



Culturally Relevant Programming for Spanish Speaking Families

Adriana Fernandez

Student Engagement Specialist

Graduate Student, Educational Leadership

CSU Channel Islands

For many of us who grow up in Latino households, going to college is not just our decision, it is a family decision. Family is a strong component of our culture, it is at the root of our traditions and our morals. As Latinos/Latinas pursuing a higher education, anything we do with our lives has to be supported by our *familia*. Being first-generation students, having a strong educational background has been instilled in us from a very young age. Sadly, many parents do not know how to navigate the U.S. education system, which can result in a disconnection between parent and student. As students, we oftentimes find ourselves alone in navigating elementary, middle, and high school. To many young Latinos/Latinas college may, at times, seem unattainable. Parents do not know about college prerequisite courses, college admissions, or SAT and ACT testing. They do not know what it means to be college-eligible. Yet, our parents' support remains and becomes our greatest motivation to achieve success. When some of us "make it" and have the opportunity to attend a four-year university, often our cultural norms may impede us from achieving this success (Tornatsky, 2002). To maximize the potential for Latino/Latina students to attend college, educational institutions must reach parents early to share information regarding how to best support their students (Tornatsky, 2002).

I have a passion for working with Latino families, because I know the great influence they have on first-generation Latino students and their education trajectory. My goal in life is to give back to my community and to provide families the adequate resources and tools to better support their students. I was very privileged to have a supportive family. From a young age, they were highly involved in my education. My mom would always attend my parent-teacher conferences, would go to my school events, and made sure to do homework with me. However, as I started progressing in school, my mom was able to help less, though her support was still evident. She was my biggest cheerleader and would help me seek out programs that would give me the help she could not, which was how I came to attend college. Once I had been accepted to various colleges, she let me decide which institution I would attend. All she said was "*que vallas con dios.*" I understand that I have been fortunate as a first-generation, low-income student, and that inspires me to educate parents about the college-going process and the importance of their support.

Literature

Expectations and Aspirations

Families have a tremendous influence on students throughout their education. Indeed, familial actions, behaviors, attitudes, and their expectations predict a child's success during their schooling (Albin, 2015). If parents keep their academic expectations high, students are more likely to be successful in all aspects of life (Albin, 2015). Parents who tend to have high expectations see educational attainment as a link to future happiness and satisfaction in life (Goldenberg, 1995). Many of our family members immigrated to the U.S. to ensure that next generations attain a secure future, a job that pays well and, overall, a much better life than they had. For that reason our parents push us towards greatness, so we do not have to suffer the hardships they faced in their lives. The only way to achieve this "secured future" is by going to school, graduating and, eventually, benefitting from a college education. But along the way, our parents do not want us to lose our traditional values and morals. Many believe that ultimate educational success is a combination of meeting both academic and moral goals (Reese, 2001). But how are we to achieve educational success when both students and parents do not know how to navigate the education system?

Parent Support and Involvement

For many first-generation students, their parents do not have much schooling. It becomes difficult to bring homework home that neither mom nor dad can help with. Thus, many parents of first-generation students provide moral support rather than academic support (Reese, 2001). Indeed, many students place significant importance on emotional support and the motivation their parents have provided. According to Zarate (n.d) in an article on the involvement of Latino/Latina parents in an academic setting, students expressed how important it has been to have their parents sit by them while they do their homework or to be involved in their school's Parent Teacher Association (PTA). I have the same opinion, since my mother stopped helping me with my homework in the fifth grade due to her little schooling. However, her support and motivation were essential for me through high school, pushed me through college, and has kept me afloat throughout graduate school. While Latino parents make it a point to be involved in their student's educational lives, much of their involvement falls outside traditional understandings of what parental "involvement" typically looks like (Lopez, 2001). My mom may not have been able to help me with calculus, but her words of encouragement were all I needed to help me persevere through my educational career.

Parent Knowledge and Going to College

In order to encourage first-generation, Latino students to attend college, it is imperative that we search for ways to get parents involved in the process of going to college (Lopez, 2001). We must share with parents basic knowledge about higher education, expose them to the different pathways available to students, and about the various requirements to make their student college eligible. Studies have shown that lack of knowledge about higher education is significantly more evident among parents of first-generation students than those who come from families where a parent has attended college (Tornatzky, 2002). By educating families from the very beginning, the college application process is demystified. Parents who see college in their student's future support them toward that goal irrespective of their income and other assets (Albin, 2015).

Culturally Relevant Programming for Spanish Speaking Families

Adriana Fernandez

Parent Programming

University Culture

University Culture is one of the programs that has been created through a combination of CSU Channel Islands' (CI) Hispanic-Serving Institute (HSI) grants. The mission of University Culture is to promote a university-going culture in Ventura County. We partner with local high schools, community colleges, and community-based organizations to provide resources to achieve academic success. Most importantly, we advertise and provide our services in Spanish in order to more broadly reach out to local families. Having this crucial information delivered in Spanish, effectively ensures parents know how to support their students through the education pipeline.

Curriculum

What makes our parent programming unique, is that we meet parents where they are and cater to their needs. This means that we go to our families. We do not expect them to come to us because we know they play many roles. We go into the field – both literally and figuratively – on their lunch breaks, and attend meetings where parents are present both in school and at work. We offer a variety of workshops throughout the academic year and adjust them depending on the needs of parents. The most popular workshops include the following: *Ayuda financiera* where we examine the different types of aid available for students, and break down the cost of attendance hoping to show our parents that money should not be a barrier to attend college; *Beneficios de un bachillerato* focuses on exposing parents to the benefits of receiving a bachelor's degree and making them aware of the different paths their students can take in order to receive their degree; *Las diferentes opciones universitarias* addresses the different systems of higher education and discusses the requirements within each, and the most popular of all workshop is titled *Como apoyar a tu hijo/a* which focuses on how parents can better support their students throughout the education pipeline. Our program focuses on the provision of moral support. Though parents may not be able to support their student academically, they are able to provide moral support crucial to creating a college-going culture.

Noche de Familia Outreach

In Spring, our program hosts a culminating one-day conference known as Noche de Familia Outreach. We invite local families and their students to visit CI to gain exposure to a college campus, and to participate in a variety of workshops. Participants are split into different tracks: parents, high school students, and middle school students. Parents participate in the workshops highlighted above. In addition, they attend a special panel where local parents who have supported their students through higher education provide advice and affirm the value of our programming. Students are offered similar workshops but from a student perspective. The one-day conference culminates with CI's Noche de Familia which is filled with live music, food, and parent/faculty/student testimonials. Many families in our community look forward to this event. Every year attendance continues to increase. For example, in our first year we welcomed about 30 participants. By contrast, now on our third year, 163 family members were hosted.

Culturally Relevant Programming for Spanish Speaking Families

Adriana Fernandez

Data

At the conclusion of Noche de Familia, parents complete a questionnaire available in Spanish to assess their experiences (Appendix A). We ask parents whether they feel more knowledgeable, empowered, and excited for their students' journey ahead. Salient themes that emerge from the data collected include: *seguridad, tranquilidad, y agradecimiento*.

After participating in the program, 98% of parent attendees reported feeling more secure and confident with themselves and with the support they are providing their students. They also indicated that they felt more at ease with the thought of their student going to college. Parents were able to gain knowledge on financial aid, college admissions, and realized that going to college is not unreachable as they might have thought previously. Lastly, every parent indicated their appreciation for programming geared specifically to meet their needs and delivered in their language. They stated that receiving information in Spanish made it easier for them to understand and process. In addition, they appreciate interacting with staff members who share some of the same cultural and familial experiences; it gives them hope that one day their students will achieve the goals they set for themselves.

Educating parents is the first step to ensure the college-going culture of first-generation Latino/a students. Parents have the desire to see their students succeed but they need the knowledge and guidance to fully support their student. Having culturally-relevant programming makes a difference to our community, and should be offered as part of the fulfillment of CI's Mission as we advance our commitment to community outreach. Every time I host a workshop for parents and by witnessing the positive implications of our programming, I leave feeling grateful for the work that I do.

About the Author

Adriana Fernandez is a graduate student in the Educational Leadership Program in the School of Education at CSU Channel Islands. She received her bachelor's degree from UC Davis where she double-majored in Chicana Studies and Spanish. She currently works at CSU Channel Islands as a Student Engagement Specialist where she and her students strive to create a college-going culture in Ventura County. Being an Oxnard native, Adriana has a passion for giving back to her community and empowering students to achieve their greatest potential.

References

Albin, A. (2015). Children more likely to succeed academically if parents believe they're college bound. Retrieved from University of California website: <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/news/children-more-likely-succeed-academically-if-parents-believe-theyre-college-bound>

Goldenberg, C., & Gallimore, R. (1995). Immigrant Latino parents' values and beliefs about their children's education: Continuities and discontinuities across cultures and generations. *Advances in Motivation and Achievement*, 9, 183-228.

Lopez, G. (2001). The value of hard work: Lessons on parent involvement from an (im)migrant household. *Harvard Educational Review*, 71(3), 416-37.

Culturally Relevant Programming for Spanish Speaking Families

Adriana Fernandez

Reese, L. (2001). Morality and identity in Mexican immigrant parents' visions of the future. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 27(3), 455-472.

Tornatsky, L., Cutler, R., & Lee, J. (2002). College knowledge: What Latino parents need to know and why they don't know it. Los Angeles: Tomás Rivera Policy Institute.

Zarate, M. E. (n.d.). Understanding latino parent involvement in education. Los Angeles, CA: The Tomas Rivera Policy Institute.

Appendix A

2018 Noche de Familia Outreach Evaluación de Evento

¿Cómo se enteró de este evento? _____

Seleccione uno:

Por favor seleccione uno.

- Padre/ Guardián
- Estudiante
- Miembro de la Comunidad

evalúe su nivel de satisfacción

Por favor evalúe su satisfacción con cada uno de los temas. **Seleccione una respuesta por cada línea.**

Muy de acuerdo De acuerdo Indeciso En desacuerdo Muy en desacuerdo

COMO RESULTADO DE ESTA PRESENTACION:

Me siento seguro/a o animado a asistir a la universidad	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Aprendí algo nuevo	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Investigaré a fondo sobre la Universidad	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Asistiré eventos en el futuro de University Culture	<input type="checkbox"/>				

¿Sobre qué temas le gustaría aprender más?

Por favor evalúe cada de los servicios siguientes. **Por favor solo seleccione uno por línea.**

Tengo un gran deseo de aprender más de esto Tengo algún deseo de aprender de esto No deseo aprender sobre esto No tengo ningún deseo aprender sobre esto

Proceso de Admisión Universitaria	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ayuda Financiera y Becas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Información sobre transferirse de un colegio comunitario	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Exploración de Carreras & Universidades	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Participación Universitaria	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

¿Qué le agrado más del evento de hoy?

¿Cómo podemos hacer este evento aún mejor?