have been at Surry Community College since 2009. I began as an adjunct English Instructor and served in that role until fall of 2013 when I was hired as full-time English faculty. Over the course of the years since 2013, I have been fortunate enough to be granted roles with increasing responsibilities and leadership for several initiatives. I have been able to take a more formal role with the Latinx population on campus as the Lead Instructor of Languages and Humanities, chair of Global Education, chair of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and the system

office liaison for Latinx Affairs. Even if I do not know people on campus, they likely know who I am. And the Latinx population knows, as a whole, that I advocate for them. Some participants will be my students. Some will be my former students. But they know there are no penalties for not participating and no advantages for participating. We will simply have conversations that could have occurred organically anyway.

Summary

Throughout the determining the conceptional framework, design, methods, instrumentation, recruitment, interview design, interviews, survey design, and countless planning opportunities, the goal of this work, to help Latinx students attend and complete college with few barriers, has remained at the center and the key focus of everything. During these Phases, conversations, interviews, survey construction and administration, data collection and analysis, the students have remained the focus and the reason that we seek results.

Important Change in My Role

When I began this study, I never thought my role would be one that would remove this work from my actionable space. However, I accepted a role at a different community college, and I left Surry Community College at the end of August 2023. At this point, I decided not to gather research from the 1b phase as previously planned. I did continue to deploy the phase II survey, and I already had phase I research from current (at the time) Surry Community College Latinx students. While, there was a shift from my intentions, the data that was collected was sufficient to show where the college stands in the eyes of the students, applying Borderlands Theory to their responses, and there was sufficient response from college personnel to apply their responses on the Bennett Scale.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Throughout the process of this study, supporting Latinx students—both actual, current and future students—has been the goal. In order to ascertain the best ways to accomplish that goal of effective, culturally relevant support has been to talk to current students (at the time) and those who previously attended. Most of the previously attended are graduates, but not in all instances. Because the nature of the study is to understand how students have felt while attending the college, the study is predominantly qualitative, though there can be some quantitative results surmised from the data. The emphasis is on the experiences of the students, especially for Phase I.

For Phase II, the understanding and the cultural competence of the faculty, staff, and administrators also necessitates the focus of the findings to be qualitative. Ultimately, the findings helped indicate a position on the Bennett Scale for the school, and the data can be examined in more quantitative ways, but the goal was to determine the positioning on the Bennett scale, which helps determine the assets, deficiencies, and training needs for faculty, staff, and administrators so they may effectively support students in their academic pursuits.

The Focus of Practice

The focus of this inquiry is to ascertain, assess, address, and alleviate as many obstacles as possible for Latinx students to attend and complete college. From a logistical standpoint, many rural colleges require a strategic plan of growth that requires paying particular attention to different types of student populations. In some areas, and the service area of this college is one with an increasing Latinx population. Some colleges may benefit from targeting non-traditional aged students. We, unfortunately, have not engaged in focused recruiting. In small numbers, we have, however, engaged in isolated, individual, and small group recruiting in the community as a

sign of goodwill and an effort to convince others that the plan to engage the Latinx population is a good one and necessary for the health of the college. My belief has always been that presence is important. We are a community college, with an emphasis on community, so we show up and prove that we value the entire community. Beyond the goodwill, there are clear business and financial incentives based on the community college funding model and the Latinx student population's increasing share of the overall community population. However, I maintain the most important role of the community college is to provide for the community.

Focus of Practice Guiding Question(s)

This study is guided by the following questions:

1. What do Latinx students, in the Surry Community College service area, wish that college officials were aware of, or understood, about their unique experiences in general and those driven by cultural differences as they endeavor to attend college?
2. What do faculty, staff, and administrators at Surry Community College know about the experiences of Latinx students in our service area?
3. What interventions might support Latinx student needs at Surry Community College?
4. What effect will interventions have on Latinx students at Surry Community College?

Arguably, based on my change in employment, research or guiding questions three and four were not utilized and fulfilled as I had hoped, but the goal of finding and implementing an effective intervention never waned from my goals. This chapter includes the findings of the study, the methodology, relationship to the theories and concepts, as well as approaches to analyzing the results. During the course of this study, my employment changed, so my ability to implement changes and impact change lessened, but the work and information is necessary, so I moved forward. However, I did not seek participants for another iteration of Phase I with

students who had previously attended the college. While I did not talk to the students about their experiences, I do have students willing and prepared to discuss with me, another researcher, or a college administrator.

Participant Demographics

Participants were selected based on a simple criterion: self-identifying as a Latinx student enrolled at Surry Community College. Students were basically representative of the Latinx population on campus in terms of dual enrolled high school and college students, early college, and gender. The participants consisted of 3 males and 2 females. The students were a sample of convenience in that I had taught and been acquainted with all of them in a professional capacity, except for one student, who was a friend of one student.

During the initial round of interviews, it became seemingly apparent that the voice of students who had moved on from Surry Community College needed a voice too, so plans were made to include students who graduated (or not), transferred, entered the workforce, or a variety of other possibilities.

Pablo

Pablo is a Hispanic, traditional-aged (18-22), male college student who graduated from high school the previous year. He is the first person on one side of his family to attend college. He plans to study accounting at the community college and not transfer. Pablo works in the carport building industry, often working 30-hours from Thursday-Saturday or Sunday, sometimes travelling more than 5-hours away from home. He is bilingual.

Jose

Jose is a Hispanic male who is a graduating, dual enrolled high school and college student. He is a respondent who was introduced to me by another participant. He is the youngest of six siblings. Jose is bilingual.

Estrella

Estrella is a Hispanic female who is a graduating early college student who is the youngest of her siblings. She is bilingual.

Isabella

Isabella is a Hispanic female who is a graduating early college student who is an only child. She is bilingual.

Carmen

Carmen is a Hispanic female who is a graduating early college student. She is the youngest of two siblings. She is bilingual.

All names of participants/respondents have been changed for the purposes of anonymity. These students were the initial target group—current students (at the time), 18 years old or older. However, I soon realized that I also needed the perspective of students who had matriculated elsewhere after their experience at Surry Community College, or who had entered the workforce from the college. An additional round of Phase I participants was recruited, selected, and interviews planned in late 2023. While I was employed at Surry Community College, I interviewed five, representative students. After analyzing data from Phase I, there was a need to add more information. During Phase IB, I approached several potential participants who had previously been students at the college and had either entered the workforce or transferred to

senior institutions. That group consisted of five participants as well. However, my change in employment halted those interviews.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred at several different times as outlined by each phase in chapter three. Phase I initial interviews of students took place at the end of April 2022. Phase II, the Faculty/Staff/Administrator survey, was deployed in the early fall semester of 2023. The second round of student interviews were scheduled to take place in late November and early December of 2023. I will provide a condensed report to the site administrators highlighting findings and suggestions for next steps, which is Phase III. My ability to implement interventions due to my change in employment at the locale certainly became a guiding factor in the change of phases for the study.

Qualitative Data Collection – Semi-structured Interviews

In Phase I, in an effort to answer research question one, *What do Latinx students, in the Surry Community College service area, wish that college officials were aware of, or understood, about their unique experiences in general and those driven by cultural differences as they endeavor to attend college?* using the semi-structured interview/conversation method and focusing on the questions found in Appendix B, I conducted, recorded, and transcribed my time talking with each student participant. Each participant was captured using pseudonyms, and, perhaps, important to note is that all respondents chose their own pseudonym. In some cases, those choices reflect or complement some of the culturally significant ideas espoused in the study. Estrella and Jose's choices stand out as at least partially Rethinking Borders, one of the four major tenets of the Borderlands Theory being examined. The interviews were conducted via

Microsoft Teams, recorded, and transcribed. The videos have remained password protected and with double authentication security. Videos and transcripts are available only to me.

Qualitative Data Collection – Online Survey—Faculty/Staff/Administrators of the College

Research question 2 was addressed with the Phase II, survey (see Appendix C) for faculty, staff, and administrators, which was deployed toward the end of August 2023 for strategic reasons. The previous spring would have been too close to the end of the semester and would have or could have appeared as an undue burden on employees to complete. The same could have been the case earlier in the fall, so the survey was deployed about three weeks into the semester and reminders were sent periodically in an attempt to gain more responses. The survey was not deployed to everyone in the campus community, but the efforts were widespread (see Table 1). I emailed all departments, including the directors or administrators, and asked for their help in obtaining respondents. The participants (anonymous other than department, position, and demographic data) began completing the survey on August 31, 2023, and the final survey was completed on September 28, 2023, but most surveys were completed over the first two days of its deployment. The respondents totaled 15, with a mix of gender, faculty and staff, and demographically, the respondents were predominantly white, and no one who self-identified as an administrator completed the survey (see Table 1). The survey data was downloaded as an excel spreadsheet to better analyze the responses. The roles, departments, gender, and race were self-identified by the faculty and are captured in this table for ease of view. Based on the culture of the college, there are people in director roles and department chair roles that would be considered administrators in some organizations, but at this institution, they choose not to self-identify as administrators.

Table 1

Personnel Respondent Breakdown

Role	Department	Gender	Race
Faculty	Social Sciences	Male	White
Faculty	Business Technologies	Female	White
Staff	Business Office	Female	White
Faculty	Teaching (discipline not specified)	Female	White
Staff	Student Services (advising)	Female	White
Staff	Financial Aid	Female	White
Staff	Student Services	Female	White
Staff	Staff (department not specified)	Male	White
Faculty	Business-Digital Media	Female	White
Faculty	Science	Female	White
Faculty	English & Humanities	Female	White
Faculty	English	Male	White
Faculty	Science	Male	Black
Staff	Student Services	Female	White

Data Analysis

Phase I of data analysis began in March of 2023 with discussions with inquiry partners about their role in listening to recordings of the respondents and identifying the four major tenets that I specified within the interviews: “Othering,” Borders, Identity, and Rethinking Borders (see Figure 2). Inquiry partners understood the process and the reasoning behind both the identification of the major tenets and their roles, but in the months that passed, those inquiry partners did not have time to complete their requested roles. A decision was made to wait until early fall 2023, but by that time, I had accepted a new position at a different school on September 1. At that time, the focus of the inquiry remained the same, and the use of qualitative data was unchanged, but my sphere of influence and ability to implement the necessary interventions resulting from the findings was greatly reduced. However, I did leave the college on good terms, and I shifted the intervention to a report of findings and suggestions for improving the campus climate.

Phase II analysis began in October of 2023 once I was certain that all faculty, staff, and administrators who were willing had completed the survey. The analysis of the employees’ responses to the survey was also qualitative in that I used their own words to ascertain where each would fall on the Bennett Scale. The overall placement of individuals on the scale indicates the campus climate for Latinx students and how open and aware employees are of the students’ unique situations precipitated by their culture (see Figures 4 and 5). Additionally, I looked at staff placement versus faculty placement, and unfortunately no administrators completed the survey, so I was unable to look at the administration’s placement on the Bennett Scale.

There were numerous ways to look at the data, but the analysis needed to be qualitative because the voices of the students are paramount to this inquiry. Also, the voices and opinions of

employees interacting with these students are equally important because they are the people who will interact with the students and impact the students' feelings of belonging. The Borderlands Theory focuses on the idea of individuals being "othered," and the impact that it can have on sense of belonging. Since we know that sense of belonging is important to success, then it makes sense to determine how the college is doing and what could be improved for the students and the college as a whole.

The Bennett Scale and his theory of Cultural Competence provide the framework to identify the positionality as it pertains to beliefs of employees. Because the scale is a continuum, it brings clarity to where the personnel are and what steps need to be taken to move the scale to great cultural competence. Overall, this analysis should help measure where the college is, and where it needs to move to fully support the Latinx students.

The Bennett Scale

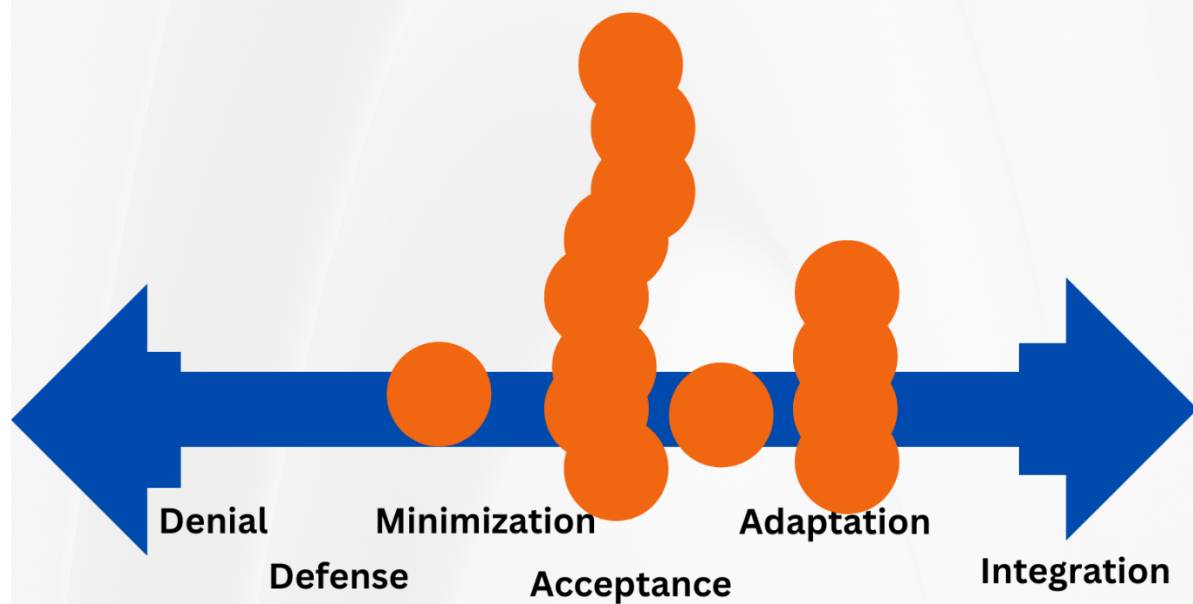


15 Faculty and Staff Respondents

Note. (Bennett, 2017; Bennett, 2004; Bennett, 1986).

Figure 4. Bennett's Scale with respondents' placement on the scale.

The Bennett Scale with Respondents' Position on the Scale*



*See Table 1 for explanation of placement

Figure 5 Bennett Scale with respondents' position on the scale.

Qualitative Data Analysis of Phase I

Through working with my dissertation committee, I determined it was imperative to focus in on some tenets of Anzaldua's Borderlands Theory when analyzing the student voices. I selected four major tenets, but there certainly could be arguments for other tenets to be included. Based on my experience with Latinx students, I chose "Othering," Borders, Identity, and Rethinking Borders as the four major tenets of the theory, or at least the four major tenets best suited for this inquiry. I specifically identified each as:

"Othering"—Based on Queer and Feminist Theory that questions the predominant belief of naming all things in the binary.

Borders—Questioning borders—geographical, linguistic, political and metaphorical

Identity—Reaching a level of peace and pride about one's identity.

Rethinking Borders—Rejecting borders—literal and figurative that provide constraints.

Understanding each of these tenets and if the student respondents relate to them in the interview/conversation helps answer Research Question 1: What do Latinx students, in the Surry Community College service area, wish that college officials were aware of, or understood, about their unique experiences in general and those driven by cultural differences as they endeavor to attend college?

"Othering"

There were several instances of "othering" that was clearly identified. For example, Estrella responded that she and Isabella are the only two girls and people of color in their high-level math classes. Their instructors call them their girls, and they feel close to a couple of math instructors and a chemistry instructor, but that does not mean that they do not feel othered by those instructors. Their resilience is in full effect in the interview. They are "othered" by people

in positions of power, even those they highly respect and they believe respect them, and because they believe there is mutual respect, they are willing to make excuses for people who “other” them or do not help them remove some of the constraints that exist in their pursuit of education.

In the case of Estrella, upon analyzing her interview, there were instances of othering, but it also seemed as if the tenet of identity had not been fully realized and she did not have pride or self-acceptance in herself because she was adamant that she did not want to live with a White roommate when she transferred to the senior institution. I had not anticipated those feelings, nor had I expected a conversation around it. I asked if she would feel differently if she met someone who respected her culture and was open. She responded if they are “open to the idea to see me for who I am, and if they're OK with it and I'm still OK with it, I'd be down for them to understand that and let myself open up to them and express my culture and let them [. . .] get some sort of understanding. But at the end of the day, they don't know what it feels like because they never [have] to live it.” While Estrella is working to overcome her borders and constraints, she still expresses many exist as barriers, such as: financial aid, her parents’ language skills, her parents’ documentation status, and her favorite teacher complaining about and “reporting the loud Mexicans at the gym.”

Because Estrella does not seem to feel comfortable in her identity, it is important to ask what, if any impact, that her interaction of being “othered” has on her inability to embrace her identity and to rethink borders.

Isabella’s interview was analyzed using the same four major tenets. One aspect that I did not initially notice in Estrella’s interview was the aspect of loneliness and isolation. However, both Estrella and Isabella seemed to be on an island alone when it came to knowledge of the college application and financial aid process. Their parents were unable to help because they did

not have the knowledge to help, and Isabella said with “all that terminology, I wouldn’t be able to completely translate [or interpret] it.” Isabella also talked about the pressure she feels to work hard. She has witnessed her parents work hard and the expectation has been that she would also work hard. She does think she handles the pressure now that she knows what she wants to do for school and career. Because at the time of the interview, she was a graduating early college and community college student, I specifically asked whether she identified more as an early college high school student or a community college student. She expressed that she felt more like a college student. In the case of Isabella, she seems to be a little more comfortable with her identity, and that assertion comes from the fact that she spends less time talking about it. An additional aspect that Isabella discussed while we were talking was her willingness and the willingness of others in her community to help. Both she and Estrella tutored typical college students, but they also volunteered to help tutor English Language Learners in the ESL program. Students in that program do not often have contact with other college students, but these students felt it was important to help these students learn English, most of whom shared their culture.

Identity and Rethinking Borders

Carmen’s interview was by far the longest of all of the respondents (see Figure 6). She and I are closer than the other respondents are, and I knew more about her journey than the others, so her interview is noticeably longer, but all of the interviews except for one were in the half hour to hour range.

Carmen shared that in the year she had been applying to four-year schools that she had to really look at herself and decide which places she should or could reach for in terms of academics and acceptance. She viewed herself as being in a place of privilege because she knew that her instructors believed she could attend any school she wanted. Carmen said, “it’s not

always that you're in a place like, I feel very privileged that I had people like my teacher, Miss Wright, that believed in me or when I asked for a recommendation to, you know, these top Ivy League schools that I didn't feel embarrassed to ask her or ask you.” She went on to offer, “But I know so many other people do feel that embarrassment. And it's because, we are influenced to not even have that confidence in ourselves or to even try to reach these places. And I think that is something unspoken that goes a very long way of impacting students. I think it's something called like the locus of control. It's like the perceptions that other people have of you can determine not only how you view yourself, but also impact how you do act or like the places you do reach, and I think that's something that has really impacted other early college students who honestly don't [have] self-confidence.” Throughout this interview, I could see pride, shock, self-doubt, guilt, and varying levels of self-confidence. Carmen was accepted to several Ivy League schools (Harvard and Columbia) and Duke and Stanford. She was offered a full-ride to each school, but she ultimately decided on a prestigious scholarship from UNC-Chapel Hill that would allow her to be in a cohort and do a lot of amazing things. Toward the end of this part of our conversation, I could see the guilt rising into a wave because she wondered how many other students could have been accepted to and attended an Ivy League school if they felt like they had support. Carmen said, “I feel like others could have gotten into these institutions too but didn't just because they didn't even think that they could get in and that was directly impacted by how others perceived them, especially those authority figures like teachers, principals, and administrators that we look up to that we think know better than us.”

Estrella	Isabella	Carmen	Pablo	Jose
48:43	30:46	56:19	17:45	49:29
43-page transcript	32-page transcript	36-page transcript	16-page transcript	38-page transcript

Figure 6. Specific length information for each recording.

In Carmen's interview, there is a measure of "othering," and there are borders and other constraints, but she has been able to harness her identity into one of pride, and she truly is rethinking borders—not necessarily her own, but those of people in power around her and those she may identify as less privileged because they do not have the advocates that she has been able to maintain.

In Jose's interview, it was the first time that we were meeting, but we quickly developed a level of comfort with each other. He was introduced to me by Carmen. The conversation with Jose, even though he was not an early college student, but instead a dually enrolled high school and college student, his process and path to funding his college education was quite similar to the early college students. He found FAFSA cumbersome and was grateful for the help he received in filling it out, and he, like many Latinx students, was faced with RDS determining him to be an out of state student, which he was not. The out of state indication requires additional steps from him—such as collecting utility bills from his family to prove residency. I asked him if there was any point that he thought the whole process for attending a four-year college was too much trouble and he wanted to give-up. Jose said, "Yeah, there have been times where I was thinking, you know, it's a lot of trouble and I'm not even sure that I'll be able to go to college because of my background and my family's situation. So, there were various points where I kind of just wanted to be like, I can just go straight into work after high school." Jose, as most of the respondents, reported a strong support system—of not just family—but of friends, teachers, and mentors. Jose offered: "But I had, like I said, a great support system such as my friends that were, you know, I saw how hard they were working and that motivated me to keep working and keep going. And then here I am now. In a few months I'll be in Raleigh attending the university."

One significant section of the interview was one in which Jose discusses his transformation from shame toward his culture to one of pride—the pride that comes with accepting one’s identity. He said, “I remember some of the first times where I began noting that I was different and how much I didn't like being different. I started looking at my classmates who had nicer clothes, nicer shoes. They just always had all these nice things. And I have older brothers and I've six siblings, so you know, we couldn't really afford to keep getting me and all these new things. So, I had a lot of hand me downs and that, I think, sort of started nurturing self-hate because I was insecure about the things that I had. And I struggled a lot. I struggled with that through middle school and all the way up until I'd say my junior year of high school.” Jose went on to expand, “I sort of had an idea of Hispanics being like ghetto, and not as studious as white kids because in my honors classes and stuff when I would look around, I would see maybe three or four other Hispanic students, and then the rest of my class would be white. And then whenever I would be around Hispanic students, they were talking about how much they didn't care about their classes . . .”

Jose felt quite “othered,” but some of that othering was clearly internalized. At the time of the interview, Jose had only the year before started feeling a sense of pride. He said, “it took me a lot to get comfortable with my culture and become proud of it. And then whenever I got over that hurdle, I started embracing it, and I started realizing that it really is something special to be a part of this culture and you know have such, I guess such a wide array of things. And you know, now that I look back on it, I'm kind of ashamed of what I used to be and the way I used to think.”

It was the culture itself, well the people in the culture that helped Jose find his place in his culture: “I’ve become surrounded with such an amazing group of Hispanic students, Carmen, Estrella and they really encouraged me and I think whenever I was able to be around them I became more aware of my culture, and I take pride in it. [. . .] I want to be what Carmen was for me; she is one of my big role models. Just to see everything that she’s done, and I would love to be that for other students who probably think, Oh, Hispanics can’t go to college and all that other stuff. So that’s probably the biggest impact my culture has on me. It’s probably one of my biggest motivators. I want to show others that. You’re Hispanic and you can go to college, so you can chase your dreams.” While I did not know Jose prior to our interview, I am grateful to have met him and been a witness to his story of transformation. With Jose, the choice of his pseudonym was a powerful reminder of his growth from the person who did not like himself only a year before, and in the moment that he chose his pseudonym, he chose, perhaps, the most Hispanic name he could have chosen.

Estrella’s choice of name should also be noted. There is a certain level of self-confidence that one must have to call herself “Star.” While, based on her responses, she seems to be less comfortable in her identity, but knowing her, that would not be my assessment.

Identity

Pablo is the final student respondent. He was a typical-aged college student who had graduated from high school the previous spring at the time of the interview. This student seemed to have a completely perfect experience with the college, but he did acknowledge the pressure he feels to do well in school, and he would have preferred that FERPA guidelines not have been maintained because his mother wanted to be part of his college class decision process, and he was fine for her to be. His plan was to complete a two-year accounting degree, and he did not

plan to transfer to a four-year school. One of the potential constraints of his education is pressure that he feels from his culture; however, he plans to use that pressure as motivation. Pablo said: “For me, I feel pressured because from my mom's side, we have a couple college students. But from my dad, I'm the first one to have any type of college experience. So, I feel pressured from both.” Cultural pressure seems to be the only way in which Pablo is othered, and he seems to have a strong sense of self. That sense of self could come from his close-knit friend group—kids he went to elementary school through high school and then college with. They all identify as Mexican and tend to take classes together. Pablo may have been more talkative if his friends had been interviewed with him. He did mention several campus people who have helped him, including his advisor, who also happens to be the Director of Student Success and Academic Advising.

Additionally, a measure of identity and how it influences the way the respondents navigate their educational experience is present. In the case of Estrella, while she seems more concerned with her identity and how others would not accept her, that is still a tenet of Borderlands Theory. The goal would be for her to be confident and comfortable in her identity, so she would not feel as if she needed her roommate to be from her Latinx background at her Predominantly White Institution (transfer college). She has been able to take all classes with Isabella, and they have been able to be each other's support for the past four-years.

Based on the results from the interviews, these Latinx students seem to feel as if they reside on the borders. They are othered from some people in their community because their peers are not always as dedicated to pursuing academics as they are. They are othered by faculty and staff based on the assumptions that students feel that are made about them and their abilities. Additionally, Latinx students are often othered by themselves and the pressure they place on

themselves, often spearheaded by a deep sense of obligation to their family's sacrifices to benefit them. However, students, in general point to support and assistance they have been given, but it is evident through their responses that they realize not everyone around them is in support of them.

Qualitative Data Analysis of Phase II

After gaining additional understanding of the student experiences, a faculty, staff, and administrator survey was deployed in an effort to understand the level of knowledge and understanding that employees have of the Latinx student experience. An email was sent to all members of two on campus committees (Global Education Advisory Committee and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion—about 35 people), all department chairs (with a request for them to share with their teams—emailed to about 10 more people who could have shared with an undetermined amount of people), and all administrators beginning at the Senior Vice President level down, at the end of August 2023. The timing was strategic in that the first couple of weeks of school chaos should have diminished and the hectic nature that builds with the semester should be manageable at that point. I requested anonymous participation and explained my goals, which included a great number of respondents. I did not open the survey up to part-time employees. I am well-aware that part-time employees are invaluable on campuses, but I wanted to hold as many aspects as constant as possible. There were 15 respondents comprising both faculty and staff. There were no administrators who completed the survey. The mix of faculty and staff as well as areas they are from is relatively representation, but a larger number of participants was expected and desired.

The Bennett Scale (see Figure 4) moves from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism and the more one, or an organization moves toward ethnorelativism, the closer they move to integration

of multiple cultures and various viewpoints in which to see the world and issues. Due to the somewhat representative sample, these placements are likely accurate or within the standard deviation, but with a more widespread completion of the survey, we would be closer to defense or minimization than clearly in the acceptance stage (see Table 2 for descriptions). I simply cannot know what those who did not see fit or a purpose to complete the survey would have marked, but in Chapter 5, I will offer some evidence for a placement left of center on the scale and not quite to the center (acceptance). In the end, I can only take away the information

Table 2

Bennett Scale Description

Stage	Characteristics/Descriptions
Denial	Cultural differences do not exist.
Defense	Cultural differences exist, but they should—zero-sum, “us vs. them.”
Minimization	Cultural differences exist, but if they are ignored, they may go away.
Acceptance	Cultural differences are acknowledged.
Adaptation	Cultural differences exist, and they are embraced.
Integration	Cultural differences exist, and one incorporates those differences into their own life—people become multicultural.

Note. (Bennett, 2017; Bennett, 2004; Bennett, 1986).

provided, so the number of respondents whose answers corresponded with the characteristics of each level were identified and yield a sum equaling 15.

One respondent offered: “I feel they [Latinx students] are at a disadvantage because we do not have a huge variety of people that work here. That may be intimidating to them. I do feel we are great about helping them once they are here - but just getting them here may be hard.” This employee identifies as staff within the business office. Based on that role, they do have minimal direct contact with the student population, but they would handle third-party payor requests, so their interaction with Latinx students would be greater than their interaction with non-Latinx students. This response seems in a favorable position because the respondent acknowledges there are some barriers—lack of people who they can identify with—but overall, they see a level of support of Latinx students. So, there is acknowledgement of differences and barriers, but an overall positive feeling about where the school is in support. It is important to note that this individual also mentions in other responses that her interaction with students is limited. While most respondents fall within the acceptance category on the Bennett Scale, there is also notable denial that can be derived from some responses. For example, “I feel the impact is likely less today than it was say 20 years or so ago. Today, there is [are] so many more Hispanic students that they likely feel more comfortable in their surroundings. In years past, the number of Hispanic students were [was] much lower. Hispanics have adapted well and I have had so many great experiences with students in the 11 years or so I have been at Surry.” This staff member seems unaware that just because time passes and more Latinx students are on campus that the support being provided to them increases, and while, I am glad that his experiences have been positive, the question that they were asked to address was: “How or in what ways do you think being Hispanic impacts one’s experience as a student?” There is a measure of defense or even

denial in the response. Though, conversely, the respondent does seem potentially open to learning about the Latinx student experience. The roughly 7% of employees who responded seem at least primed for discussion and learning.

Results

Through analyzing the data of both the student interviews and the faculty and staff survey, I am able to codify some answers to the research questions, beginning with Research Question 1: What do Latinx students, in the Surry Community College service area, wish that college officials were aware of, or understood, about their unique experiences in general and those driven by cultural differences as they endeavor to attend college? Research Question 2 can also be answered utilizing data, but unfortunately that data cannot be used as uniformly because of the low response rate. However, using the data that exists, I will answer the question of What do faculty, staff, and administrators at Surry Community College know about the experiences of Latinx students in our service area? (see Figure 5)

Analysis of Research Question #1

What do Latinx students, in the Surry Community College service area, wish that college officials were aware of, or understood, about their unique experiences in general and those driven by cultural differences as they endeavor to attend college? The students did not always explicitly state information that they wished college personnel knew about their experiences and culture, but there were several common themes in the interviews that would be beneficial for people supporting the students to know. From the students themselves, they know that people see them as hardworking, but they are less sure that people see them as academically gifted, or even academically competent.

Family involvement is important to Latinx students, but there are barriers to that involvement. Latinx students have often served as interpreters or translators for their families for most of their lives. Students need family support, but the education system is an unknown entity to the family and the student and with language and sometimes educational deficits within the family, there is limited support and advocacy for the students.

The language barriers can likely be mitigated, but the barriers do not end there. Students point out those barriers are exacerbated by the lack of culturally centered support. It is one thing to tell someone to apply to college, apply for scholarships, and to submit FAFSA, but it is another thing entirely to walk through the process with the students. Latinx students often have barriers in submitting some of those applications that make it difficult to navigate. Specifically, Estrella points to the FAFSA nights and even Spanish FAFSA nights that are not enough. She remarks about the advice for writing her scholarship essays:

They were like you have to make it unique. You gotta make it your own story.

And that's literally it. That's all they say. I'm just like, what this is this isn't enough!" When asked if she thought a workshop focused toward Latinx students would be helpful, she said: "Oh yeah, that'd be amazing, especially if it's like students who have already gone through the process, and they can share experiences with them and maybe share their essays if they're not too personal.

That's what my one of my high school English teachers did. She emailed me two days ago. She asked me to send my essays and list of activities.

From Estrella's comments, we can ascertain that many Latinx students want to be helped by people who have shared experiences with them, and they want to help others once they know the way. For example, Estrella offered the suggestion of "Maybe a support group every month or

something to check up on each other. I think that would be really nice.” She goes on to say that “it could be in school or outside of school provide a little outlet to the stress and to have fun.” Jose also points to Connection with and support for and from those who share a cultural identity is a common theme in the interviews.

Analysis of Research Question #2

What do faculty, staff, and administrators at Surry Community College know about the experiences of Latinx students in our service area? College personnel may not have been captured widely enough in the survey to truly determine what everyone knows about the Latinx experience/s. Overwhelmingly, respondents pointed to language issues on the part of students and even themselves—general communication issues and language as a barrier to learning. One respondent even pointed out that native Spanish speakers think in Spanish and then translate to English to complete work and how exhausting and cumbersome it must be.

However, low participation by personnel—faculty, staff, and administrators—can be an example of the culture of the organization. Employees have been part of a couple of reduction in force situations and have been urged to work in a lean manner to still produce the same results that were accomplished with many additional employees. This type of culture can be overwhelming, and one more request—even completing a simple anonymous survey can seem too daunting. Additionally, one more request about a topic that someone sees little value in can also impact this less than ideal response rate.

Respondents were aware of financial burdens and legal issues related to their documentation status or that of their family that Latinx students often face, and they seemed almost helpless at their knowledge level. Resources to remove these systemic barriers exist, but

they are limited. More access to information could help provide personnel with more resources and more support.

Analysis of Research Questions #3 and #4

What interventions might support Latinx student needs at Surry Community College? What effect will interventions have on Latinx students at Surry Community College? These questions remain important, and I will provide a report with suggestions to the college with ways to measure the impact of the interventions, but since I am not employed at the college, I will not be able to help ensure any intervention or assessment of said intervention (please see Appendix E).

Overall, the findings and recommendations suggest that Surry Community College has a culture that indicates caring is at the core, even if understanding is not completely achieved. Latinx students feel more supported at the college than at their high schools, which can make the college seem more advanced than perhaps it is, but it is always favorable to be considered more supportive.

Summary

Through the data collection, data analysis, and writing, the value of the study has remained clear, but the implementation of the information less clear. It is imperative that the college not lose sight of the changing demographics and accept that the demographic trends of decreasing white populations and increasing Latinx populations will continue. The sooner the college accepts and embraces the trends, the sooner it can reap the rewards of even more positive Latinx enrollment trends.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to help students attain success and overcome barriers, we must truly understand the barriers that students encounter. We learn about their barriers from listening to their stories, which is at the core of this study, but there is also literature that documents some of the barriers as well. These findings certainly support the personal experiences that I have witnessed and have been told from the students. There is no vindication in students feeling the way I assumed they would, nor in the work that needs to be undertaken by the college.

The focus of this inquiry was to ascertain, assess, address, and alleviate as many obstacles as possible for Latinx students to attend and complete college. The study was a qualitative study designed to capture the experiences of Latinx students and view their experiences through four major tenets of the Borderlands Theory (Anzaldua, 1987) via semi-structured interviews/conversations. Acknowledging that to make an environment better for students, that faculty, staff, and administrators often must do work to impact change. Bennett's Scale of Cultural Competence was used to measure the climate on campus and learn what faculty, staff, and administrators wish that they knew to support Latinx students via anonymous survey.

Throughout this chapter, the research methods, participants, and study questions will come into clear context, and the steps to gain information to mitigate barriers for Latinx students will become more obvious.

This study was guided by the following questions:

1. What do Latinx students, in the Surry Community College service area, wish that college officials were aware of, or understood, about their unique experiences in general and those driven by cultural differences as they endeavor to attend college?

This juncture of understanding or lack thereof is often the intersection or crossroads of culture and an academic present and future for Latinx students. When students are driven by cultural values, as most Latinx students are (Hobbs, 2020), it is important that the college community understands that this group, and other minoritized groups, for that matter, are not motivated only by success, potential wealth, or the sense of accomplishment that many non-historically minoritized groups may be. Their motivation is much larger in scope. Their motivation is the generations of poverty, the decades of violence and struggle, lifetimes of sacrifice. Their motivation is the ability to offer repayment for an opportunity. Borderlands Theory provides a theoretical and conceptual framework for examining the unique position that Latinx students are in as they navigate higher education. Borderlands is a crucial feminist theoretical interdisciplinary concept. The focus of the theory is on “marginalized identities.” Anzaldúa “conceptualized a space of belonging defined by the border itself, a painful physical space ‘where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds’ (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 25; Borderlands: A feminist concept, n.d.). Additionally, the space transcends the literal and physical border to the concept of the space between.

2. What do faculty, staff, and administrators at Surry Community College know about the experiences of Latinx students in our service area?

This question helps to establish the gap between faculty, staff, and administrator knowledge and student needs. It is important to ascertain what the people interacting with students or those making decisions for students know about the unique experiences of said students, specifically the Latinx students who do not share the same culture or cultural values. People are hesitant to admit bias because we do not appreciate facing our own flaws. Because of

this factor, determining the role of bias will be difficult, but a concerted effort to gain results in this arena must be put forth.

3. What interventions might support Latinx student needs at Surry Community College?

Answering these guiding questions and others that may arise during conversations will help determine a helpful intervention so we can successfully mitigate some barriers to education for Latinx students. In consultation with the literature (Anzaldúa, 1987; Bennett, 2017; Bennett, 2004; Bennett, 1986) and inquiry partners and as informed by data collected in Phases I and II, for Phase III of my inquiry, I will design an intervention to improve employee practices in their interactions with Latinx students. There may also be an intervention implemented to directly impact student access, experience, and completion. I will present a professional development intervention to address manageable barriers for students and assist college personnel in increased knowledge about the Latinx student experience and ways to help students mitigate barriers.

4. What effect will interventions have on Latinx students at Surry Community College?

Time permitting, I will implement a future intervention and include results in this Focus of Practice. Borderlands provides a lens to determine how students feel about their place in the campus community (Anzaldúa, 1987).

Phase I of the study was conducted in spring of 2022 in the form of student interviews taking place and being recorded on Microsoft Teams. Participants agreed to the manner in which the interviews took place. I used online meetings because they were easier to schedule, and so I could record and re-watch the videos and have the transcription completed for me.

Phase II of the study was developed based on information from the students' interviews and deployed in the early fall semester of 2023. The survey was offered to all full-time faculty, staff, and administrators. Phase II of the study was indeed conducted after data was collected

from students. Faculty and staff across the college were asked to complete a survey (see Appendix C), which complements the data collected from the student perceptions in their interview phase. Initially the intent was to gain a representative sample of surveys of college personnel—one from each division, I thought that data could be extremely limited. Since the survey is electronic and anonymous, I had the opportunity to disseminate the survey widely. I also captured departmental affiliation.

Data Analysis

The study sought to answer research questions that overall, help indicate the climate on campus for Latinx students and how we can improve that, which will improve enrollment and completion. Specifically, research questions 1 and 2 were used to guide the study. Research Question 1: What do Latinx students, in the Surry Community College service area, wish that college officials were aware of, or understood, about their unique experiences in general and those driven by cultural differences as they endeavor to attend college?

The results indicate that students do encounter barriers and are not always certain who can help, but one interesting aspect that is prevalent, is that students want to use what knowledge they gain to help others who will follow in their situations. Students also would like to have people who look like them on campus in addition to the allies that they know exist. Additionally, students are hard working. They know it is a stereotype, but they consider it to be mostly true because they truly feel the pressure and obligation to work hard because they know so many ancestors sacrificed for their opportunity. Also, students do not want people to make assumptions about their academic limitations. At a very minimum, students find their experience at the college to be acceptable, but they are quite gracious in their assessment. They tend to allow people to say hurtful things or do hurtful things and not hold it against them and chalk the

misstep up to ignorance. These transgressions are often in the form of microaggressions and often less noticeable to the perpetrators. The covertness of microaggressions does not make them less harmful.

Research Question 2: What do faculty, staff, and administrators at Surry Community College know about the experiences of Latinx students in our service area?

With the faculty, staff, and administrator survey, the participation was lacking. The total number was not the issue, but the lack of variety in departments who completed and the absence of any administrators completing the survey could have significant implications for the overall climate of the college and for the willingness to make changes in said environment for the benefit of the students.

Summary of the Findings

Findings from the student interviews certainly indicate that Latinx students experience “othering,” borders, issues of identity, and rethinking borders. And while they are treated in ways that are at a minimum, microaggressions, they are forgiving because they do believe that the professor who complains about the loud Mexicans at the gym is the same person who identifies a couple of the respondents as her “girls” in a tone of pride. It does not occur to this professor that somewhere, someone may be complaining about her “girls” when they are laughing and speaking Spanish with each other—just being her “girls.”

As for the faculty and staff survey respondents, they were open to learning, even if they were a bit fixated on language barriers and seemed oblivious to others. The one response that minimized the situation that many Latinx students face, while not exactly where we would like to see him on the Bennett Scale, the fact that he completed the survey means he is invested enough to weigh in and possibly open enough to hear another perspective. Whereas, the hundreds of

personnel and administrators who did not participate, they are possibly as far to the left on the scale as in denial. There are questions about whether the possible personnel respondents did not see the value in the study, so they did not respond. Or were there other factors that served as reasons for their lack of participation? For the students who are studying at the community college, I hope there were other factors that prevented responses from a wider audience and not a belief that the study was without merit.

The most concerning finding is that not only was the response rate around 7%, but also no one who identified as an administrator completed the survey. So, these deficits in the results may have more of an indication on the climate at the college than responses the responses that were actually received.

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings of the research study on barriers to Latinx students attending college are directly (and some tangentially) related to previous research studies discussed in Chapter 2.

Research Question 1: What do Latinx students, in the Surry Community College service area, wish that college officials were aware of, or understood, about their unique experiences in general and those driven by cultural differences as they endeavor to attend college?

Theme 1—Barriers, students want to be understood. They want the people who teach and support them to know they have barriers without having to state what they are. Pressures placed on students due to culture and family responsibilities can also be a barrier.

Theme 2—Identity, students want to be able to be themselves, to speak Spanish with one another, to know and see people who have navigated a similar difficult journey.

Research Question 2: What do faculty, staff, and administrators at Surry Community College know about the experiences of Latinx students in our service area?

Theme 1—Barriers—financial and language (culture could be used interchangeably)
barriers stood out to almost all respondents.

Theme 2—Hardworking—respondents noticed a culture difference of the effort Latinx students seem to put forth at school.

Barriers exist for both students and personnel. These barriers are actual and perceived, but they are barriers regardless. Imposter syndrome manifests to the students from what they believe that their faculty believe about them, and some faculty perceive language to be an issue for Latinx students. This language barrier can create a divide that furthers the idea of imposter syndrome, and it can impact students' self-worth and overall self-confidence (Cobb, 2018, p. 96; Manzano-Sanchez et al., 2019).

Connection to Theoretical Framework

Barriers are borders. Arguably, the words could replace each other in most contexts. In this specific context, they are interchangeable. Identity is important; forming an identity that will stand up to imposter syndrome is also important. Both concepts are steeped in Borderlands Theory and indicate the theoretical framework is a favorable one to explore the circumstances of Latinx students, especially as they navigate higher education system of the United States.

Additionally, students can feel empowered by this framework. They can see themselves and their experiences. Representation matters. For students to see someone who looks and feels as they do should not and cannot be minimized. Self-acceptance and self-advocacy are the ultimate goals of the framework for students, and arguably, those are two of life's most important areas of self-engagement—or of simply SELF. Latinx students can witness themselves in the borders—literal and proverbial—as Anzaldua catalogs in her writing, and they can

imagine and envision the borders as a place of worth and dignity—not just because they are there, but because of the others who have been in the borderlands prior to them and with them.

In one of Anzaldúa's essays "How to Tame a Wild Tongue," the borderlands of language as culture are examined. She captures the connection that culture has to language and how people fight to keep their culture. In that particular essay, the dentist invades her mouth with wads of cotton and metal drills, but he is met with tongue, all muscle and taste buds, and he declares that he's "never seen anything as strong or as stubborn" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 75). Anzaldúa's description of this strength mirrors the strength of the ties to culture that Latinx students have, though varying degrees of connection. The culture, like the tongue, cannot and should not be tamed. It is powerful and these students will fight for it to survive. Supporting students as they acknowledge and showcase their roots can increase the connection between the school and the students and only strengthen the relationships between the two.

Because culture is at the heart of the matter in terms of student access and success, the Bennett Scale is a viable tool to measure cultural competency based on a few questions intended to gauge faculty and staff awareness, interest in, and overall openness to cultural competence. While this scale, and frankly most scales, are open to interpretation and an inherent margin of error based on human judgement, this specific scale allows for those margins of error to be intact and still provides a similar set of conclusions that are likely are not skewed. Using additional scales to measure cultural competence would be an ideal approach, so we could truly gauge the efficaciousness of the Bennett Scale and these findings.

Limitations/Delimitations of the Study

Although I was able to collect data to analyze and provide responses to the research questions, limitations and delimitations of the study exist. Limitations can be noted in the nature

of the interviews. Being recorded or being on camera could have an impact on responses. Being unable to have privacy to discuss the topic could be a limitation. Additionally, respondents could have tamed answers for me since I do not share their culture. There are also limitations to the faculty, staff, and administrators survey. Firstly, the significant limitation is the absence of data from one of those three groups. Additionally, the responses are from employees concentrated in about three departments. The breadth of the responses is not as representative of the college as I would have liked. Also, I think it is possible that those who did not take the time to respond would not have been as ethnorelative as the actual respondents were. Chances are significant that the climate is not as culturally competent as the limited data indicates. Based on being in a clearly “red” political area, even though the survey was anonymous, respondents may not have willingly completed the survey based on social or familial pressures or their own staunch beliefs that would call into question their fitness for employment at an emerging Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). Lastly, there are limitations in the study moving forward to address research questions 3 and 4 because I am no longer employed at the institution. However, my new employer is possibly interested in a similar study on their campus.

There are some delimitations of the study too. I only talked with students who were current at the time of the interview process/data collection. It was early in the interview process that I decided to also interview students who had left the college due to graduation or some other reason. However, I left the college, so I did not choose to interview those participants as Phase IB.

Implications of the Findings for Practice

Researchers and employees at the focus of practice need to continue to examine ways to increase access AND ensure success. Enrollment is but a step in the process. Completion is the

goal, but completion while mitigating barriers is the ultimate goal. Researchers need to continue to examine ways to ensure that various groups are viewed through a culturally relevant and culturally oriented lens. Higher education cannot treat all students as if they have the same barriers. Barriers are extremely personal to students. Understanding that students need to trust people (researchers and college personnel) in order to share their specific barriers is an extremely important fact to know. One of the values of community colleges is meeting students where they are, and the need for that practice is certainly true with the Latinx population. Recruiting Latinx students in a manner that they feel wanted and not just a member of a sought after demographic is part of the first step. Recruiting the whole Latinx student and their family is a significant step in the right direction. Understanding that parents likely want to be involved, but they need information in Spanish, and students likely need or want the information in English is also a factor in recruitment. Culturally relevant programming is also a catalyst to Latinx recruitment and retention. Celebrating Latinx Heritage month, having a soccer team or intramurals is also of interest to Latinx students. Formal cohorts and student leaders providing advice and support is a positive practice as well. The opportunities to provide the necessary support are numerous, but the unwillingness to provide these areas of support will hurt the success of Latinx students, or at least, it will not help provide support that can help students feel included and worthy. Unwillingness is a conscious decision, but failing to see the need is a different situation. And that is a school that serves Hispanics in name only, but does not serve them in practice (Garcia et al., 2019).

This study may have implications for practice in various Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging circles. Community colleges are often the schools of choice for Latinx students because they often have responsibilities at home and they tend to look for a great value, which

community colleges are known to be. Based on the community college population, I could also see this study being an initiative at the system office to make sure all of the Great 58 are ensuring that all members of the communities that we serve are being included. A system-wide and state-wide initiative can help ensure that rural, red (conservative) areas do not exclude Latinx students and continue to focus on inclusion no matter the political driving forces.

The awareness and insights from this study should transcend the student and employee focus and permeate human resources practices as well, specifically hiring; curriculum adoption (culturally relevant curriculum); student engagement strategic plans; communication strategic plans; and college strategic plans. These findings are poised to impact college policies, procedures, and future actions from enrollment to support. Ensuring that such a significant share of the population, the Latinx student, has more representation, support, and voice is important for colleges and their service areas to remain sustainable.

Social Justice, Diversity, Access, and Equity Implications

Recommendations for Future Studies/Research

Due to the low number of respondents for faculty, staff, and administrators, I suggest an overall campus climate assessment on cultural competence with an emphasis on what microaggressions are, why they matter, and how to avoid them. Training could be implemented, but it is important to ensure that all areas of concern are identified. In addition to the Bennett Scale, there are AAC&U (American Association of Colleges and Universities) Value Rubrics for cultural competence, global learning, and hundreds of other valuable skills that could and perhaps should be assessed.

I am currently working on a study with a college in Finland that we have a Virtual Exchange with, and we are using the AAC&U value rubrics on Teamwork, Global Learning, and

Cultural Competence to assess how teamwork, global learning, and cultural competence increases (hopefully) over time during the virtual exchange. Finland is a particularly interesting country to be working with because many of their students are international. Seeing the access that those students who would not be able to attend school in the United States due to cost are able to attend school for free in Finland. The juxtaposition of access in most of Europe compared to the lack of access many Latinx students have in the United States due to their documentation status is stark.

Implications on Role as Scholarly Practitioner

I had great hopes for this study, and the variety of interventions that we would be able to implement at my former institution. These efforts to benefit the students that I care so much about were always at the forefront of my mind. However, I learned, likely from my time writing this document and the rest of my doctoral experience, to step into roles as an educational leader where I can lead and influence change (progress, if not change). That knowledge and understanding led me away from the site of my focus of practice, which was completely unanticipated.

In the months since I have left, I have been happier than I have been in more than a decade with my professional life, but I have had to work to mitigate my guilt for stepping away from a role that allowed me to work extremely closely with Latinx students from my home. The months have been a dichotomy—fulfilled in my role and a great sense of autonomy, but extreme guilt that I walked away from the opportunity to help the Latinx community on a regular, consistent basis. However, even though I am in a different locale, I will not abandon the Latinx community. In fact, I am the employee sponsor of two student clubs: the intercultural club and the Latinx Scholar Society. Additionally, I thought that my formal Diversity, Equity, and

Inclusion work may end because I would not have the opportunity to lead those efforts, but I was named to the DEI Steering Committee at my new school, and I can and will continue to be a voice for the Latinx community. When I have a seat and a voice at the proverbial table, so will the needs and well-being of Latinx students—if only by proxy.

As for future work on this research, initially, I thought I would like to capture these student stories as narratives, and then I moved away from that idea, but I feel a strong degree of certainty that I would like to write the narratives and a few others who were not included in my research as a small collection. Their stories matter. Their stories will matter to others if they know them. Additionally, I think a podcast may be an interesting idea too. The idea of writing narratives seemed cumbersome to me, but I have returned to writing, and I write a weekly column for our internal newsletter. Taking some positive steps for me has allowed me to find renewed energy to help others. I am grateful for the energy and the opportunity to continue doing all I can for as many people as I can.

Conclusions

At the beginning of this document, I referenced the great Latina, Justice Sonia Sotomayor, and at the end, I am loosely referencing Rhianna and her anthem to “Shine Bright like a Diamond.” Pressure yields diamonds. These Latinx students withstand internal, family system, and external pressures. Either in spite of or due to the pressure, the students have become bright, shining diamonds. This study has shown the magnitude of the shine gleaming from these bright diamond students. While the pressure has seemed as if they would sometimes crack, they have endured and withstood the pressure to now stand glowing in the light radiating from their core. If we, as educational professionals, can help make the higher education process more accessible and favorable, they will light the way for all of us. There is no group more

demographically significant than the Latinx population, and while we can care about all students, a certain strategic focus should be placed on recruiting, supporting, retaining, and completing the Latinx student, especially in the rural south.

REFERENCES

- About the Center.* (n.d.). *Surry Community College NC Viticulture Center.*
<http://ncviticulturecenter.surry.edu/?p=about/campus-services/shelton-badget-north-carolina-center-for-viticulture-enology>
- About Surry.* (n.d.). *Surry Community College.* <https://surry.edu/about>
- About Yadkinville.* (n.d.). *The town of Yadkinville.* <https://www.yadkinville.org/residents-visitors/about-yadkinville>
- America's dying cities. (2011). *Newsweek.* <https://www.newsweek.com/americas-dying-cities-66873>
- Anzaldúa, G. (1987). *Borderlands la frontera: The new mestiza.* Aunt Lute Books.
- Bailey, S.P. (2017). How nostalgia for White Christian America drove so many Americans to vote for Trump. *The Washington Post.* https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/social-issues/how-nostalgia-for-white-christian-america-drove-so-many-americans-to-vote-for-trump/2017/01/04/4ef6d686-b033-11e6-be1c-8cec35b1ad25_story.html
- Benefits and Services. (n.d.). *Employment and training administration.* U.S. Department of Labor. <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/tradeact/benefits/2009-law>
- Bennett, M. J. (1986). A developmental approach to training for intercultural sensitivity. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 10(2), 179-196. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767\(86\)90005-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767(86)90005-2)
- Bennett, M. J. (2004). Becoming interculturally competent. *Academia.edu.* (pp. 62-77)
https://www.academia.edu/68391602/Becoming_Interculturally_Competent

- Bennett, M. J. (2017). Developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. *The international encyclopedia of intercultural communication*. (pp. 1-10)
<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118783665.ieicc0182>
- Benson, J. E., & Lee, E. M. (2020). *More than one way to be first. Geographies of campus inequality: mapping the diverse experiences of first-generation students*. Oxford Academic. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190848156.003.0001>
- Borderlands: A feminist concept. (n.d.). *Equality Archive*.
<https://equalityarchive.com/issues/boderlands-a-feminist-concept/>
- Bragg, D. D., & Durham, B. (2012). Perspectives on access and equity in the era of (community) completion. *Community College Review*, 40(2), 106-125.
- Brown, S., & Fischer, K. (2019). A dying town. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.
<https://www.chronicle.com/article/a-dying-town/>
- Calva, A., Matthew, R. A., & Orpinas, P. (2020). Overcoming barriers: Practical strategies to assess Latinos living in low-income communities. *Health Promotion Practice*, 21(3), 355–362. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524839919837975>
- Cobb, J. (2018). Higher education can learn from first-generation students. *Contexts*, 17(1), 96–96. <https://doi.org/10.1177/153650421876>
- Crawford, E. R., & Dorner, L. M. (Eds.). (2019). *Educational leadership of immigrants: Case studies in times of change*. Taylor & Francis Group.
- Craig, B. (2021, Oct 11). Know nothing party now White replacement theory. *Courier – Journal*. <http://login.proxy172.nclive.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/know-nothing-party-now-White-replacement-theory/docview/2580603623/se-2?accountid=14179>

- Craig, M. A., & Richeson, J. A. (2017). Information about the US racial demographic shift triggers concerns about anti-White discrimination among the prospective White “minority.” *PLoS ONE* 12(9): e0185389. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0185389>
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Los Angeles, SAGE.
- Del Real Viramontes, J. (2020). Transforming the community college transfer pipeline for Latinx students. *Journal of Applied Research in the Community College*, 27(2), 157-167. <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/transforming-community-college-transfer-pipeline/docview/2581022558/se-2>
- Elliott, J. D., & Parks, R. (2018). Latino students and degree attainment. *College and University*, 93(1), 10-18.
- Excelencia in Education. (2020). Find Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) and emerging Hispanic-Serving Institutions: Surry Community College. <https://www.edexcelencia.org/research/institutions/surry-community-college>
- Exhibits: Surry Community College*. (n.d.). *The Mount Airy Museum of Regional History*. http://www.northcarolinamuseum.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=176&Itemid=170
- Flagg, T. (2016, February 6). Tobacco contract cuts hurt Surry County farmers. *The Mount Airy News*. <https://www.mtairynews.com/news/37553/tobacco-contract-cuts-hurt-surry-county-farmers>
- Frey, W. H. (2014). *Diversity explosion: How new racial demographics are remaking America*. Brookings Institution Press. <https://doi.org/10.7864/j.ctt1vjqnns>

- Gándara, P., & Mordechay, K. (2017). Demographic change and the new (and not so new) challenges for Latino education. *The Educational Forum (West Lafayette, Ind.)*, 81(2), 148-159. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131725.2017.1280755>
- Garcia, G. A., Núñez, A.-M., & Sansone, V. A. (2019). Toward a multidimensional conceptual framework for understanding “servingness” in Hispanic-Serving Institutions: A synthesis of the research. *Review of Educational Research*, 89(5), 745-784. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654319864591>
- Gill, H. E. (2014). *The Latino migration experience in North Carolina: New roots in the old north state*. University of North Carolina Press. https://doi.org/10.5149/9780807899380_gill
- Goldsmith, T. (2017, March 22). The story of North Carolina is the story of immigrants. *Indy Week*. <https://indyweek.com/guides/archives/story-north-carolina-story-immigrants/>
- Grooms, A. A. (2019). Straddling the boundaries of the zone of tolerance: One district’s response to rapid demographic change. *Education and Urban Society*, 51(7), 946-969. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124517747364>
- Hatch, J. A., & Newsom, S. K. (2010). Life history. In P. Peterson, E. Baker & B. McGaw (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of education* (3rd ed.) (pp. 430-435). <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-044894-7.01517-7>
- Henderson, N., Sloan, M., & Swanson, D. J. (2021). *Barriers to post-secondary success* (Order No. 28493781). (2544913085). <http://login.proxy172.nclive.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/barriers-post-secondary-success/docview/2544913085/se-2?accountid=14179>
- Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities. (n.d.). <https://www.hacu.net/hacu/default.asp>

- Hobbs, M. (2020, September 8). Edge: Latinx students bring strengths into schools. *Edge: Carolina Education Review*. <https://ed.unc.edu/2020/09/08/latinx-students-bring-strengths-into-schools/>
- Institution Lookup: Surry Community College*. (Fall 2017). The Carnegie Classification of Higher Education Institutions. <https://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu/lookup/lookup.php>
- Jensen, E. (2009). *Teaching with poverty in mind: What being poor does to kids' brains and what schools can do about it*. ASCD.
- Johnson, J. H., Jr. (2019). *Six disruptive demographics that will change America forever*. Food Systems Leadership Institute. <https://fsli.org/files/2019/06/Six-Disruptive-Trends-FSLI-June-2019-.pdf>
- Johnson, K. M., & Lichter, D. T. (2016). Diverging demography: Hispanic and non-Hispanic contributions to U.S. population redistribution and diversity. *Population Research and Policy Review*, 35(5), 705-725. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11113-016-9403-3>
- Johnson, K. M., & Lichter, D. T. (2019). Rural depopulation: Growth and decline processes over the past century. *Rural Sociology*, 84, 3-27. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ruso.12266>
- Labossiere, R. (2010, April 1). Census form: Question of race, identity: White or Black? Some Hispanics don't like choices. *Hartford Courant*. <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/census-form-question-race-identity/docview/257325824/se-2>
- Leonard, S., & Thomas, D. (Executive Producers). (1960-1968). *The Andy Griffith Show* [TV series]. Danny Thomas Enterprises; Mayberry Enterprises; CBS Productions.

- Locks, A. (2017, July). *Summary of Yosso's Cultural Wealth*.
<https://www.pitzer.edu/academics/wp-content/uploads/sites/38/2017/07/Wrk1EditedYossoCulturalWealthSummary.pdf>
- MacCracken, A. (2020, July 15). New programs reflect changing Latinx higher education experience. *EdNC.org*. <https://www.ednc.org/new-programs-reflect-changing-latinx-student-higher-education-experience/>
- Main Campus Map*. (n.d.). *Surry Community College*. <https://surry.edu/uploads/docs/SCC-Main-Campus-Map-and-Legend.pdf>
- Manzano-Sanchez, H., Matarrita-Cascante, D., & Outley, C. (2019). Barriers and supports to college aspiration among Latinx high school students. *Journal of Youth Development*, 14(2), 25-45. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5195/jyd.2019.685>
- Marks, M. (2022, October 11). Opinion: A sense of belonging is critical to college students' success. *The Colorado Sun*. <https://coloradosun.com/2022/10/10/opinion-college-belonging/>
- Mission and history*. (n.d.). *North Carolina Community Colleges*.
<https://www.nccommunitycolleges.edu/mission-history>
- McIntosh, P. (2019). *On privilege, fraudulence, and teaching as learning: Selected essays 1981-2019*. Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group.
- North Carolina & Tobacco: Historical Background*. (2005). PBS-POV.
<http://archive.pov.org/brightleaves/historical-background/>
- Q&A: North Carolina's History of Latin American migration. (2019, September 10). *UNC University Communications*. <https://uncnews.unc.edu/2019/09/10/qa-north-carolinas-history-of-latin-american-migration/>

- Radford, J. (2017, June). The vineyards & wineries of Surry County. *Surry Living*.
https://issuu.com/northvalleypublishing/docs/surry_living_-_june_2017__paginatio
- Rhodes, S. D., Alonzo, J., Mann-Jackson, L., Tanner, A. E., Vissman, A. T., Martinez, O., Rodriguez-Celedon, R., Garcia, J. M., Arellano, J. E., Song, E. Y., Eng, E., & Reboussin, B. A. (2018). Selling the product: Strategies to increase recruitment and retention of Spanish-speaking Latinos in biomedical research. *Journal of Clinical and Translational Science*, 2(3), 147-155. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cts.2018.31>
- Santamaría, L. J. (2014). Critical change for the greater good: Multicultural perceptions in educational leadership toward social justice and equity. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 50(3), 347-391.
- Santamaría, L. J., & Santamaría, A. P. (2011, April). Critical change for the greater good: Multicultural dimensions of educational leadership. Proposal for paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). New Orleans, LA.
- Senegal, P. (2021). *Perspective | A responsibility to equitably expand college going*. EdNC.org
- Sinclair, N. (2014). Moving with change: Reflections from the book *Who Moved My Cheese?* *Linkedin.com*. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/20140813031050-70953588-moving-with-change-reflections-from-the-book-who-moved-my-cheese>
- Snowball Sampling. (2022). <https://research.oregonstate.edu/irb/policies-and-guidance-investigators/guidance/snowball-sampling>
- Snyder, J. A. (2022, September 1). Education and indoctrination. *The Point Magazine*.
<https://thepointmag.com/politics/education-and-indoctrination/>
- Sotomayor, S. (1996). Speech to Hofstra Law Students. *The Washington Post*.

- Stefaniak, A., Mallett, R. K., & Wohl, M. J. A. (2020). Zero-sum beliefs shape advantaged allies' support for collective action. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 50(6), 1,259-1,275. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2674>
- Surry Community College Institutional Research. (2021 September). Data request for demographic information. Surry Community College Institutional Research.
- Turner, E. O. (2020). *Suddenly diverse: How school districts manage race and inequality*. University of Chicago Press.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2018). *Hispanic population to reach 111 million by 2060*. US Department of Commerce. <https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/2018/comm/hispanic-projected-pop.html>
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2020a). *Quick facts: Surry County, NC*. US Department of Commerce. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/surrycountynorthcarolina>
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2020b). *Quick facts: Yadkin County, NC*. US Department of Commerce. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/yadkincountynorthcarolina>
- Worsham, R. E. (2021). *The residency determination service: State policy as a barrier to college access for underserved students?* (Order No. 28663437). (2555101447). <http://login.proxy172.nclive.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/residency-determination-service-state-policy-as/docview/2555101447/se-2?accountid=14179>
- Yen, H. (2010, March 10). Minority births on track to outnumber White births. *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*. <https://www.diverseeducation.com/demographics/latinx/article/15089476/minority-births-on-track-to-outnumber-white-births>

APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

3/12/24, 3:31 AM

IRB: Study Correspondence Letter - Wright, Sarah M - Outlook

IRB: Study Correspondence Letter

umcirm@ecu.edu <umcirm@ecu.edu>

Mon 04/24/2023 02:07 PM

To:Wright, Sarah M <wrights95@students.ecu.edu>



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board

4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building · Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** ·
rede.ecu.edu/umcirm/

Notification of Exempt Certification

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: [Sarah Wright](#)
CC: [Marjorie Ringler](#)
Date: 4/24/2023
Re: [UMCIRB 22-002330](#)
"Si Se Puede": Improving Latinx Access to and Completion of College

I am pleased to inform you that your research submission has been certified as exempt on 4/24/2023. This study is eligible for Exempt Certification under category # 2b.

It is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted in the manner reported in your application and/or protocol, as well as being consistent with the ethical principles of the Belmont Report and your profession.

This research study does not require any additional interaction with the UMCIRB unless there are proposed changes to this study. Any change, prior to implementing that change, must be submitted to the UMCIRB for review and approval. The UMCIRB will determine if the change impacts the eligibility of the research for exempt status. If more substantive review is required, you will be notified within five business days.

Document	Description
"Si Se Puede": Improving Latinx Access to and Completion of College(0.01)	Study Protocol or Grant Application
Faculty and Staff Level of Understanding Survey(0.01)	Surveys and Questionnaires
Informed Consent(0.01)	Consent Forms
Student Survey.docx(0.01)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions

For research studies where a waiver or alteration of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, the IRB states that each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(i)(1)(i)(A) and (2)(i) through (v) have been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

3/12/24, 3:31 AM

IRB: Study Correspondence Letter - Wright, Sarah M - Outlook

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

IRB00000705 East Carolina U IRB #1 (Biomedical) IORG0000418
IRB00003781 East Carolina U IRB #2 (Behavioral/SS) IORG0000418

Study.PI Name:
Study.Co-Investigators:

APPENDIX B: STUDENT GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION

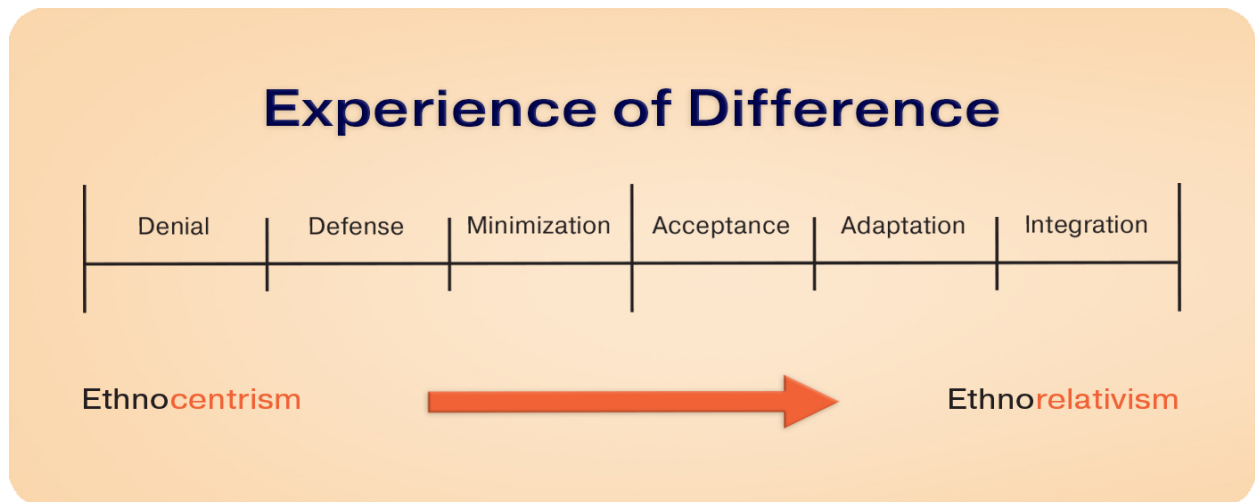
My questions for the student participants are as follows, with the understanding that these questions may not necessarily be asked in this linear fashion. If answers are gained in a previous question, or a follow-up question for clarity and understanding is needed, there will be a necessary deviation from this order. All questions are derived from the ideas of the Borderlands Theory/la frontera.

- Where are you in your educational journey at the moment, and what are you planning for your future beyond Surry Community College?
- In your process of applying and enrolling here, have you had any questions or difficulties that arose that you did not know where or how to resolve or get answers? If so, please explain. These questions or difficulties can be process based or something you think is unique to you.
- Can you talk about how your culture impacts you as a student?
- Will you explain what your typical weekday is like? Weekend?
- Can you tell me about pressure that you may feel to be successful at school and/or work?
- Please share your feelings about how or if you feel SCC understands your culture.
- What do you wish those encouraging you to go to school (high school level) and SCC officials knew/understood about your experience?
- Can you talk about your level of trust of SCC employees?
- On a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the most supportive and 1 being the least, what level of support do you feel from Surry Community College?

- Are there one or two suggestions that you could offer that would improve the level of support you and other Latinx students feel?
- Is there anything that I did not ask that you would like to share?

With permission, I plan to record the interviews, so that I may return to them to ensure correct information when coding. Students will provide me with a code name, so that they are anonymous in the survey and elsewhere in this dissertation. Of course, if I know the student, I will know their true identity.

APPENDIX C: FACULTY AND STAFF LEVEL OF UNDERSTANDING SURVEY



(Bennett, 2017; Bennett, 2004; Bennett, 1986)

The terms of denial, defense, etc. will not be used, but those concepts of relating to difference could still be common terms borne from [the survey](#). The survey questions are as follows after a few demographic questions (role, department, gender, age):

<https://bit.ly/facultystaffunderstanding>

Faculty and Staff Level of Understanding Survey

Required

1.What is your role at Surry Community College

Faculty

Staff

Administrator

Other

2.Please list your department--you can answer broadly.

3.Gender

4.Race/Ethnicity

5.How or in what ways do you think being Hispanic impacts one's experience as a student?

6.Can you list, with explanation, any obstacles you have personally witnessed Hispanic students undergo?

7.Can you list, with explanation, any obstacles that you have heard of Hispanic students undergoing?

8.Discuss your confidence in your understanding of Hispanic issues that SCC students may experience.

9.Is there something specific that you do not understand about the Hispanic experience that you would like to? Please explain.

APPENDIX D: SURRY COMMUNITY COLLEGE IRB APPROVAL



INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Application for the Use of Human Subjects in Research

All research with human subjects conducted by students, faculty, or staff at SCC, must be reviewed initially by the chairperson of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). To initiate this review, the investigator/project director must complete and submit the attached application and forward it to the IRB chairperson. If the research does not qualify for exempt status, the IRB will determine if an expedited or full committee review is appropriate. You will be informed by the IRB regarding the disposition of your application.

Please submit your human subjects application at least one month prior to the date you wish to initiate data collection. **DATA CANNOT BE COLLECTED PRIOR TO RECEIVING AN APPROVAL FORM FROM THE IRB.**

Any changes in research protocol that affect human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to their implementation unless these changes are necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subject. Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others must be promptly reported to the IRB.

Date: 4/15/2022

1. Project Title: "Si Se Puede": Removing Obstacles for Latinx Student Success

2. Principal Investigator(s): Sarah Wright

Phone No. (336)386-3439 E-mail wrights@surry.edu

Address of Principal Investigator: 630 S. Main Street Dobson, NC 27017

Relationship to the College: Faculty ☒ Student ☐ Other ☐

If student, name of faculty sponsor: _____

3. Sponsor's Signature: _____

Project Dates: From 4 / / 2022 To 4 / / 2024

4. State the purpose of the research and provide a brief statement of project goals.

Phase IA of this study will initially involve interviews of 15 Latinx students enrolled at Surry Community College.

Students will be asked a series of prepared questions, and follow-up and probing questions will be utilized as needed.

These questions are open-ended and serve to help ascertain the obstacles that students have faced thus far in their higher education experiences.

Once data is collected from students, we can identify obstacles for current and future students at Surry Community College, as well as ways to mitigate the barriers that exist.

5. Provide a description of the procedures to be followed along with the following information.

- Copy of questionnaires, surveys, or interview protocol.
- Number of subjects.
- How will subjects be sampled?
- What, if any, relationship exists between the researcher and the subjects?
- If data collection is done in class, explain what students who do not participate will be doing.
- Attach letter or form of approval from any agencies that will be involved with data collection.

See attached.

6. Describe the benefits of the research.

Phase I, and the data collected in this phase, is the linchpin of the inquiry. Without participation and information from students and then personnel (a different phase under a different IRB request), we cannot effectively identify gaps that exist in resources for Latinx students. Armed with data and analysis, we can develop interventions to help students mitigate barriers that they face in the pursuit of education.

7. Provide answers to the following questions.

- Describe the risks to the subject and precautions that will be taken to minimize them. This includes physical, psychological, and/or sociological risks.
- How will confidentiality of data be maintained?

- Final disposition of data (What will be done with questionnaires, inventories, and/or audiotapes?)
- How would you describe the level of risk for subjects participating in this project?

_____ No risks X _____ Minimal risks _____ More than minimal risks

Subjects will have no more than minimal risks. Difficult past traumas could come up. Subjects may stop at any point.

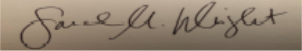
I will also ensure they have access to mental health counseling if needed. Information will be maintained on a password protected computer and subjects will provide a code name which they will be referred to.

I will maintain all information for at least three years.

8. Briefly describe your subject population.

Latinx students currently enrolled at Surry Community College.

I certify that the statements made herein are accurate and complete. I agree to inform the Board in writing of any emergent problems or proposed procedural changes. Should changes be made, I further agree not to proceed with the research until the Board has reviewed and approved the changes that I propose to make in the protocol.

Signed:  _____
Principal Investigator

Date: 4/15/2022

Return the completed form to
Michael Faulkner
Executive Director of Institutional Research
faulknerm@surry.edu
336.386.3436

March 2024

FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

Prepared by:

Sarah M. Wright

Prepared for:

Surry Community College

Summary of Background

In the fifteen years that I was employed with Surry Community College, I saw the prevalence of Latinx students increase on campus and in classrooms. Through interactions with Latinx students, we have realized that they had many unique scenarios impacting their attendance and completion of programs. Simultaneously, or close, we also realized that Latinx students had needs and questions that were often unique to their experience. We set out on an endeavor to find ways to support students. This research is an extension of those efforts.

Findings

Through interviewing students and surveying college personnel, we have been able to gauge the temperature of the campus climate--at least an initial gauge. Students are pleased with their support for the most part, but they do feel othered and if they are outsiders. Efforts to focus on their culture is appreciated.

Personnel also are somewhat aware of the obstacles that Latinx students face, but they want to know and do more.

Suggested Interventions

I suggest a student and family orientation for Latinx students. Conduct the family orientation in Spanish. Conduct the student in English. Answer the questions of the parents. Make them feel part of the community. If the parents feel connected, then the students will feel more connected.

Also, for students, continue to hold culturally relevant events.

For faculty, consider professional development specific to Latinx student needs.

For human resources, commit to interviewing Latinx candidates when they apply for positions.

Understand that representation matters.

Assessing the Interventions

I suggest a widespread interview campaign with students after several years of interventions (3). A family survey could also be implemented in Spanish and English.

For faculty, the personnel survey should be re-deployed with administration's encouragement for personnel to complete.

