Creating a Model of Latino Peer Education: Weaving Cultural Capital Into the Fabric of Academic Services in an Urban University Setting

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Abstract

Over the last few decades, college admission rates for Latinos have increased. However, the achievement gap between Latino students and other ethnic groups remains wide. Peer mentorship programs have shared in some degree of success in promoting the academic success of diverse and underrepresented student populations. Despite the growing population of Latino students, little has been done to recognize the potential cultural assets and resilience that they can bring to the educational environment. Utilizing concepts from cultural capital and community cultural wealth, a peer-mentoring program

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for Latino students was developed. The *Promotores de Educación* program was designed to provide students with peer support, tutoring, and linkage to academic and student services to improve the educational experience of Latino students, leading to improved academic performance and timely graduation. The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of the development and implementation of the program.

Keywords

peer mentoring programs, Latino, academic achievement

Introduction

California State University, Long Beach (CSULB) designated as a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) in 2005, received a 5-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education in 2006 aimed at reducing educational and professional barriers experienced by the university's growing Latino student population. The HSI initiative, entitled *Mi Casa: Mi Universidad* (MCMU) was developed to provide Latino students with additional academic and service-related support, sponsor on-campus employment, and create Latino role models despite the paucity of Latino and Latino student-focused faculty. Through this initiative, a peer education program entitled *Promotores de Educación* (educational peer mentors) was developed. The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of the development and implementation of *Promotores de Educación* (PED) program at CSULB. Due to the scope of this article, it should be noted that a subsequent article will focus on the program's findings.

Latino/a Educational and Professional Barriers: A Brief Overview

Over the last few decades, college admission rates for Latinos have increased significantly (Fry, 2011). Despite these gains, Latinos continue to lag behind their African American and White counterparts in 4-year college and university enrollment and bachelor's degree completion (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). Specifically, the proportion of Latino adults with a bachelor's degree in 2010 was 9%, far less than both African Americans (12%) and Whites (18.3%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010a). Furthermore, only 2.3% of Latinos held a graduate degree, far less than both African Americans (4.4%) and Whites (6.8%; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010a).

Several barriers have been identified that contribute to lower educational attainment among Latinos, including lack of academic preparation (Berkner & Chavez, 1997; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003; Zarate & Gallimore, 2005), English language proficiency (Soto, Smrekar, & Nekcovei, 1999), linguistic and cultural alienation (Gonzalez, 2002; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Swail et al., 2003; White & Lowenthal, 2011), familial financial obligations (Erisman & Looney, 2007; Pew Hispanic Center, 2009), and a lack of knowledge of U.S. higher educational systems and the financial mechanisms through which to fund college. Furthermore, young Latinos may have little familiarity with the explicit and implicit rules that govern academic discourse (White & Lowenthal, 2011), which may be associated with not having parents with a postsecondary education to help them navigate within a higher education setting (Horn & Carroll, 1998; Wallace, Abel, & Ropers-Huilman, 2000). Additionally, barriers to education due to low socioeconomic status and poverty have been well established (Caldas & Bankstron, 2001; Ward, 2006). More recently, the economic downturn has had a significant impact on Latino wealth, which declined by 66% between 2005 and 2009 (Taylor, Fry, & Kochhar, 2011). In 2010, 26.6% of Latinos were living in poverty, up from 25.3% in 2009 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Although the disparity in access to education between the poor and nonpoor has narrowed, bachelor's degree completion remains higher for the nonpoor (Tinto, 2006-7).

Despite the growing population of Latino students, little has been done to recognize the potential cultural assets and resilience that Latino communities and students can bring to the educational environment. Many Latino students are confronted with an environment that is centered solely on academic preparation and remediation, and fails to recognize the potential integration of cultural assets into their academic programming. Furthermore, these environments are often void of understanding the resilience and strength of the students' characters (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009) and the many obstacles Latino students have already overcome upon enrollment in college or university. Among young adults aged 18 to 24, 33% of all Latinos enrolled in school, compared to 42% of their counterparts (Lopez, 2009). Among foreign-born Latinos, only 20% compared to 40% of their U.S. born counterparts enrolled in college (Lopez, 2009). The marked difference between U.S.- and foreign-born Latinos attending school highlights the need to better understand the barriers that immigrants versus nonimmigrants experience, as well as respond to the dynamic contexts of educational risk experienced by both groups. Simultaneously, a critical examination of culturally relevant educational programming designed for Latino students must take place to ensure that institutional deficits are openly addressed.

Need for Latino Peer Mentorship Programs

Racially and ethnically specific peer and faculty mentorship programs provide an opportunity for institutions of higher education to develop more personalized relationships with students and more readily respond to individual student needs beyond the classroom. A study of undergraduate students participating in a faculty student program found that Latino students were more likely to perceive same-race/ethnicity mentors as significantly more supportive regarding their academic and personal development than those students from a different race/ethnicity (Santos & Reigadas, 2002). Furthermore, the authors reported that same-race/ethnicity matching increased student satisfaction to a greater extent when compared to non-matched mentor pairs. Although faculty mentorship is essential for student success, little research exists to determine their impact on academic outcomes such as academic performance, retention, and graduation (Campbell & Campbell, 2007).

Latinos continue to be underrepresented in faculty positions across the U.S. Recent data indicate that only 4% of faculty in degree conferring institutions (including community colleges) were Latino compared to 7% African Americans and 79% Whites (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). Due to the underrepresentation of Latino faculty on college campuses, particularly those in urban centers with large Latino populations, matching faculty to students would burden already overly taxed faculty. Educating sufficient numbers of Latino faculty in a timely manner would also be unfeasible as the educational pipeline for Latinos that extends from elementary school to postdoctoral degrees is ridden with leaks (Solórzano & Yosso, 2000); this is evidenced by the fact that in 2010, only 0.55% of Latinos 25 years and older held a doctoral degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010a). This situation creates a cyclical, institutionalized conundrum for Latinos since, in order to provide adequate racially and ethnically specific mentorships for Latino students to improve their academic attainment, there must be a dramatic increase in the representation of Latino faculty. However, an increase in the representation of Latino faculty is unlikely given that Latino students continue to have low academic attainment, thus further eliminating the possibility of these students becoming faculty members.

However, peer mentorship programs (Falchikov, 2001; Jacobi, 1991) can provide many benefits to students in general and specifically to Latino students (Thile & Matt, 1995; Torres & Hernandez, 2010). For example, peer mentorship programs can furnish immediate assistance, opportunities for on-campus employment centered on academic success, and facilitate the use of

the mentor's cultural skills and educational expertise to teach and mentor their peers. Furthermore, peer mentorship can promote the academic success of diverse and underrepresented student populations while heightening the potential for both recognition and appreciation of the values, resilience, and potential for positive educational integration among student populations historically underrepresented on college campuses (Wallace et al., 2000). This is of particular importance in urban institutions in the Southwest wherein Latino populations are highly comprised of Mexican/Mexican American/Chicano students, of whom only 0.2% have earned a doctoral degree, thus possessing the potential to become faculty (Watford, Rivas, Burciaga, & Solorzano, 2006). Therefore, peer mentorship programs can provide a pathway through which underserved Latino students can receive assistance from high achieving peers who have undergone similar contextual experiences and understand first-hand the educational barriers one must overcome to achieve academic success. Moreover, peer mentors, through training and practice within an educational setting, can also gain the experience necessary to overcome the barriers leading to graduate school and potentially facilitating completion of a doctoral degree.

Theoretical Framework for Developing a Latino Peer Mentorship Program

Concepts derived from cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2003) and critical race theory (Yosso, 2005) were used to inform the development of a peer mentoring program for Latino students. Cultural capital refers to "the linguistic and cultural understandings and skills that individuals bring to schools on the basis of their social class location" (Maldonado, Rhoads, & Buenavista, 2005, p. 609). Culturally congruent models and academic success programs often seek to correct individual academic performance without understanding the cultural assets and potential facilitators that underrepresented populations often bring with them into the academic setting. Without a clear understanding of what *cultural capital* can mean to a unique population within an institutional context, student assets will continue to be underexploited and not fully utilized. Furthermore, programs will continue to focus on individualized student deficits without incorporating population-specific designs that could utilize cultural strengths to facilitate academic success.

Historically, cultural capital has included only a "very narrow range of assets and characteristics" and has largely been defined by White, middle-class culture and values (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). Utilizing critical race theory, cultural capital can be expanded to encompass community cultural wealth

and move beyond white, middle-class culture, to encompass diverse cultural contexts in an academic milieu. Community cultural wealth refers to an "array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). From this perspective, community cultural wealth can be gleaned from six forms of capital: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant.

Types of Cultural Capital

Aspirational capital refers to "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). One important characteristic of Latinos is resilience. Many sacrifices are made within Latino families and communities to work toward their aspirations. For example, Latino college students possess aspirational capital; they dream of bettering their futures through a willingness to learn and to succeed in their academic careers. Aspirational capital is an important element in the retention of Latino college students and plays an important role in the future progress of the Latino community. Aspirational capital is in some ways analogous to the concept of *esperanza* or hope within the Latino community, the antithesis of what could be known as *desperación* or desperation. While many Spanish-speaking communities may not be familiar with *aspirational capital*, drawing its parallels to *esperanza* will most likely resonate as many immigrant families came to the United States after adjusting to varying levels of desperation and hoping for better life prospects upon migration to the United States

Linguistic capital "includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style" (Yosso, 2005, p. 78). Among Latinos, linguistic capital refers to their abilities to communicate and navigate through both English and their native languages, most often Spanish. Although language is often viewed as a barrier for Latinos, linguistic capital is very beneficial and advantageous to Latino college students. Their ability to communicate in more than one language allows them to navigate themselves within diverse communities and build on their social/communication skills. Linguistic capital also provides Latino students "multiple social tools of 'vocabulary, audience awareness, cross-cultural awareness', 'real world' literacy skills, math skills, metalinguistic awareness, teaching and tutoring skills, civic and familial responsibility, [and] social maturity" (Faulstich Orellana, 2003 as cited in Yosso, 2005, p. 79). Latino youth are also relied upon by their families to

serve as translators for their parents, or elders, and thus gain knowledge, navigation skills, and experience communicating with professionals such as doctors and teachers.

Familial capital refers to "those cultural knowledges nurtured among *familia* (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition" (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). The importance of family unity or *familismo* is a core characteristic among Latinos. Unlike the typical White-American family, Latino families tend to be larger in size and often consist of extended familial networks. Thus, Latino students experience many opportunities to maintain healthy relationships, communicate with others, and build connections with their resources. In this regard, familial capital provides them with many relational skills that can be helpful along their academic path.

Social capital refers to the "network of people and community resources that provide instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society's institutions" (Aragon & Kose, 2007, p. 118). *Comunitarismo* is a common value among Latinos that refers to the sense of unity and high level of frequent and consistent interaction within Latino communities. This value combined with *personalismo*, or an affinity toward personal relationships, often results in developing social support mechanisms that are needed to offset environmental, social, and institutional discrimination that negatively impact students' academic and professional development. Other values central to Latinos such as *respeto* and *simpatia* may play a role in social capital as well. *Respeto*, or having respect for and highly valuing the elderly or persons of authority in one's community and *simpatia*, the desire for harmony over discord, enable social support networks that are often lost due to immigration, to remain ensconced within Latino communities and families long after immigration to the U.S. Latino students are thus accustomed to networking and having a social network in place, on which they can rely for support and motivation to pursue in their aspirations.

Navigational capital refers to "skills of maneuvering through social institutions," such as universities and other academic institutions, which are traditionally not built nor developed to assist and facilitate the particular academic success of Latino students (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). Navigational capital may assist the growth of Latino students' academic invulnerability, referring to a student's ability to perform well academically when faced with stressful events and conditions (Alva, 1991; Yosso, 2005). Examples may include technical and relational skills and knowledge such as registering for classes, applying for financial aid, seeking on-campus housing, and purchasing textbooks (Aragon & Kose, 2007). Latino students need to use their navigational capital to get the information they need to facilitate these processes, which may, in

turn, reduce common stressors (i.e., financial support) that have been found to negatively affect Latino academic retention and completion.

Lastly, resistant capital refers to "those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that [challenge] inequality" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). Latino college students must access their resistant capital to persevere in their academic achievements, working against institutional and societal racism and the lowered expectations that a legacy of educational disparities often accompanies. Latino parents often immigrate and engage in strenuous work to provide a better future for their children. They may set aspirations that facilitate their children's ability to attend university, graduate, and have established careers so as to improve their quality of life. Furthermore, "parents of color are consciously instructing their children to engage in [behaviors] and maintain attitudes that challenge the status quo" (Yosso, 2005, p. 81).

University Context: The *Mi Casa; Mi Universidad* Initiative

The *Mi Casa: Mi Universidad* initiative was designed to address four key areas: student advising, faculty development, institutional research capacity, and the creation of programs targeting Latino students in need. While CSULB has several programs, focusing on underserved students, mainly those who are first-generation educated, linkage has not yet been established nor has detailed evaluation of their impact on Latino students been conducted. Further, few programs target Latino students exclusively and fewer have incorporated cultural assets and values as an integral part of the educational success strategy. Through the MCMU initiative, Latino students are linked to educational and student services resources to ensure that they receive assistance prior to becoming discouraged with their academic progress, often due to lack of timely progress to degree completion. Creative strategies to improve outreach efforts to the Latino students' families have been created to incorporate them more effectively and encourage family understanding of, and support for, students' educational experience while optimizing the integration of *familismo*, or family unity, in relevant project activities.

In an effort to impact the student advising experience, the MCMU initiative incorporates numerous strategies to ensure that Latino students, particularly those who are first-generation-educated, receive culturally relevant advising. Faculty and staff receive scheduled Latino-specific cultural competency trainings targeting both general education and faculty advisors. As CSULB continues its rapid growth and demographic shift in student

population, this training is crucial to the success of Latino students as many advisors are expected to provide services to a growing number of diverse student populations. Academic advisors are often the gatekeepers to academic information and linkages to services when students are most in need, and it is critical that they understand the Latino educational context and learn how to best manage and counsel ways in which students can integrate family and culture with those of an academic nature.

A summer program entitled Beach Learning Communities (BLC) was established with the assistance of MCMU faculty and staff to target Latino students requiring multiple-subject remediation in English and mathematics. As part of their BLC experience, students are invited to campus over the summer for instruction, mentorship by Latino students, staff, and faculty; student services orientation; and, linkage to the PED program.

Latino Students Demographics at California State University, Long Beach

CSULB is a large, urban, highly diverse campus located in south Los Angeles County that has rapidly grown from 26,277 in 1994 to be one of the three largest universities in California in 2010 with approximately 33,416 students. The Latino population at CSULB has undergone dramatic growth in the past decade, from 21% in 2000 to over 30% in 2010 (California State University, Long Beach, 2000; 2010). Long Beach is the most diverse city in the United States and is now approximately 41% Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010b). Additionally, Latinos represent over 53% of Long Beach Unified School District's student population (California Department of Education, 2011). Although CSULB's Latino student population continues to increase, Latino college readiness remains discouraging with 28.1% and 35.4% of Latino freshmen requiring single-area or multiple-subject remediation, respectively (Novak, 2011). Remediation, in combination with highly impacted classes and the need to work off campus (often full-time to provide economic contributions to the household) often results in six or more years spent on earning a bachelor's degree. Extensive time to graduation can cause denial of financial aid due to credit caps and frustration potentially resulting in drop out. Furthermore, the university experience is not often well understood by Latino families as college is often marketed to the individual student and not the parents through traditional school channels, particularly if parents are Spanish-speaking.

Promotores de Educación Program

The PED program was designed to train first-generation-educated high per-forming Latino students with the opportunity to work with peers in need of educational and personal support, provide them with tutoring and assistance, and link them with available university services. Although the *promotores* (lay peer educators) model is most often known in the U.S. for health educa-tion and outreach conducted in underserved Latino communities, throughout Latin America and the Caribbean *promotores* are also used for marketing, literacy training, in addition to their service impacting health status and access issues.

Promotores *Requirements for Participation*

Each year, a cohort of approximately 13 *promotores* are selected based on the following criteria: A grade point average (GPA) above 3.0; CSULB faculty/staff recommendations; knowledge of, and involvement with, CSULB pro-grams and Latino-specific groups; and, responses in a detailed bilingual screening interview. The PED program is to provide Latino students, many of whom are expected to work to contribute to their family's financial wel-fare, employment opportunities that facilitate on-campus jobs, while simul-taneously providing them with the skills and knowledge necessary to progress toward graduate school. Applicants who demonstrate characteristics as shown in Table 1 are sought to engage in training and half-time university-based employment in the program.

In addition to the aforementioned characteristics, potential *promotores* are interviewed to assess whether or not they demonstrate understanding of, and appreciation for, the cultural values and characteristics shown in Table 2, several of which were previously explained within the Cultural Capital section.

Utilizing the combined forces of the PED training and cultural capital, inclusive of their personal characteristics and experience and recognition of inherent cultural values, the *promotores* work to provide Latino student men-tees with advising, friendship, tutoring, confirmation and affirmation, and serve as network providers to link mentees with needed CSULB services and program connections.

Mentee Requirements for Participation

Students in need of PED services must have a GPA of 2.49 or below, identify as Latino, be willing to work at least one hour weekly with their designated

Table 1. *Promotores* Requirements for Participation.

Characteristic	*Promotores de Educación* characteristics defined
Role model	Can serve as a role model and has a history of role model-like experience in an academic or peer-like setting.
Resilient	Has demonstrated resilience and perseverance in terms of their academic endeavors and university skill-building experience.
Campus service experience	Can report having experienced use of CSULB-specific student services and/or involvement in clubs or programs.
Leadership experience	Has demonstrated experience working in a leadership and/or mentorship role with underserved or underrepresented students.
Resourcefulness	Displays resourcefulness when asked to respond to scenarios involving common situations that *promotores de educación* often confront.
Independent management of student cohort	Demonstrates the capacity to work independently in managing and mentoring a cohort of approximately 10 first-generation-educated Latino students who are experiencing difficulties in terms of academic performance.
Spanish-speaking	Fluent Spanish speakers and able to engage in Spanish-language dialogue with both students and their family members.
First-generation-educated	Are among the first generation in their families to attend a four-year college in the United States.
Strong academic record	Have and maintain a grade point average of 3.0 or higher.

promotor, and proactively access an array of campus services. Students with a 2.0 GPA or below are given only two semesters to rectify their academic situation, and institutional research shows that no less than 1,000 Latino students per semester are faced with disenrollment if unable to achieve a minimum of 2.0 within the two semester limit. Table 3 shows the number of Latino students with GPAs between 0 and 1.99 and 2.0 to 2.49 for each of the semesters of the PED intervention.

Based on data received from CSULB Institutional Research, across the five semesters an average of 9% and 14% Latinos are below a 2.0 and between a 2.0 and 2.49, respectively (see Table 3). Students below a 2.0 are the first to

Table 2. *Promotores* Cultural Values and Characteristics.

Value	Description	Example of how value may impact education	Potential effects of *Promotores de Educación* (PED)
Communitarismo	An understanding of the importance of forming and maintaining tightly-knit communities.	In a large urban educational setting the social support mechanisms and networks that exist in communities and families of origin are often lost in the university setting.	The PED program can meet the community formation needs that students often lack when coming to CSULB. Through events, cultural confirmation, and social support the student can begin to experience a sense of belonging.
Respeto	An inherent consciousness and appreciation of the role of the elderly and persons of authority in the overall societal and community schemata.	Faculty are viewed as figures of authority and the student-teacher relationship may be lacking. Furthermore, some university personnel may erroneously interpret *respeto* as student submissiveness or passiveness.	The PED program can assist students to be more assertive in participating in the classroom, requesting information on their academic progress, and in building relationships with university faculty and staff, without being discourteous and losing site of the *respeto* they were taught at home.
Trust/Confianza	The ability to gain the trust of, and discern the trustworthiness of, an individual and his/her intentions.	Building *confianza* in a large environment like a university, where everything and everyone is unfamiliar and different, may be a daunting task. Requesting help from peers, faculty, and/or staff could be challenging without a foundation of trust.	The PED program provides students with a familiar face and cultural confirmation, which allows students to relate to the *promotores* and build a bond of trust more readily. The ability of the *promotores* to gain the *confianza* of each member of their mentee cohort is essential if their collective work is to be effective in targeting the principal needs of the students seeking services.
Familismo	The recognition of the importance of family unity within the lives of Latinos. *Familismo* implies an appreciation of the potential family structure and support has in terms of providing emotional and social support throughout the student's educational experience.	Support systems that honor cultural characteristics are often not an integral part of the university environment. Students must establish their own web of individuals and services that can provide them with emotional and social support.	The PED program becomes the student's family within the university and provides them the emotional, social, and academic support they need for success. Additionally, *promotores* and other resources within the PED program link students to the different services and student groups that can further provide needed support and affirmation.

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Value	Description	Example of how value may impact education	Potential effects of *Promotores de Educación* (PED)
Personalismo	An understanding of the value placed on personal vs. institutional relationships.	An institutional relationship is close to nonexistent with most students. Often referred to as a commuter school, students can drive in and out of campus without interacting with faculty staff. Thus, services are not sought and utilized, and personal relationships in the university may be minimal.	*Personalismo* is synergistic with *confianza* in that these values develop simultaneously and enable the *promotores* to gain the trust necessary to refer mentees to services that may be of an increasingly sensitive nature, such as Counseling and Psychological Services.
Simpatía	This cultural value recognizes the tendency to desire agreement and harmony over disagreement and discord and has both fundamentally positive and negative aspects.	At times mentees may perceive that they cannot assert themselves respectfully without threatening relationships and their newfound social and academic place within the university structure.	Similarly, with *respeto*, PED can guide students to be assertive and confront their academic needs. The PED program teaches students how to advocate for themselves without creating discomfort and disagreement.
Presentismo	An understanding of the value placed on the "here and now." *Presentismo* can both positively and negatively impact a student's course of study.	Students may be presented with negative opportunities within personal and academic life that can potentially derail their schedules and course of study. Conversely, a student may decide to remain on campus for a particular guest lecture that may be beneficial for his/her course of study.	With the assistance from the PE program and linkage to the Learning Assistance Center, students learn increasing time management skills and gain academic prowess and experiences of success. They can better judge how to respond to last-minute opportunities within the larger realm of life and academic progress.

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Table 3. Latino Students at CSULB Qualifying for PED Program from 2009 to 2011.

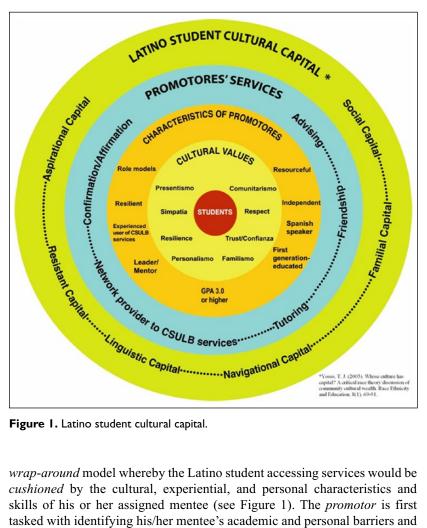| Semester	Spring 2009	Fall 2009	Spring 2010	Fall 2010	Spring 2011
Total students	8,043 (100%)	8,457 (100%)	7,576 (100%)	8,452 (100%)	8,595 (100%)
Below 1.99 GPA	870 (10.82%)	615 (7.27%)	800 (10.56%)	620 (7.34%)	766 (8.91%)
Between 2.0 and 2.49 GPA	1,225 (15.23%)	1,066 (12.60%)	1,269 (16.75%)	997 (11.80%)	1,157 (13.46%)
On or at risk for probation	2,095 (26.05%)	1,681 (19.88%)	2,069 (27.31%)	1,617 (19.13%)	1,923 (22.37%)

Note. GPA = grade point average.

be targeted for services through emails, postings to BeachBoard (the university's e-learning environment), and other strategies. Following recruitment of students on active academic probation, outreach to self-reported Latino students with GPA between a 2.0 and 2.49 GPA is conducted using similar methods. Until a quota of 100 students is met, PED continue active recruitment throughout campus, advertisements in campus newspapers, targeted announcements in courses with low completion rates, and periodic announcements in Latino-specific campus clubs. Once students apply for and commence receiving PED services, they continue to remain eligible until their semester-specific GPA reaches above a 2.5 for two consecutive semesters. Mentees can also become ineligible if they have more than three consecutive unexcused absences without notifying their respective *promotor*.

Integration of the Promotores de Educación Model into the University

Given the large and dynamic nature of CSULB, the integration of the PED program required several developmental steps prior to its establishment and integration. First, project faculty and administration worked with human resource staff and the Center for Career Development to create job descriptions and hiring practices that met university requirements, while simultaneously working closely with Academic Advising and Institutional Research to ensure that the targeted groups were those most needing PED services.

Following a year of development and campus consultation, a model to describe the characteristics, recruitment, services, and linkages offered by the PED program was developed and several presentations were conducted throughout the campus community to facilitate a greater understanding of the program and optimize targeting and recruitment of mentees. Using concepts derived from Yosso (2005), the program was conceptualized as a

Figure 1. Latino student cultural capital.

wrap-around model whereby the Latino student accessing services would be *cushioned* by the cultural, experiential, and personal characteristics and skills of his or her assigned mentee (see Figure 1). The *promotor* is first tasked with identifying his/her mentee's academic and personal barriers and facilitators and directly linking the student to the most appropriate services while creating *confianza* (trust). As the mentee begins to access the services recommended by the *promotor* a greater sense of academic accomplishment begins to develop and the mentee's self-confidence and efficiency in seeking academic and personal assistance increases.

To facilitate the *promotores'* understanding and ease in navigation of campus-based services, four categories of services are presented: programs, university services, events, and student services (see figure 2). The overall
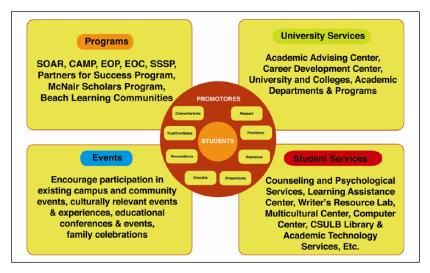
Figure 2. Programs, university services, events and student services.

goal of the PED program is twofold: To provide the Latino first-generation-educated student with culturally affirming and relevant mentorship and linkage to campus services, while facilitating a greater understanding and response to the needs of first-generation-educated Latino students among the CSULB campus community.

The PED program culminates in the mentees sustaining a GPA of above a 2.5. As the mentee's GPA improves, he/she is effectively linked to an array of student services, programs, and activities and has developed a network of academic, professional, and social support that overrides his/her need for the services provided by the PED program. From this point, the mentee can acknowledge a readiness to discontinue the PED program, which renders the former mentee's position available to a new Latino student in need. By meeting these particular goals, successful implementation of the PED program is demonstrated.

Description of Promotores de Educación Training

A training program was developed in collaboration with Academic Advising whereby each PED mentor cohort would receive a training component that was similar to CSULB student advisors. As the 5-year project evolved and a greater amount of knowledge was gained regarding the Latino student

experience at CSULB, the PED training changed to better respond to Latino student needs. Throughout the duration of the program, the training included several presentations by various student services, such as counseling and psychological services and the learning assistance center, to enable PED mentors to better familiarize themselves with the available services and key staff members from each campus office. PED training thoroughly reviewed both the requirements expected from the *promotor* and the potential needs of the Latino student at CSULB. Due to the fact that the training was provided to the *promotores* twice during the academic year: Once prior to each of the fall and spring semesters, timely adaptation to any changes in the university environment was possible. Both trainings aimed to educate the *promotores* about teaching and mentoring techniques, professional development, gate-keeper courses (i.e., prerequisite courses characterized by high-enrollment and low-student-success rate), and content specific curriculum outlining the services provided and programs offered.

The 2-week fall training was conducted in a total of 9 days for approximately six hours per day. The initial portion of the training consisted of an orientation for the newly hired *promotores*. The orientation functioned as an introduction of the *promotores* to the project staff, the HSI initiative and its role at the university, and also facilitated network building within the *promotores* cohort itself. *Promotores* were also familiarized with guidelines regarding their academic performance and need to maintain no less than a 3.0 GPA to remain in their positions. Following the orientation, the *promotores* were then provided with background information to the overall issue of Latino educational experiences in the United States, California, and CSULB. They discussed literature articles that focused on topics such as the history of Chicana/o education, deficits in Latino education, and the increased need for programs like the PED to promote Latino educational success. The *promotores* were also exposed to the experiences, challenges, and successes of AB 540 students (i.e., undocumented students enrolled at CSULB), and the services that are available to them (AB 540 Resource Guide, 2010).

Furthermore, in the fall training the *promotores* were familiarized with all of the campus resources that may be of benefit to Latino students. Key campus services include the learning assistance center, center for community engagement, financial aid, academic advising, health resource center, multi-cultural center, career development center, counseling and psychological services, disabled student services, and pre-baccalaureate advising and support services. As the *promotores*' exposure to campus services increased, they were trained and guided as to how they could effectively link and mentor Latino students to facilitate successful use of services and programs.

Simultaneously, *promotores* benefited in networking with the several campus staff and faculty. The summer training was, thus, completed with more of a focus on the *promotores* and their academic careers and ability to balance school, work, family, and friendship networks. By the end of the training *promotores* were prepared to serve as much-needed role models for struggling Latino students.

The spring training was tailored around professional development and advancement for the *promotores* themselves, which in turn could be relayed to their mentees. Topics for the spring training included: dress for interview success, career development, and writing at the graduate level. Additional focus was also given to working with juniors, seniors, and super seniors (those who have been at the university for over six years).

Summary

The *Promotores de Educación* program addressed an important need in developing culturally competent peer mentoring programs for Latino students. Over the course of the project, the PED program was developed in terms of its underlying theoretical framework, curriculum, and participation requirements for both Latino mentors and mentees and establishing linkages to the available resources on campus. Further, the program was successfully integrated into CSULB following a series of steps that involved coordination among project faculty, administration, human resources, and other departments. Lastly, recruitment and evaluation goals were met for all participants in each cycle throughout the project years. While the focus of the current article is on the development and integration of the PED program, a subsequent article aimed at describing the results of the PED program will draw on a sample of over 600 Latino participants at CSULB.

Implications

In recent years, the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics was renewed (The White House, 2010). While this initiative affirms the current administration's interest and commitment to expanding education opportunities and improving education outcomes for Latinos, the achievement gap between Latino students and other ethnic groups remains wide. This gap is particularly noticeable when Latino students are compared to their White and African American counterparts in college and university enrollment and bachelor's degree completion. At the college and university level, few education programs attempt to incorporate an understanding of the

cultural context and structural environmental issues in the conceptualization of the Latino educational experience. Existing programs may undergo slight adaptation but their development is not centered on the Latino educational experience. Furthermore, although cultural relevance is often discussed as an important element of educational programming, the incorporation of cultural values in institutional programming is seldom observed. Cultural relevance is often justified through event planning, special presentations on racial/ethnic celebratory months, and other events, which although important, do not weave a cultural approach and understanding into the way in which a university engages students in services and *does its business* so-to-speak. Furthermore, the cultural strengths and resilience brought to campus by first-generation-educated Latino students are seldom valued by colleges and universities and the monolithic culture of academia, despite the diversity of disciplines, is often allowed to flourish.

This article describes the development of a peer education program established at a major urban university in Southern California. The program was designed to provide Latino students with peer support, tutoring, and linkage to university academic and student services, so as to improve the educational experience of Latino students, leading to improved academic performance and timely graduation. Peer mentorship programs such as the PED can provide Latino students with opportunities to learn from high achieving peers who have undergone similar contextual experiences (e.g., being a first-generation college student) to achieve academic success. Additionally, the program was developed to provide high performing Latino students with educational and mentorship training, on-campus employment, and visibility and recognition within a large urban campus environment. Until the U.S. is able to rectify the scarcity of Latino degree completion at the doctoral level, role models for Latinos in academia will remain difficult to encounter on college campuses. The PED model offers a way to highlight Latino students, increase academic success, and integrate cultural relevance and educational affirmation into the fabric of the college experience.

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