

August 21, 2017

To: Vanessa Poblano, Faculty Affairs  
Fr: Prof. Patricia Kim-Rajal, Chicano and Latino Studies  
Re: Sabbatical/DIP Report

The following is a report of the scholarly and professional development activities I engaged in between July 2016 and January 2017, the period encompassing my sabbatical leave.

### Research

I began a qualitative research project inspired by almost fifteen years of teaching and mentoring Latina students. My project, "Latina Experiences in U.S. Colleges and Universities" draws upon ten interviews with first-generation Latina college students between the ages of 18 and 24. These interviews were conducted between October 2016 and March 2017, transcribed, and analyzed. The findings discussed herein represent an initial overview of the most salient themes present

This project utilizes a phenomenological approach, Participants were asked to describe what they believed to be key moments, both positive and negative, while going to college. I identified four themes that recurred across all respondents' narratives about their college experience: lack of diversity, microaggressions, struggles with language, and family issues. A selection of relevant quotes is highlighted in Figure 1:

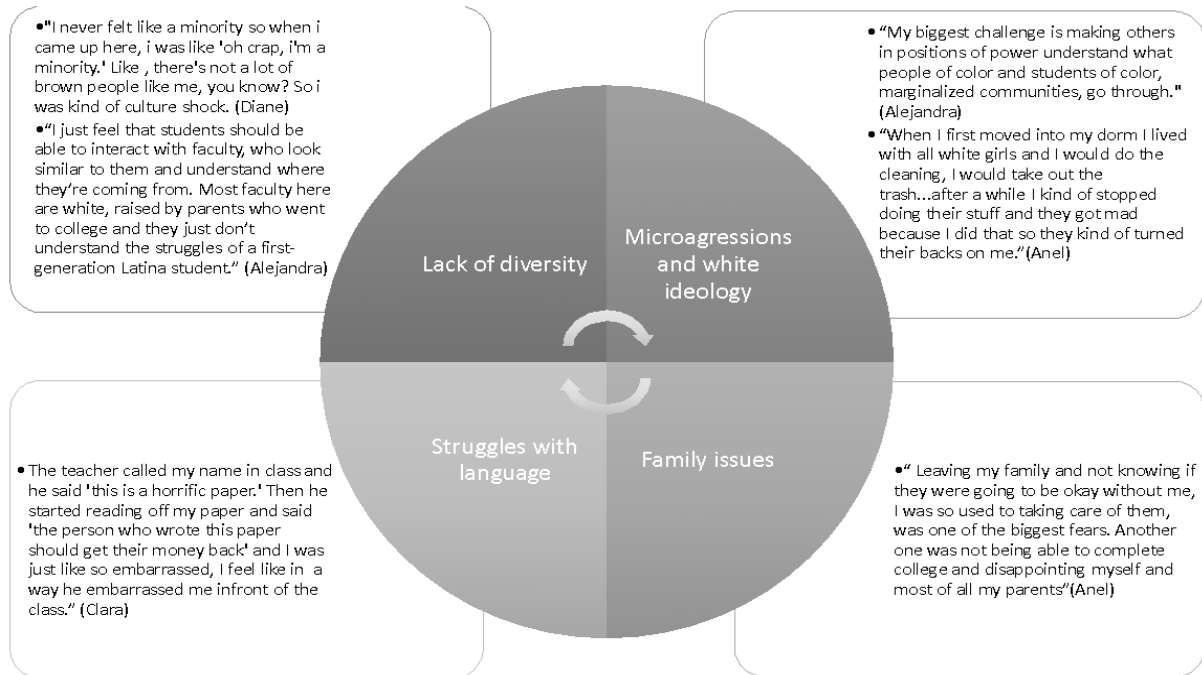


Figure 1

Participants discussed the familial pressure they felt as first-generation college students. They felt pressure to do well in school in order to justify their parents' sacrifices, a not uncommon scenario for Latina students from whom "the stress of leaving home to attend college and feeling pressured by parents to succeed" (Mount 2015). In addition to parental expectations, participants also felt they were role models for siblings and younger relatives, which added to the pressure they felt to both do well in school. This pressure was often compounded for Latinas who don't speak English as their first language. There are few resources that support for English language learners (ELLs) in U.S. universities and little to no training of faculty and staff about the needs of ELL college students. Oftentimes, this lack of awareness means that students face negative experiences in the classroom, as was the case for at least one participant.

All participants reported being shocked at the lack of diversity on California's college campuses, particularly among faculty. They identified the lack of diversity in the student body and faculty as impacting their experiences in the classroom and their psychological well-being. Research indicates that institutions that lack diversity can negatively impact Latinx students' self-esteem, mental health, and sense of belonging<sup>1</sup>, which can lead to stress, isolation, low involvement and engagement on campus, and ultimately, poor academic outcomes. Participants reported a lack of understanding of their experiences from white faculty. Substantial structural reforms of white serving institutions of higher education whose policies and practices prioritize the needs of white students and alumni must be undertaken to create a space that centers the voices and experiences of Latinx students.<sup>2</sup>

A substantial percentage of research about Latinx in higher education focuses on outcomes, with the unstated goals of identifying those facts that either help or hinder Latinx persistence and graduation rates. This project highlights four areas identified by Latina students in California public universities as sources of stress while attending college. Among these are struggles with language and the lack of support for English language learners or multilingual students in higher education. Respondents also reported stress regarding competing academic and familial obligations. The lack of Latinx faculty, the fact that they did not see themselves represented or their experiences understood and valorize, led some to question whether they belonged in an institution of higher education. This lack of diversity among faculty, and among the student body, was reported as having an effect on their psychological well-being of participants. As Latinas attending college in a white serving institution, participants reported microaggressions, discrimination and feelings of alienation.

### Other Scholarly Activity

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<sup>1</sup> Rodriguez, Dalia. "Silence as Speech: Meanings of Silence for Students of Color in Predominantly White Classrooms" *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 4.1 (2011): 111-144.

<sup>2</sup> Cavasos, Alyssa G and Javier. "Understanding the Experiences of Latina/O Students: A Qualitative Study for Change". *American Secondary Education*, 38.2 (2010): 95-109.

In December 2016 Dra. Mariana Garcia Martinez and I reached out to the national board of Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social (MALCS) with a proposal to bring their annual Summer Institute to Sonoma State University. While Chicana/Latina women were an integral part of Chicano struggles for social justice through the 1960s and 1970s their contributions were barely acknowledged. Sensing this collective loss of voice, feeling highly isolated, eager to extend their knowledge to other women, and desiring to change society's perceptions, a group of Chicana/Latina academic women gathered at the University of California, Davis and established Mujeres Activas En Letras Y Cambio Social (MALCS) in 1982.

We were fortunate to have our proposal approved by Dr. Judith Flores Carmona at which point I became the site co-chair for the conference. I am happy to report that after eight months of hard work, the 2017 MALCS Summer Institute took place at Sonoma State University July 19-23, 2017. Over 200 participants registered to attend and present their work at this feminist gathering, which also raised money for the Sonoma State University chapter of MALCS.

### Community Service

I had the opportunity to collaborate with a group area students, faculty and staff to organize the first North Bay Women of Color Conference. We began meeting in October 2016 and by March 28, 2017 we were able to host 200 women for a one-day, no-cost conference centered around the issues faced by women of color. As a lead faculty organizer, I helped to secure funding to bring Patrisse Cullors, one of the founders of Black Lives Matter, as the conference keynote. I also created the conference's digital presence (<https://sites.google.com/sonoma.edu/ssuwocc/home>) and managed both workshop proposals and registration. My efforts on behalf of this inaugural conference were recognized by my fellow organizers who presented me with the Womxn of Color of the Year award at the event.

### Professional Development

In addition to getting a new project underway with the assistance of student researchers, I took advantage of my sabbatical to participate in several workshops offered by the Faculty Center. In September I attended in a Qualtrics workshop to learn how to use it for data collection and analysis. As my sabbatical drew to an end, I was fortunate enough to be selected to attend the Online and Blended Teaching Institute on campus. After completing the institute, and thanks to the assistance of Faculty Center staff, particularly Noelia Franzen, I developed an online version of an upper-division, GE C1, Ethnic Studies course in order to facilitate student access to this important and necessary graduation requirement. The online version of the class has been successfully piloted in Extended Education and will be offered as part of the Statewide curriculum as of Fall 2017.

- Participated in "Asking Questions with Qualtrics" workshop offered by the SSU Faculty Center, September 20, 2016
- Participated in the Online and Blended Teaching Institute held at Sonoma State University, January 17-18, 2017
- Completed CSU QOLT framework training offered by the SSU Faculty Center, January 17, 2017