

BARRIERS TO BELONGING:

Latinx Students at UCSD

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Mexican Migration Field Research Program

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Executive Summary

As of 2021, the University of California-San Diego (UCSD) is on track to become a “Hispanic-Serving Institution,” meaning that 25% or more of its students identify as Hispanic or Latinx. While UCUES, the broad undergraduate survey run by the university every two years, shows that Latinx students are increasingly meeting their peers academically, there remain major gaps in feelings of belonging.

This report draws on 366 online surveys at UCSD (210 of them with Latinx students) and 45 in-depth interviews of Latinx students at UCSD between January-March 2021 to identify key barriers to belonging for this population. We seek to identify the specific practices that undermine belonging in the classroom, the institution, and extracurricular activities. We also consider how financial barriers intersect with many Latinx students' identities and can inhibit belonging across these areas. In conjunction, we look for spaces of inclusion and opportunities for improvement.

Key Findings

Most Latinx students feel excluded and isolated at UCSD.

Gaining support from empathic faculty and joining student organizations can help students feel more belonging.

Latinx undergraduates feel **most** belonging when:

In the classroom:

- Faculty express empathy and acknowledge the specific needs of Latinx students
- Faculty directly reach out to students or explicitly make themselves available
- Faculty use straightforward terminology
- Faculty provide time in class for students to interact with one another and faculty

In the institution:

- Latinx faculty members are widely represented
- Class sizes are small, allowing students to seek out support and connections
- Latinx students have access to transitional programs like Summer Bridge that uncover the “hidden curriculum,” build mentorship, and help students feel like part of a community

In student life:

- Students see other Latinx students in student organizations
- Student organizations have few hurdles or fees for participation

Financial needs intensify Latinx students' exclusion.

Many Latinx students are struggling financially, causing stress, increasing isolation, and making it hard for them to participate in academic and social activities. These barriers are especially acute for transfer students, commuters, and students who live with their families. Students need greater financial support to enable full belonging. It is also important to address shame and stigma around financial needs.

Contributors

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Introduction: “Access Ain’t Inclusion”

Scholars widely recognize that Latinx students experience significant challenges during their transition into college. These issues often overlap with the barriers experienced by transfer students, first-generation college students, and low-income students. Our paper builds on research by Anthony Jack (2020), in combination with critical race theory (CRT) and Latinx critical theory, to recognize that, as Jack puts it, “access ain’t inclusion.”¹ In other words, admitting Latinx students into universities does not mean they will feel integrated into college campuses.

Educational sociologists widely recognize that Latinx students experience significant challenges during the transition into college and throughout their higher education career. Higher education is deeply stratified—with white, higher-income students often predominating in colleges. These issues often overlap with barriers experienced by low-income students, as many Latinx students face financial struggles. The added experience of coming from an immigrant and/or undocumented background often exacerbates feelings of financial insecurity.

Universities often make symbolic efforts towards diversity by recruiting students from underrepresented minority groups, while doing little to change the everyday institutional practices that reinforce such students’ feelings of exclusion and isolation. The University of California-San Diego (UCSD) is a good example. UCSD considers itself to be an emerging Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI), meaning that it is on its way towards having a population of at least 25% Latinx-identified undergraduates. As of fall 2020, approximately 22% of full-time undergraduate students identified as Latinx. In recent years, Latinx students have made gains in closing academic gaps with white students.

Nevertheless, according to surveys run by the University of California (the UCUES), as well as in our own research, a significant majority of Latinx students still *feel* like they do not belong at UCSD. In our January 2021 survey of 210 Latinx students and 156 non-Latinx students, for instance, when we asked Latinx students if they felt “UCSD supported [their] needs as a student and a person,” nearly 30% disagreed. Similarly, when asked how connected Latinx students felt to their peers, 28% felt very disconnected, 23% felt somewhat disconnected, and 15% felt they were neither connected nor disconnected. Fewer than 5% felt very connected to peers.

This report investigates what is happening *on the ground* at UC San Diego to make Latinx students feel excluded, while enabling a few Latinx students to feel they belong. We do this by taking the perspective of Latinx students themselves. The report is written by undergraduate students (and one graduate student), most of whom identify as Latinx. We used our own positionality to connect with and interview fellow Latinx students as well. By comparing moments and spaces where Latinx students feel *included* to those where they feel *excluded*, we identify opportunities for institutional improvement through the experiences and perspectives of Latinx students at UC San Diego.

We begin by evaluating the extent of Latinx students’ feelings of exclusion at UCSD. We then identify practices that undermine or increase inclusion in the classroom, the university, and extra-curricular student groups. We find that Latinx undergraduates feel

¹ Jack, Anthony Abraham. 2020. *The Privileged Poor: How Elite Colleges Are Failing Disadvantaged Students*. Harvard University Press,

greatest belonging in the classroom when faculty express empathy for Latinx students and acknowledge their specific needs; faculty directly reach out to students or explicitly make themselves available; faculty use straightforward terminology; and faculty provide structured time in class to interact with other students and faculty.

They feel greatest inclusion in the institution when 1) they see Latinx faculty members widely represented; 2) class sizes are smaller, allowing them to seek out support and connections; and 3) they have access to transitional programs like Summer Bridge that uncover the “hidden curriculum,” build mentorship, and help students feel like part of a community.

In student life, Latinx students feel most belonging when they see diverse representation in student organizations, including other Latinx students. They also feel more belonging when organizations avoid creating barriers or fees that limit student participation.

Finally, we show how financial needs intersect with Latinx students' feelings about UCSD in cross-cutting ways. We find that most Latinx students are struggling financially, causing stress, making it hard for them to participate in academic and social activities, and increasing isolation. These barriers are especially acute for transfer students, commuters, and students who live with their families. Therefore, students need greater financial support to enable full belonging.

Research Methods

This research was conducted by nine undergraduates and one graduate student at UCSD, under the auspices of the Mexican Migration Field Research Program in 2020-2021.

Our main results come from 45 in-depth interviews conducted with undergraduate students at UCSD between January-March 2021 over Zoom. We drew the respondent list from a set of 376 brief, online surveys of undergraduate students at UCSD, gathered online in January-February 2021 using Qualtrics. The survey was sent out to all academic departments and undergraduate advisers at UCSD, asking them to forward it to their students. The questions in the survey collected demographic information and brief responses about belonging and financial needs. It also asked if respondents would be willing to participate in an anonymous, one-hour, in-depth interview with a peer. We included anyone who identified as Latinx/Chicanx and was enrolled as an undergraduate at UC San Diego as of January 2021. Of respondents, 210 identified as Latinx/Chicanx.

Of the 210 Latinx students who took the survey, 67% had one or more immigrant parents, and 13% were immigrants to the US themselves, with 11% born in Mexico. Almost three quarters (73%) were first-generation college students, and 34% had parents with less than a high school education. When they were in high school, 26% said they had a household income under \$20,000 and 48% between \$20,000-40,000. Only 5% of respondents reported a household income over \$80,000. In other words, most respondents came from families that qualified as low income, and many fell below the federal poverty line. At UCSD, 20% were transfer students, and 53% held jobs.

Part 1: Belonging in the Classroom

As illustrated by Anthony Jack,² and supported by our findings, disadvantaged Latinx students often enter higher education without a clear understanding of how to connect with authority figures, especially in the classroom. Some faculty and institutional practices sometimes reinforce this sense of exclusion, while others help cultivate a more welcoming classroom environment. The Latinx students we interviewed stressed that they felt most at home when professors explicitly expressed empathy, made themselves available, and created times and spaces for connection.

Our respondents also highlighted elements of classroom belonging that go beyond the individual faculty level. Specifically, they emphasized how important and encouraging it felt to see Latinx (as well as Black and Indigenous) faculty hired. Several talked about finding more interest in the materials and feeling more confident approaching professors with similar backgrounds to them. Other students underscored that they felt most at home in smaller classes, whereas large classes made it harder to build connections and seek out support.

Faculty warmth, encouragement, and availability

Many of the students we interviewed emphasized that it really helped them feel a sense of belonging when professors acted “approachable.” They defined acting approachable as showing kindness, directly reaching out to students, using straightforward terminology, offering structured time to get to know one another, and positively encouraging students. By contrast, when faculty acted aloof, it was harder for students to feel they belonged.

In our interviews with Latinx students, more than half raised the issue of faculty behaviors, and more than two-thirds described classrooms or situations where faculty made them feel excluded by acting aloof. Most of those also explicitly said that such professors were not very friendly and did not feel approachable.

For instance, “Luciana,” a fourth-year, Mexican-American student, described how unapproachable professors made it difficult for her to connect outside of the classroom. Luciana grew up in a diverse neighborhood in Southeast San Diego, with immigrant parents whom she described as hard-working and supportive. Despite a stable environment at home, her high school was often troubled with gang violence and a looming police presence. However, the high school’s counselors and staff helped to guide Luciana to enroll at UCSD. Luciana arrived at UCSD with the expectation that it would be academically rigorous; however, she felt excluded when professors did not use straightforward terminology or offer students positive encouragement in the classroom. She shared a story of one particularly difficult professor:

Yeah, I never liked her office hours. Maybe that could have helped [me feel more included], but I remember I didn't feel comfortable. Plus, the way in which she spoke, she always had this like vocabulary. I've always thought “Why can't you just make vocabulary accessible and as understandable as possible? Why do you have to use all these big words that go over my head sometimes?” So, she spoke like that, and I just didn't want to be

² Jack, Anthony Abraham. 2020. *The Privileged Poor: How Elite Colleges Are Failing Disadvantaged Students*. Harvard University Press,

around her.

In this quote, Luciana suggested that the professor's use of complex jargon made her feel uncomfortable. As a result, Luciana began avoiding the faculty member and never went to office hours or asked questions if she needed help with difficult material. Luciana's experience highlights how some professors make it harder for Latinx students to develop important skills, like networking, which can assist them long after they graduate.

Similarly, Carla, a queer woman who migrated from Mexico, underscored the negative effects of professors who don't express compassion for the diverse barriers and situations students were facing outside the classroom. Carla stressed how inflexible rules created extra burdens for students like her. She explained:

I have come across some very tactless professors that really don't take into consideration like "Hey, sometimes students work," or sometimes students have different challenges, you know? And sometimes even professors can make some really off-handed comments. So yeah, I think there just needs to be a more conscious line of understanding, like hey your students come from diverse backgrounds and face diverse challenges. And it's important to understand who you may be affecting when you, for example, just have a "no tolerance" policy per se. We get it: it's college. Like, you're supposed to rise up to the challenge and accept that. But there, for example, might be students that are struggling with deadlines because they have other issues; they have work, etcetera.

As Carla highlighted, professors' inflexibility and unwillingness to acknowledge competing demands on low-income students made her feel misunderstood. Furthermore, Carla felt punished (with lower grades) for having outside circumstances that made her unable to meet rigid and inflexible deadlines.

As both she and Luciana suggested, a lack of compassion from faculty sometimes made Latinx students withdraw from authority figures and miss out on possible connections. These lost connections and relationships can be vital to creating a system of support for students who are not familiar with the cultural or scholarly "lingo" (that may be familiar to white and upper-middle class faculty and students) and who already have difficulties outside the classroom.

By contrast, students had far better experiences of academic belonging when their professors actively created spaces of approachability. For example, Fernanda, a first-year Mexican American transfer student, told us that when she was struggling with academic stress and the lack of in-person connection during the Covid-19 pandemic, one professor held open-ended office hours, which helped her feel she belonged. Fernanda grew up in the Bay area and had immigrant parents who emphasized the importance of hard work. She attended Community College to better prepare herself for the expectations of higher education. After her admittance to UCSD, which she described as a highly competitive environment, she worried about handling the academic rigor. However, this professor eased her transition and alleviated her worries and stresses. She described:

So last quarter [Fall 2020], I had this professor ... She was just really, really nice; she was very responsive. Every Wednesday night [she] would have this

Zoom meeting, and you could just jump in and hang out with her and talk with her. Or even just her office hours - you didn't really have to ask about her class. So, I joined it maybe once or twice, but the one time I did it was a pretty stressful week. I think it was the week of elections. And she had even sent an email like, "If you're under a lot of stress about this week, you can ask me for an extension for these assignments." When I was in that Zoom call with her at night, I just told her "I don't really feel like talking. I just feel like I just need companionship right now. I'm pretty stressed out." And she was like, "Oh. Yeah - Just be here, hang out. Like, we're just talking about anime or just talking about movies," so it was all right. She understands where we're coming from, too.

Fernanda's professor did relatively small things: she sent an email during a stressful national event; she held office hours where students were not required to discuss scholarly topics; she explicitly offered extensions to students during difficult times; and she verbally expressed empathy for students. Yet these small actions made a world of difference for Fernanda, helping her feel at ease even in a single visit to office hours.

Others also talked about how professors could create an inclusive classroom environment by being aware of the stresses students were carrying (such as the election or outside jobs), creating flexible deadlines and policies, inviting students into open-ended space for connection and discussion, and verbally offering positive encouragement. In the process, they support students' personal and academic growth as well as their self-esteem about college. This helps students like Fernanda overcome what is called "imposter syndrome": the idea that they are not qualified to be at UCSD. In turn, students may become more engaged in their own academic journeys.

Testimony from another student, José, suggests that professors can also bridge such gaps just by warmly inviting and encouraging students to attend office hours. José was a first generation Latinx student who generally felt very included in the classroom. In contrast to students like Luciana and Carla, José made an effort to attend office hours whenever he felt professors were welcoming enough. Once José got to office hours, he found professors generally to be very approachable and understanding – but he needed encouragement to make that initial leap. José described:

There's been a good number of professors who I've really enjoyed the way they interact with students in the lectures themselves. And for those professors I've, for the most part, made an effort to go to one of their office hours and just talk with them and, for the most part, they've all been very welcoming. They get really happy to just be able to talk with students, and they're very open to sharing and just spending some time to talk with them. And that's really helped me just feel that I'm comfortable enough to go to my professors. I think, so far, my office hours interactions have been really good and have positively impacted me.

Students like José may gain important feelings of connection and belonging from attending office hours, perhaps even more so than other students who arrive at UCSD feeling like they already fit in. However, as the evidence here suggests, the barriers to students taking initiative to go to office hours are high. Professors can warmly invite students to attend office hours, making this a more approachable opportunity for them.

The Importance of Small Classes and Latinx Faculty

Faculty are not alone in supporting students' belonging. Administrative decisions – like who to hire and how to set faculty-student ratios – also weigh on students' abilities to feel included. In our interviews, about 40% of students brought up institutional issues related to belonging, most of those for negative reasons. Specifically, they emphasized the large student to faculty ratios and the lack of faculty diversity.

Class Sizes

According to US News and World Report, the student to faculty ratio at UCSD is 19:1, and about 30% of all classes have more than fifty students. However, many of the students we interviewed found themselves in much larger classes (sometimes of hundreds), impacting their ability to connect and reach out to professors.

For example, Amalia was a third-year undergraduate studying Literature and Theatre who grew up with a twin and six siblings in San Diego. She went to a charter school prior to enrolling at UCSD and described the guidance counselors at that school as pivotal to placing her on track to attending college. For her, higher education was a path to escape from her hometown and secure a better future for herself and her family. After accepting a full ride scholarship, Amalia faced difficulty adjusting to the competitive academic environment at UCSD. Specifically, she highlighted the feelings of exclusion and disconnection she felt when attending a large class. She remembered one example where she felt especially isolated:

So that was probably one of the biggest classes I've ever taken- it was like 200 students and one professor, and it was really hard to get that one-on-one connection and just ask questions, even if they had office hours. I just felt so disconnected because I didn't know much about the professor. The professor didn't know much about me, so we didn't - the professor didn't really know what my needs are, you know, or what specifically I was struggling with when I didn't understand the material. So that was really, extremely hard.

Amalia's story indicates how the size of classrooms can have an impact on students' ability to feel heard and understood, and even to attend office hours. Amalia felt that her experience would improve dramatically if UCSD limited class sizes, making it easier for her to develop relationships with her instructors. She went on:

I know for a public school it is really hard to get that ratio with students and professors, but it's really important that the students are comfortable in the environment they're learning in. And I know they have office hours and like TA's for the extra support, but I feel like there's nothing more important than the person that's teaching and the person that's learning.

Amalia felt that large class sizes made it too difficult to connect with the person she was learning from. As research shows, being able to connect with professors is critical to students' ability to succeed academically and network into jobs beyond college.

Juliana, a student from Brazil, reinforced Amalia's sentiments, in her description of lecture halls filled with hundreds of students but taught by a single professor. For her, such lectures felt like a barrier to inclusion in the classroom. She explained:

Going to these like very large lecture halls that feel just super impersonal, you know because you have like 300 students in one classroom and I was

used to maybe, what - like 30 people in a classroom. Being in the huge lecture hall, where you're not really directly speaking to your professor, a professor does not know you, right? Unless you really can make an effort to go to office hours and keep in constant contact with them.

Juliana underscored how crucial it was for Latinx students to have direct contact with professors, in order to help the class feel welcoming and personal. With large class sizes, learning can become sterile and impersonal. Without solid relationships with instructors, Latinx students feel less comfortable speaking to authority figures and asking for help, impeding their academic performance and success. Large student to faculty ratios can make the classroom especially impersonal – and therefore exclusionary, making it harder for students to ask questions with confidence, seek out personal connection and receive guidance.

Faculty diversity

A second area of institutional need is to improve faculty diversity. According to data published in 2018 by the UCSD Office for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, only 9% of all faculty members and 27% of career staff come from underrepresented minority groups. These numbers are indicative of a lack of diversity in the university's hiring practices, which affects Latinx students' ability to see themselves represented by professors and the staff that support them.

Representation within an institution allows students to feel accepted and heard. When this important element is missing, we often see students suffering from what is called imposter syndrome: a pervasive feeling of self-doubt and insecurity despite evidence that the person is skilled and successful.

Imposter syndrome was a prominent topic during many of our interviews, especially when students walked into classes for the first time that had few other people who looked like them. Many students felt most class discussions were dominated by white male students, and they saw such students as more empowered and confident to speak out and raise their hands in class. By contrast, many people of color, women, and other marginalized students, especially Latinx students, felt excluded and disempowered. This perception of white male dominance is especially ironic since white male students are not the dominant population at UCSD.³ Professors play an important role in helping students overcome imposter syndrome by encouraging a friendly and supportive in-class environment.

Natalia was a Central American first-generation fourth-year student studying Sociology. Her mother, who raised Natalia and her brother as a single parent in the inner-city Los Angeles, worked long hours as a caterer and instilled the importance of a strong work ethic and education. However, despite Natalia's mother's efforts to shelter her, their predominantly Latinx neighborhood was heavily impacted by gang activity, which permeated Natalia's school life. Her high school also lacked college preparation resources like guidance counselors or AP classes, and as a result she decided to attend community college to prepare before applying to a university. As a result of the lack of resources available to her, the transition period from high school and community college to UCSD was difficult for Natalia. She emphasized how having a Latinx professor who also

³ See this site for UCSD student demographics: <https://datausa.io/profile/university/university-of-california-san-diego#enrollment> and this site for dashboards on diversity among undergraduate students: <https://diversity.ucsd.edu/accountability/index.html>.

grew up in the inner city helped her overcome her hesitance to talk to professors and attend office hours:

He was a really great professor; he was brown, and he was Latino. He really spoke of coming from those inner-city schools. It spoke to me because I definitely picked up that we had a similar background, and I approached him about it through office hours one day after our course ended. I just was like, "Hey, I just wanted to ask you kind of something personal. I feel like you kind of came from a similar background as me, is that your case? And how did you get here? You know, how are you in your masters? Because, everyone in my city, and my background we're not doing this, so- how did you get here?" And he kind of told me about it all, and I was like "Wow!" It just like made me feel so full to see that he had a similar background as I did.

Natalia highlighted how seeing her own experiences represented in faculty made her feel that she belonged and that such accomplishments were possible for her as well. Having a Latino professor helped her to feel a sense of community and inclusion, which contributed to her sense of comfort in connecting with him in office hours. More broadly, faculty of color can teach the material to Latinx students in terms informed by their own experiences overcoming obstacles.

Ultimately, Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) professors can use their own personal experiences and perspectives to better connect with Latinx students and guide them through the unique barriers they are facing. Ximena, a first generation Chicana student, also emphasized the inclusionary effect of seeing diversity among her instructors. She confided:

I was always afraid to go up to professors, I still am. But I would go up to the professor in her office hours and I felt she was just really approachable. As another Latinx woman, I was like this is the first Latinx woman professor I've had. I just was like "Oh my God like let me talk to you!" I just felt really connected and I was - I wanted to take more ethnic studies classes, so I just started taking more ethnic studies classes, and I declared another ethnic studies minor, and that was the first time that I really felt engaged at UCSD.

For Ximena, having a Latina professor not only helped her overcome her fear of speaking up, but also allowed her to connect with the material being taught in class. This experience even guided her to take on a minor that felt both academically and personally fulfilling, illustrating the way in which having representation among professors can eliminate barriers for Latinx students.

In the 45 interviews we did, approximately half of respondents brought up their experiences with professors at UCSD. Of those who expressed a positive opinion of faculty, over a quarter of those opinions directly related to having a class taught by a professor of color. Latinx students emphasized the importance of having diverse faculty to create more inclusion on campus. Students also reported increased openness to seeking out academic or personal guidance by finding common ground in shared experiences. With more BIPOC professors, students felt better represented and understood by their instructors.

Part 2: Extra-Curricular Inclusion

In the second section of the report, we consider how non-academic programs and student organizations can support Latinx student inclusion at UCSD. Specifically, we look at academic transition programs and support spaces and at student clubs and organizations.

On college campuses, the demanding academics and competitive environments can often lead students to self-doubt, loss of motivation, and struggles involving mental health. In fact, mental health disorders affect students at alarming rates. In one report, 11.9% of students struggled with anxiety and 7-9% with depression.⁴ Unfortunately, such feelings are especially common among students from marginalized communities, including Latinx, first generation, and low-income students at UCSD. Therefore, finding an escape from the pressure of university is essential to improving or maintaining college students' mental health. Having a community outside of the classroom can be an escape and a support system for those struggling in their personal and academic lives. Such communities can take the form of student organizations, sports, jobs, or even taking part in resource centers such as cultural centers, women's centers, or counseling centers.

A recurring theme in our interviews was the importance of finding a community that can support you even when it feels like your academic life is falling apart. For the 45 Latinx students that we interviewed, school was always a priority. But finding a group of people with whom to “escape” often represented the difference between feeling a sense of belonging at their college or not. Students' sense of belonging also shaped their ability to succeed academically. Of our forty-five participants, 44% linked their mental health to their involvement in student organizations, clubs, and related campus resources.

Access to such resources offers an important form of support outside of the classroom environment and the individual connection between students and instructors. Although UCSD offers a variety of options to engage Latinx students in non-academic life, inclusion and belonging are still an issue in this arena. Approximately one third (16 of the 45) of our interviewees discussed accessibility of clubs and resources. Of those 16, only two felt very connected to UCSD, campus life, and peers. The other 14 range from neutral to somewhat and very disconnected. Despite the benefit that these programs offer to Latinx students, challenges arise in program accessibility, capacity, and dissemination.

Academic Support and Transition Programs

Among our respondents, we found that on-campus academic support and transition programs were extremely helpful in building a sense of community and belonging, gaining confidence to approach professors, and feeling prepared to enter UCSD.

There are various such programs at UCSD. For example, the Office of Academic Support and Instructional Services (OASIS) helps empower first-generation college students in a multitude of areas like academic, personal, and professional. Many interviewees reference the Summer Bridge program (under OASIS) and the Chancellor's Associates Scholars Program (CASP) as integral resources that helped make campus more accessible to them. For instance, Summer Bridge is a program that supports incoming

⁴ Pedrelli, Paola et al. 2014. “College Students: Mental Health Problems and Treatment Considerations.” *Academic Psychiatry* 39.5: pp. 503-511, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40596-014-0205-9>.

first-year students who are the first in their families to attend college. During the summer before school begins, the six-week program introduces students personalized connections, teaches them to seek out opportunities, and thereby helps them transition into university life. Many respondents emphasized that without Summer Bridge, they would not have known about many campus resources and programs, or about where to seek academic or personal support (CAPS, the Zone, etc.)

For example, José was a second-year, first generation Latinx student studying social science. José grew up in a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood in Southeast Los Angeles, and he emphasizes how hard-working both his mother and father were, often only having time to see one another over dinner. Inspired by his parents' work ethic, José knew from a young age that education and attendance at a four-year University was important. Initially, being a first-generation student made José worry about whether he would be equipped to deal with the difficulties and rigor of college. He emphasized the significance of Summer Bridge in helping him overcome this concern:

We got access to supplemental instruction. I think it was very, very beneficial. The other class that I took was called contemporary issues so it's just learning about some of the challenges that students face, you know going into secondary education, especially when it's their first year, so we did that program and it was really nice, because we also got assigned an academic transition counselor for the entire school year.

For José, a comprehensive program like the Summer Bridge became a vital tool in easing the transition to college. Having professors who were mindful of José's status as a first-generation student and having counselors to aid in the transitional period gave him vital support. Jose highlighted how the program took multiple steps (i.e. collaboration with faculty, guidance counselors, and students) to ensure it was well-funded and effective.

Another example of the impact of transitional resources was Luna. Luna was a fourth-year student in International Sociology and Ethnic Studies, and she, too, highlighted how pivotal the Summer Bridge program was in helping her adjust to college life:

It really helped. Just adjusting into that lifestyle of what it's like to be a college student. In terms of class, it also helped to prepare you mentally for how many hours you're going to need to put in, and your method of studying, what times are best for studying, where to study, getting comfortable with the campus, figuring out where everything is, where the library's at, the resources the school offers. So that program really helped me out a lot.

Whether it be learning the layout of campus or good study habits, through programs such as Summer Bridge, UCSD can help Latinx students develop life skills that are vital for their personal, professional, and academic success.

In addition, these programs also provide a community for underrepresented students. For instance, Catalina, a second-year student at UCSD, was studying sociology. Catalina credited Summer Bridge for helping her find a community of Latinx and low-income individuals during her transition to college. She said that even now, two years later, those people were still her closest friends. She explained:

I think the greatest sense of belonging, would be like the summer and fall quarter of my first year, so 2019 because that's when I did Summer Bridge.

And from Summer Bridge and all that, I had an amazing group of friends, and during that fall quarter, we got together pretty much every day ... We were studying all the time, and I had a group of I guess nerds. We all wanted to just study together, so we would study together and do homework together, so I think that's also why I did really good my first year because all we did was study, and so I think that was definitely like my greatest sense of belonging.

As Catalina emphasized, community and academic success were closely intertwined – with *both* encouraged by programs like Summer Bridge. Many other students spoke in similarly glowing terms of Summer Bridge and its central role in shaping their experiences at UCSD. Penelope, a 22-year-old first-generation sociology student was one. She recounted how Summer Bridge connected her to a Latinx mentor and other Latinx students, and helped her realize “oh okay I’m not alone,” especially when it came to her self-doubts and fears. She went on, “I felt supported in the sense that we all felt out of our comfort zone.” Finding people who were going through the same thing, and mentors who knew what it was like to be a Latinx student in a system that didn’t, was critical to helping Penelope feel more at home.

While programs like Summer Bridge do critical work, they cannot be successful without an array of ongoing, on-campus support programs into which students can segue for the remaining four years.

On-Campus Support Communities

On-campus support communities can also help students feel a sense of belonging at UCSD, making campus organizations and resources more accessible. For instance, the Raza Living-Learning Community (TRLLC) located in Eleanor Roosevelt College (ERC) allows for new and continuing residents at UCSD to engage with the Latinx community and develop a deeper understanding and connection for their experience in the United States. Likewise, the Raza Resource Center offers community-building, mentorship, and education.

These programs support their students with faculty mentorship, providing professional and academic opportunities, while being a support system for many Latinx students. They also help Latinx students navigate higher education, by helping to uncover what is called the “hidden curriculum:” the implicit demands of UCSD. They also encourage students to attend office hours and network, and they may provide legal support or financial aid. Our respondents emphasized that these extra-academic programs were crucial to their success.

For example, Jasmine, an 18-year-old first-generation low-income student, felt intense imposter syndrome when she got to UCSD. She described:

I think that one of the biggest things was just imposter syndrome of like “oh, I don’t belong here.” Or even when I went to my first few programs of my scholarship, I was just [thinking], “Oh my gosh. I don’t deserve it.” Or “I shouldn’t have it” and things like that. I just kind of felt it was going to be hard to find people that I could relate to, in a sense. What really helped is the community where I live right now. I applied to a living-learning community for Latinx students. So, that really helped because I feel like every person that I live with also understands what I’m going through.

Only after she moved into a Latinx-identified living and learning community could Jasmine feel a sense of acceptance and begin to believe in herself.

Similarly, Ximena, a first-generation, fourth-year political science major, credited the Raza Living and Learning community with helping her overcome a deep sense of isolation. She contrasted her feelings the first year – when she did not have such a community – with her feelings after moving in:

I felt really isolated and, at first, I didn't know that I needed to find a community. I just kind of was going about life. I would kind of walk through the Library Walk and creep on what all these organizations do... "do I need to pay? Or what is everything?" ... I was kind of "I don't belong here". After my second quarter or third quarter, I went through it. I was like "Oh my God! I don't know what I'm doing here! I shouldn't even be here!" It wasn't until my second year that I started to get more into the community I was in. I lived my second year in the Raza Living-Learning community in ERC. I felt kind of empowered. I felt like the people coming in, we're not really seen, and in this community, they were. I was kind of reconnecting with my family.

Getting involved with a group dorm made up of other people who had gone through the same isolation and exclusion allowed Ximena to overcome those feelings. As she built a community, she felt less alone and overcame her feelings of doubt.

Similarly, the Raza Resource Centro was an important space that around seventy percent of our interviewees said they knew they could go to talk to someone who understood their ethnic background. Even those who had not been to Raza appreciated that there was such a community available to them. Other resource centers – like the women's center - also provided a safe space for students to drop in whenever it was convenient and form connections. In turn, more than half of the interviewees attributed lasting friendships to connections formed at a resource center. Whether befriending someone coincidentally visiting the Zone at the same times, or bonding over a shared struggle at OASIS, students said these were the places they felt the greatest sense of belonging. Building friendships in these permanent spaces was a lot more accessible than finding friends within student organizations because there is no pressure to be at meetings at a certain time.

While such programs are incredibly important to students, they are not always available to people who need them. Because of limitations on funding, many programs can only reach a subset of the students who would otherwise qualify and stand to benefit. Even though we found that such programs were vital to Latinx students' feelings of inclusion, many Latinx students fell through the cracks.

For example, Ariana, a fifth-year undergraduate Mexican American student at GPS, talked about her experience with the Triton Community Leadership Institute (TCLI) as a privilege that not all of her peers could access. Ariana reflected:

Yes, I think that my experience at UC San Diego was entirely different, and I cannot stress this enough, [than it would have been] if I did not join the program TCLI ... They had already planted the seeds of community and embracing the first-gen identity and understanding that it made us resilient and that we could be leaders. My whole first year I had a mentor who was also first generation, and I had monthly community events. And program

coordinators made themselves available and showed interest when we talked about identity. But I also remember my friends who tried getting into the programs and had the same qualifications but were not able to participate in the program because it was limited in space.

Like others who participated in similar programs, Ariana benefitted enormously from the community-building, encouragement, and mentorship offered at TCLI. But she recognized that other qualified students could not get in.

Indeed, several respondents had trouble accessing campus resource centers and Latinx support programs, describing long wait times, program caps, and limited staff. For example, many students described UCSD's Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) as valuable, but nearly impossible to access due to the few appointments available, long wait times, and understaffing. Luciana, for instance, said, "I didn't use CAPS even though I should have, because it was recommended to me a few times. But just, you know, they're really busy." Ultimately, Luciana did not think it was worth it to try seeking support there. Similarly, Catalina—whom we mentioned above—was experiencing depression and needed to leave school. Yet even for her, accessing UCSD CAPS was difficult, prompting her to seek off-campus resources instead. She described:

I chose to go back home because when I tried to go to CAPS and stuff ... it was a long wait time. Because there's so many students and it's free for us and everything. So, it's really hard, I think, for us to actually access it. I think that's why I just chose to go with the off- campus option.

Luciana and Catalina's stories are examples of how the issues of accessibility and mental health can be connected and how these and other issues can "pile up" and contribute to the barriers Latinx students face to integrating at UCSD.

In addition, difficulties also arose related to awareness and advertisement of these programs among the general student body. Camila, a 27-year-old first year transfer student, explained that as a new student it felt overwhelming to know exactly what support was available for qualifying candidates:

I think professors and certain resource centers try their best to make sure that students get the most out of their experience, but there's so much going on at UCSD that it's kind of impossible for an incoming student to know everything that's available to them. I feel like you have to really go out of your way to find the resources. I think they can do a better job of, you know, of advertising to students that this is what you can do at UCSD or this is who can help you at UCSD. Because there's a million different websites, and I have no idea.

For Camila, looking for support programs catered toward Latinx students was hard in the face of so many options at a big public research institution like UCSD. In a context of excess information, it can be difficult to know where to look without guidance. This, compounded by the limited admittance, resources and programs can be restricted in the scope and depth of their impact.

Student Organizations: Lowering Bars to Entry

In what follows, we evaluate which practices by student groups help promote real inclusion, and which practices undermine Latinx students' feelings of belonging. Of the students who participated in the study, 38 (84%) had some sort of involvement in a club,

student organization, and/or resource center on campus. Out of those, more than half talked about how representation within these organizations helped them overcome imposter syndrome.

Of the students we interviewed, eight found groups where they felt welcome, safe, and able to access resources. For some, like third-year student Amalia, work offered one such space. Amalia explained that when the pandemic hit, she felt depressed being idle. She said it was hard to find motivation to do anything. A job offered something to fill her free time and take her mind off her idleness.

In another example, Catalina (quoted above describing the community she built in Summer Bridge), credited her sense of belonging at UCSD to her active involvement in student organizations. She added that after Summer Bridge, she began searching for other ways to get involved. Catalina had been a leader in high school, founding a club to help access scholarship opportunities. At UCSD, she became the social chair and then co-president of the First-Generation Student Alliance. This group helped her further build community and a sense of purpose. She described its goals:

Our mission is just to create a community and be a resource to first-generation students. So, we've just been trying to get the word out there and make sure that first generation students know that there are resources for them on campus but they're hard to find. So, we have socials that they can see because, like I said, we thought we were just a small community, but actually there's a large population of first-generation students on campus, and we just don't really know about each other, because it's so hard to find each other. So, we have socials so they can connect with other first-gen students, and we have panels so they can meet with people who have resources for them, and build connections and stuff.

Creating opportunities for students like her was one of many ways Catalina planned to give back to her community. Catalina considered her involvement in the First-Generation Student Alliance a key support when she went through periods of depression. For her, the “support system” of a strong institution with friends was critical to overcoming practical challenges (as in financial struggles) and those involving mental health.

Although joining an organization is meant to foster team building and closeness, many Latinx students we interviewed struggled to connect with such student organizations. Some of them spoke about not seeing other Latinx students represented in the organizations they wanted to join, reinforcing their feeling of isolation and imposter syndrome. Others said that when organizations had requirements – such as fees or mandatory meeting times – these acted as barriers for low-income students and those with jobs. Such requirements made the resources, network and friendship that come with a group inaccessible.

Some student organizations acted aloof or stated that they only wanted to serve certain types of students. For instance, Alexa had a passion for theater and wanted to join the drama club. When she emailed an organization, she never got a response about how to join or when the info sessions would be. Then, when she finally found a meeting, “I was really disappointed when I went to this little meeting, they had for the theater Community or the theater majors and minors [because] these people are really snobby and pretentious. So, I just didn't want to be rejected in that sense, so I didn't try anyway.” In short, Alexis felt that students in the group were displaying a kind of cultural capital based

in more privileged backgrounds than hers. As a result, Alexis dropped the idea and never joined an organization. She also *felt* rejected.

In other cases, student organizations required a time commitment that was not feasible for students who also held jobs. For instance, Antonio was interested in music and DJ'ing and wanted to join KSDT's DJ program. But, working all the time, he could not get as involved as he wanted. Other respondents told similar stories, emphasizing that they could not commit to student organizations that had time-consuming initiation processes or active member requirements. While such "bonding" events could offer opportunities to get to know other students, requiring that members attend such events in order to remain active in a student organization deterred those with work conflicts. In turn, working students found that in many organizations, the requirements were unattainable, making it harder for them to integrate into the rest of the student body.

Likewise, Thiago wanted to be involved in campus life and sought out student organizations that aligned with his academic interests. But he quickly found out that he could not qualify due to time constraints. A fifth-year physics major with a double minor, he explained, "When I'm not a student, I'm honestly probably just working. I have class Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and I'm at work, Tuesdays and Thursdays." For his first two years, he worked in the dining halls and lived on campus; later, he picked up a different job that made more sense for his commute. As a result, he had to sacrifice extracurricular activities.

As UCSD becomes an HSI, inclusivity must rely on a comprehensive and well-funded support system of programs outside of the classroom that can help Latinx students overcome barriers--not only to academic success but also to building community.

As detailed below, the barriers to Latinx student inclusion inside and outside the classroom intersected deeply with financial concerns. For many students, this made racial exclusion almost inseparable from financial exclusion and the kinds of practical barriers that came with having to support themselves.

Part 3: How Financial Insecurity Reinforces Exclusion

In the third and final section, we show how Latinx identity and belonging deeply intersect with students' financial (in)security. We found that basic needs are going unmet for many Latinx students, which affects their ability to succeed academically and outside of the classroom. Due to financial insecurity, Latinx students often must work while attending school, giving them less time to spend on their studies or build relationships with faculty and peers. Our respondents also discussed related stresses such as food insecurity, unstable housing, the struggle to balance work and school, and the inability to afford necessary academic programs, among other challenges. Financial stress undermines mental health by creating uncertainty, contributing to imposter syndrome, and forming communication barriers between Latinx students, staff, faculty, and peers who could be potential sources of support.

A significant portion of the people we interviewed faced stress and insecurity because of financial difficulties. This included paying for their tuition, school necessities, rent, groceries, and living expenses as well as finding themselves in positions where they must take on insurmountable levels of debt to afford higher education. Such challenges force students into a constant state of [survival mode](#).

We found that students were most likely to face intense financial insecurity if they came from a low-income family; were a first-generation college student; came from an immigrant family or they were an immigrant; had undocumented family members (especially parents) or were undocumented themselves. These factors disproportionately affected the Latinx student population, who are more likely than other students to be low-income and first-generation.

If UCSD truly wants to “serve” Hispanic and Latino students, it needs to expand not only empathy but also the kind of comprehensive funding that low-income Latinx students need to belong. To put it succinctly: if UCSD wants Latinx students to belong, it *must* address the crushing financial burdens that most of them are shouldering while in college.

The Burden of Jobs while in School

To make ends meet, many Latinx (and other) students must work while attending school. Of the 210 Latinx students we surveyed, 102 (48.57%) worked for pay, and 74 (72.5%) of those worked more than 10 hours per week. Having a job makes it difficult for students to succeed academically and socialize with peers, because they have less time to spend on studies and socializing with peers.

For instance, Antonio, a fourth-year transfer student, came from a low-income family in which both of his parents were undocumented. Due to being the child of undocumented immigrants as well as a first-generation college student, Antonio had to overcome extreme financial barriers to attend UC San Diego, including testing and application fees. Once Antonio arrived at UCSD, even with financial aid and student loans, he was forced to work a full-time job to afford the high costs of tuition, rent, and even affording food. He described:

I'd be broke sometimes, too, and I'd be like, “Fuck, I can't even buy anything to eat, too, cause I'm broke. I gotta pay rent and stuff like that.” ... So, when I got here, they would make me work shifts that—so there's a cleaning crew in the morning of like three dudes, and we go in at like 5:00

AM. So, I remember, a lot of my classes were, you know, like 11:00 AM to 1:00 PM or like 11:00 AM to 12:20 PM and then I would have class from like 5:00 PM to 8:00 PM, you know. So, I really couldn't work during the day, so I would have to do a lot of those morning shifts, going in at 5:00 AM and stuff like that and then go to school. And I noticed that affected me, because I would be waking up at 4:00AM then going to work from 5:00 AM to like 1:00 PM, depending on the day, and then I'd go straight to school. And I'd be on the bus, I'd be falling asleep, my head would be bobbing. Or in lecture I'd be falling asleep because I had been up since 4:00 AM. And that work was laborious. It wasn't like that normal stuff you'd do at In-N-Out. Like I was cleaning up, lifting stuff. It was just laborious, so my body would take a toll. And I would be tired, and sometimes I wouldn't have time to eat. Like I was like "I gotta go" – because I'd take the bus to school because I live right around the corner from the UTC mall. So, to save money, I didn't want to drive because it was right there. So, I'd hop on the bus.

As Antonio detailed, having to work created an extra burden that heavily reduced his time for sleeping and eating, leaving him barely functional during his "second shift" at school. Between these impacts and the laborious nature of the job, as he put it, "my body took a toll."

Many other Latinx students had similar stories. For instance, Ximena described: "When I would be on campus, it was like 'Do I want to eat today, or do I want to have gas in my car?'" The pattern illustrates an alarming point: poverty and working while attending school forces many Latinx students to face a daily decision in which they must sacrifice basic necessities. Students often had to choose between buying groceries, buying gas, or paying for rent. Many also lamented the high costs of school supplies (especially textbooks). In a constant state of survival, students often found they had to forego required course materials, food, sleep, and other things necessarily to their academic success. Such impossible tradeoffs often left them tired, hungry, or without course materials and – in consequence – unable to learn.

Another fourth-year student, Stephanie, whose parents immigrated to the United States, detailed how her financial insecurity and work schedule directly affected her ability to enroll in classes and graduate on time. She explained:

Um, so finances have been a big struggle, the whole fact that I had to drop the class because it interfered with my work schedule, and then not knowing if I can graduate this spring or not, that's a big struggle ... But other things like, for example, the writing series at Marshall College ... sometimes I have my own, I guess, issues with that, because like textbooks, for example, if you're like me and your parents aren't supporting you that much through college [then] sometimes getting textbooks can be a struggle. And then, it makes you wonder, like, how does that play into the concept of 'scholar and citizen' that this college is promoting?

Stephanie had to drop classes that conflicted with her work schedule and as a result, she was worried she would not meet the requirements to graduate on time. As she put it: how can one be a "scholar citizen" when the university itself is putting up barriers to completing your degree?

Students like Stephanie are often forced to miss class or drop classes altogether, making

it difficult to graduate on time. Many change majors, for a variety of reasons, but often due to the intensity of the courses and requirements or to the kind of daily availability they require. In short, most aspects of students' academic lives are impacted by their financial constraints, making it extremely difficult to succeed—at least not without a high toll on the student.

The Isolation of Commuter and Transfer Students

It was especially difficult for commuters and transfer students to feel they belonged. Students who commuted faced high transportation costs and logistical difficulties to attending class and connecting with peers. Meanwhile, transfer students – many of whom transferred as third years to save money on the first two years of college – had to adapt into UCSD far more quickly than other students, at a stage when students who entered as first-years had already adjusted. Importantly, Latinx students are disproportionately represented in these categories, reinforcing the kinds of exclusions that many of them felt based on race and identity.

To save money on UCSD's skyrocketing housing costs, many students lived at home and commuted to school. We found that commuting created a distinct disconnect and low feelings of belonging. Overwhelmingly, students who lived off campus took the bus, doubling the amount of time they spent commuting between home and campus. Many such students said they could not afford the high cost of gas or parking on campus.

Mariana, a low income, first-generation college student whose parents immigrated to America from Mexico, described:

For me, one of the more difficult things about being at UCSD was that I couldn't afford living on campus. It was so expensive. My third year I lived in National City, and I had to commute from National City. And I would have to plan my days around going to school, just because we didn't have access to parking structures. For me it was primarily that I had to get there early. I had to park my car in the back lot, and then I'd have to take the bus in and then at the end of the day, I would have to take the bus again and wait until 7:00 or 8:00 PM just to be able to get home.

Mariana's commuting process involved multiple different vehicles and extended her day from early morning to late in the evening. Ironically, as a fourth-year student during the Covid-19 pandemic, Mariana found that learning remotely made her life easier. As she put it, "Well, I think the option to be remote - I think it provides access."

Many students choose to attend community college for the first two years and transfer into UCSD in their third year, to adapt to the experience of college and save money on tuition and fees. However, transfer students have less time to adapt to UCSD, form connections, pursue opportunities, and get to know students and faculty. As a result, they often experience disconnection and social isolation. Respondents who were transfer students and lived off campus often expressed feeling both physically and socially distanced from campus life and other students.

For instance, Antonio the fourth-year undergraduate mentioned above, was a transfer student and had to live off campus for financial reasons. This combination made it hard for him to form a strong support network at UC San Diego. He explained:

I lived both years off (campus). So, if I wanted to live on campus, I had to pay like 12 grand, and I didn't want to go into debt. So, you know, that—it's

hard. Like, as a transfer student, it would have been better to live on campus. Because, as a transfer student, it's hard to make friends. You only have like two years to make the most of it. And then, you don't know how to work the UC system for the most part, you know. So, you're just like "okay, how do I make friends?" You just go from like a small classroom setting to like a big-ass lecture halls, you know.

Living on campus was prohibitively expensive for Antonio, so, wanting to avoid debt, he chose to live off campus. This decision had consequences, which Antonio was all too aware of. As a first-generation student, Antonio was further disadvantaged in that he was unfamiliar with dominant college culture and the UC San Diego system.

Among respondents, transfer students found the transition into UC San Diego easier when they had a strong support network on campus. Those who quickly formed friendships and communities at UCSD described their transition positively. With support from established friendships and communities on campus, these students were better able to navigate campus resources and, in many cases, reported that this support eased their culture shock and imposter syndrome. By contrast, respondents who were not able to connect to organizations, groups, or other students felt isolated and disconnected from UCSD.

For example, Alexa was born in Arizona to parents from Mexico and grew up in Los Angeles. As a transfer student at UC San Diego, Alexa felt frustrated with the limited opportunities the university provided to help with her transition. She believed UCSD was doing little to make campus more inclusive for students like her. She described:

To be honest, I don't know what the things are that they're actively trying to do to include the whole student body. But from what I - how I see it, it's like, they work so hard to make it known that UCSD is an inclusive school, but I feel like the effort to make it inclusive is not really there because I literally don't know what they're trying to do to make it inclusive. I understand there's like these little events where you get to meet people and stuff like that, but I don't know. I feel like, as a transfer, it was just so hard to get acclimated and then it's even harder when you don't even belong to any group. It's like, what do you do?

Dejected, Alexa explained that while initially she expected UC San Diego would facilitate better inclusion, her experience at the university had not born out that expectation. Now in her fourth year, Alexa had not yet found a group where she felt she belonged and did not feel adjusted to the university. Other than the university's social events, Alexa had not experienced efforts from UC San Diego to help students connect. She recognized that certain affinity groups existed but felt entry into such groups was achieved only through personal connection with someone already in that community. She was saddened by this lack of social connection and went on, "I don't feel like I got the real quality experience. I feel *robbed*, especially right now. I feel *robbed*." While Alexa began her first quarter hoping to form important connections and lasting friendships, she was disappointed that UC San Diego did little to help make that possible. She added:

I guess all of these [student] communities were already formed [when I got to UCSD], and it just seemed like it was—I mean, I know that I could probably obviously be a part of a new one, but it just seemed like too much work. And even when I reached out... I still didn't feel included.

Even when Alexa made the effort to find community on campus, she still found it difficult to connect to other students, because she felt like everyone already knew each other.

Several other respondents also felt that UC San Diego did not designate enough funding to support resources and programs intended for transfer students, especially Latinx transfers. Students expressed frustration with what they perceive to be inadequate communication about resources and opportunities. These respondents described feeling lost trying to access resources, feeling disconnected from university faculty and students, and hoping for more concrete and direct guidance from UC San Diego. Many of our respondents were unsure how to navigate the UC San Diego system and did not feel comfortable in certain university spaces, making it hard even to ask for help.

These experiences speak to a systemic issue—the role of racism and socioeconomic exclusion in inhibiting access to institutions of higher education and, by association, privilege and financial security. The current structure of UCSD makes it nearly impossible for low-income Latinx students (i.e., most Latinx students) to succeed, perpetuating a cycle of inequality and wealth disparity. To get the same privileges as their white, middle-class peers, many Latinx students must overcome insurmountable barriers.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As UCSD seeks to become a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), officially meaning it has more than 25% Latino students, it must do more to ensure that it is actually *servicing* its Latino student. As this report has underscored, and systematic survey data from UCSD also reveal, Latinx students express widespread feelings of isolation, imposter syndrome, and un-belonging. To better understand what can be done, we have identified a series of patterns both inside and outside the classroom that intensify Latinx students' exclusion or might be used to better include such students.

Throughout this report, the Latinx students we spoke with highlighted the following key areas for improvement, which we frame in the form of recommendations:

- 1) Faculty should use straightforward terminology, provide space for students to connect to one another and faculty in and outside of class, and warmly invite students to office hours, which can help set the stage for greater connection. This can facilitate an environment where students feel comfortable articulating what they are struggling with.
- 2) Faculty should offer flexible policies and deadlines to accommodate major current events (such as elections and Covid-19) as well as students' widespread needs to work.
- 3) Faculty should actively seek to understand the financial struggles and racism facing Latinx students and empathize with students about these things. Preparation might include mandatory cultural sensitivity training similar to sexual harassment training.
- 4) UCSD administrators should ensure all students have access to small classes early on in their UCSD career, to enable them to get to know faculty and one another.
- 5) UCSD administrators should prioritize hiring Latinx faculty and other faculty members from other underrepresented groups *at least* in proportion to the

representation of such groups among student body. Such individuals can be critical role models for underrepresented students and help them connect to the institution as a whole.

- 6) UCSD administrators should expand transition programs, particularly Summer Bridge, to all first-generation students, as these programs played a critical role in helping students find community and understand the “hidden curriculum” at UCSD.
- 7) UCSD administrators should provide more expansive transition support for transfer students to help them bridge the large gaps from community college and quickly build community.
- 8) UCSD residential and student life should expand institutions like the Raza Resource Centro and the Raza Living Learning Community, which are a critical service for students to feel they belong.
- 9) Student organizations should institute a no-qualification system, dropping membership fees and attendance requirements at specific events, to accommodate low-income students.
- 10) Student organizations should evaluate the representation of students from underrepresented groups and seek to mirror the composition of the student body (or better).
- 11) UCSD administrators should include Latinx students in decision-making about how to allocate promised federal funding for becoming an HSI.
- 12) UCSD staff should improve outreach to Latinx students to disseminate information about financial support, work opportunities, and non-academic support initiatives. The burden should not fall on students who are already overwhelmed and unfamiliar with the university system.
- 13) UCSD administration should radically expand financial support to the most struggling students, to help them overcome burdens associated with rent, purchasing food, commuting, and work and ensure students are not forced to forsake food, shelter, or sleep to be able to learn.

Our evidence suggests that such policies would dramatically improve not only Latinx students' feelings of belonging at UCSD, but also their mental and physical health and their academic performance. If UCSD truly wants Latinx students, it has a practical and a moral imperative to more pro-actively promote their inclusion.