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LATINX STUDENTS' SENSE OF BELONGING: ROLE OF IDEA-RELATED COURSES

ALONDRA FAUDOA

49 Pages

Although there is continuing growth in higher education for Latinx individuals, they are disproportionately less likely to finish college compared to students of other ethno-racial groups (Snyder, 2018). Sense of belonging has been found to be a crucial component for student success, especially for Latinx students. The purpose of the following qualitative study was to gain an in-depth understanding of Latinx students' sense of belonging on campus using Hurtado and Carter's (1997) theoretical framework and explore how Latinx students' sense of belonging is related to interactions within classes designed around an Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Action (IDEA) framework. This study used a secondary data set that was collected starting in Fall 2019 and a primary data set that was collected in Fall 2022. This study features 24 Latinx undergraduate students and explores the following themes: transitioning from hometown to a campus environment, hostile climate on campus, and ways to increase sense of belonging. In addition to highlighting factors that impacted students' sense of belonging, we found that IDEA-related courses greatly benefited Latinx students' sense of belonging and other recommendations from the students on how to increase sense of belonging. The findings of this research add to the body of literature on Latinx students and their sense of belonging at PWIs, and help higher education systems to develop transformative action plans such as implementing more IDEA-related courses in universities.

KEYWORDS: Latinx, Sense of Belonging, Student Success, IDEA Courses

LATINX STUDENTS' SENSE OF BELONGING: ROLE OF IDEA-RELATED COURSES

ALONDRA FAUDO A

A Thesis Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

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LATINX STUDENTS' SENSE OF BELONGING: ROLE OF IDEA-RELATED COURSES

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CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	i
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW	3
Theoretical Framework	3
Origins of Research with Latinx College Experiences and Belonging	4
College Student Success Through Belonging	6
Sense of Belonging Challenges	7
Institutional Support for Latinx Students' Sense of Belonging	10
The Current Study	13
CHAPTER III: METHODS	15
Participants	15
Procedure	15
Data Analysis	17
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS	19
Theme 1: Transitioning from Hometown to College Environment	19
Culture Shock	19
Moving from a collectivistic to an individualistic culture	20
Theme 2: Hostile Climate on Campus	21
Experiences of Discrimination	21
Non-Supportive Community	22
Lack of Resources	23

Theme 3: Ways to Increase Sense of Belonging	24
Joining Cultural Student Organizations	24
Administrative and Community Support	25
IDEA-related Courses	26
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION	29
Implications	34
Limitations & Future Research	35
Conclusion	37
REFERENCES	38
APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS	46

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The Latinx community is one of the fastest-growing minority populations in the United States. Currently, individuals identifying as Latinx are the second largest ethno-racial group in the U.S., making up about 18% of its population (Rodriguez, 2021). This continuing growth also extends to higher education. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2020), the U.S. has experienced a 35% increase in Latinx students who complete a college degree from 2010 to 2020. With more Latinx students attending college, further research is needed to identify potential barriers they may face and, most importantly, to identify potential protective factors that could help aid their student success at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs).

Although college graduation rates have been increasing substantially, Latinx students are disproportionately less likely to finish college compared to students of other ethno-racial groups (Snyder, 2018). Some scholars have referred to this as “the Latino educational crisis” (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Institutions of higher education struggle to retain Latinx undergraduate students to graduation compared to other groups of different ethnicities (Fry & Lopez, 2012). For example, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2020, even though Latinx students represent 17% of the nation’s college student population between the ages of 18-24, only 9% of 4-year bachelor's degrees are earned by Latinx students. Many factors may play into Latinx students’ graduation rates, including a lack of representation, resources, and cultural perceptions on campus (Arellanes & Hendricks, 2022).

The inequitable rates of Latinx students who attend college versus the number of Latinx students who graduate with a bachelor's degree is a phenomenon Capers (2019) identified as a Latinx paradoxical dichotomy in the literature. According to the literature, some scholars view the rise of Latinx students attending college and graduating through a more positive lens by

viewing it as progress. In contrast, others view students' lack of completion of their bachelor's degree as a failure in higher education. For example, many scholars believe it is more important to recognize the growth and academic success Latinx students can achieve, despite the obstacles they face, rather than viewing the disproportionate numbers as unfavorable. Compared to 1988, the number of Latinx students that obtained a bachelor's degree grew from 10% of the population to 15% in 2015 (Ryan & Bauman, 2016). Although this is promising as Latinx students continue to grow and strive, there is still room for improvement, particularly in improving retention and success of Latinx students after their matriculation. Issues of retention and success are multifaceted, but here we believe that one important area may be exploring minoritized students' sense of belonging on campus. This current study furthers the literature by exploring how Latinx students' sense of belonging relates to interactions within classes designed around an Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Action (IDEA) framework and how it may impact their student success.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The current study uses Hurtado and Carter's conceptual model of sense of belonging as a theoretical framework to identify its impact on Latinx student success. Hurtado and Carter's (1997) pioneering work states that a sense of belonging is defined as the feeling that one matters to others and having a place within a group. It includes both cognitive and affective elements in which the individual's cognitive perception of their role in their affiliated group produces an affective response. For college students, their cognitive and affective elements reflect the extent to which students feel connected to, a part of, or stuck to a campus. Hurtado and Carter's work made a remarkable contribution to the Latinx literature in higher education as they found that sense of belonging was a crucial mediating variable contributing to student success. This is especially important for minority populations such as Latinx students, whose culture and values are not dominant on campus. Furthermore, Hurtado and Carter's model (1997) found that the ease of transitioning into college and perceptions of a hostile campus environment all impact Latinx students' sense of belonging on campus and student success.

Hurtado and Carter's framework, *A Sense of Belonging*, was initially derived from Bollen and Hoyle's (1990) first dimension of the Perceived Cohesion Scale which is "sense of belonging." According to Bollen and Hoyle (1990), perceived cohesion captures the extent to which an individual feels "stuck to" a specific social group and is composed of two dimensions; the individual's sense of belonging and their feeling of morale associated with group membership. From here, scholars have advanced the field to recognize that a sense of belonging is a crucial component of an individual's identification with a group membership, affecting a student's behavior. Overall, literature and theories pertaining to sense of belonging have

identified similar core elements, one being that sense of belonging takes on heightened importance among certain populations, specifically those marginalized in universities when it comes to academic outcomes (Strayhorn, 2018). Therefore, understanding Latinx students' sense of belonging on campus may be particularly important for determining future interventions to help positively increase their academic outcomes.

Although sense of belonging has received considerable attention regarding marginalized groups, the literature has recently focused on Latinx college students' unique experiences on sense of belonging and its influence on student success (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Maestas et al., 2007). Given the increased rate of Latinx students enrolling in college, as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau (2019), there is a specific need to address this gap within the field and to do so in a timely manner. Higher education institutions must incorporate specific resources that consider cultural and social factors that impact Latinx students' sense of belonging on campus. Courses that focus on supporting Latinx students through an IDEA framework may be a way to reach this goal. This study will focus on identifying IDEA courses' potential benefits and impacts on Latinx students' sense of belonging.

Origins of Research with Latinx College Experiences and Belonging

Research in supporting Latinx students in college has a decorated history with origins dating back to the 1930s. George Sanchez (1936) is often recognized as the “Father of Latinx Psychology” for his contributions to educational equity for Latinx students and his diligent work to disprove the eugenics movement, which was plaguing educational research at the time. Since then, notable contributions have been made by many scholars. Among others, Concha Delgado Guitan (1992) applied her dedication to social and education to examine contributing factors that led to Latinx student empowerment and academic success. Their research serves as the

foundation of Latinx higher education. However, despite these and fellow scholars' efforts, there remain gaps that need to be covered around student success and identify barriers that may be present.

Of particular interest is the relationship between Latinx students' sense of belonging in relation to student success and the campus climate/environment. In fact, scholars have identified a correlation between a sense of belonging and retention/persistence (Luciano-Wong et al., 2019; Romo et al., 2020). Finding ways to increase students' sense of belonging could potentially increase retention and promote representation. Gloria and colleagues (2005) used the University Environment Model (Pace, 1969) to assess minority students' comfort on campus and how much support they receive from individuals on campus, including faculty and staff. They found that Latinx students' positive perceptions of the university environment positively affected their persistent decisions to receive support from individuals on campus. Similarly, Dueñas and Gloria (2020) found that Latinx students who perceived a higher sense of belonging on campus also had an increased sense of mattering, assisting them through their college experiences. As reflected by the literature, the more comfortable the student feels and is supported, the more positive the impact is on their academic success.

Inversely, studies have also found that negative social experiences can lead to a lower sense of belonging and therefore can negatively impact the retention of students as well (Lee & Barnes, 2015; Martin et al., 2017). Contreras (2009) found that discriminatory campus experiences, such as feeling isolated or having negative interactions with faculty, created barriers to academic success and retention for undocumented Latinx students. Similarly, Fisher (2007) found that Latinx students' negative perceptions of the racial climate at their institution were negatively correlated with persistence among a national sample of first-year students. A key

reason why discriminatory experiences can lead to lower academic success and retention is because they begin to perceive the university environment as hostile, which can lead to them feeling less valued and accepted (Strayhorn, 2012). Therefore, a more complex understanding of a sense of belonging for these students is needed to help identify and recognize ways to support the academic success of Latinx students. It can help create a better understanding of what it means for Latinx students to feel like they belong on a college campus.

College Student Success Through Belonging

Given that decades of literature and research have aimed to demonstrate evidence of student success in post-secondary education, many different definitions have been developed to identify this construct. One of the more traditional measures of student success is through determining a student's academic achievement through scores on standardized college exams, college grades, and credit hours earned to represent the student's progress toward their degree (Kuh et al., 2006). However, scholars such as Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) indicated that merely using standardized tests and GPA can negatively influence an individual's degree attainment and career or employment outcomes. Many scholars argue that student success should be measured in multiple forms (Arellanes et al., 2022). Astin (1993) proposed that student success should also be measured by whether or not the students felt satisfied with their college experience and comfortable in their learning environment.

Furthermore, literature has suggested that student success depends on students' integration into college and their perceived sense of belonging on campus (Billingsley & Hurd, 2019; Burke, 2019; Strayhorn, 2018). These factors can significantly influence their academic outcomes, especially for minority students (Strayhorn, 2018). Given that, a measure of student success that does not merely depend on standardized tests can be used as a proxy to determine

the students' sense of belonging on campus. This current study will focus on a more integrated picture of student success by gaining additional perceptions of students' sense of belonging on a college campus.

Sense of Belonging Challenges

Early research on sense of belonging has found it an essential element to human behavior as Maslow (1954) identified belonging as a basic human need and motivation for behavior. Since then, scholars have emphasized the importance of belonging in the higher education as they have found that "student connection fosters positive outcomes" (Carales & Hooker, 2019). More specifically, having a sense of belonging with peers in the classroom or on campus has been linked to being a crucial component of students' success (Kirby et al., 2021; Pedler et al., 2022; & Hamann, 2022). It can significantly affect a student's academic adjustment, aspirations, and retention on campus (Strayhorn, 2018). If students can connect to their campus environment and feel like they belong, they will likely have a more positive outlook on their academic journey, which can lead to better motivation and student success (Pedler et al., 2022).

However, some challenges and barriers prevent some students from feeling a sense of connection on campus. Zeller and Moiser (1993) found that, especially during the first year on campus, students may experience a culture shock due to the transition and may have difficulty acclimating to their college campus and experiencing a sense of belonging. More specifically, minoritized students have a more challenging time transitioning into college compared to other students due to differences in culture, values, and other factors (Arevalo et al., 2016). Given the impact a student's sense of belonging has on retention and satisfaction, universities need to put effort into helping students increase their sense of belonging to help buffer the shock of transitioning into an unfamiliar environment.

Similar to other minority populations, Latinx culture values collectivism, especially in their home (Azpeitia, 2022). In a collectivist culture, there is a substantial value for family ties, and in turn, individuals seek and need interpersonal (or extrafamilial) relationships (Schwartz, 2009). Latinx students' strong familial ties and obligations may impede them from developing a sense of belonging on campus due to their struggles to remain close to their families (Dayton et al., 2004). However, if students can maintain their collectivist values in their college experience, it may serve as a buffer against stress. Morgan and colleagues (2013) found that Latinx values, including their strong family ties, contribute to resiliency and thriving. Similarly, Azpeitia (2022) found that the effect of familismo (i.e., providing support, acting in reference, and feeling an obligation to the family) can act as an academic motivator for first and second-generation Latinx college students if they continue to value that throughout college.

Unfortunately, when Latinx students transition into a college environment, they may not have the opportunity to practice their collectivistic values due to the individualistic values seen in the United States and higher education institutions (Arevalo, So, & McNaughton-Cassill, 2016). In an individualistic culture, there is a substantial value for independence and autonomy (Zielinska, 2020). Students from a collectivistic culture are often less likely to see their university as a welcoming campus environment and have a more challenging time transitioning into college compared to their White peers (Arevalo et al., 2016; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005). Such findings may identify the reasoning behind why Latinx students experience lower levels of sense of belonging on campus compared to their White peers (Strayhorn, 2018). Given the growth of the Latinx student population, institutions need to be aware of the conflicting values that may be present between Latinx and American culture and take action to ensure that Latinx

students feel connected to both their culture and institution to help support their sense of belonging.

Another factor that negatively influences Latinx students' sense of belonging is the underrepresentation of minority students in universities. Given that White students and faculty make up more than 50 percent of the overall population at universities, Latinx students are at risk of being underrepresented. Attending a Predominately White Institution (PWI) can lead to feelings of isolation and alienation, especially if the Latinx student does not feel supported (Gonzalez-Palacios, 2022). Latinx students often report experiencing microaggressions from their White peers and faculty members, causing them to feel like "outsiders" and develop a sense of "unbelonging" (Chakraverty, 2022). Furthermore, scholars have discovered that students may often feel marginalized or unwelcome by their professors due to the negative stereotypes the faculty ascribe to, leading them to believe that all Latinx students are lazy and unteachable (Sanchez-Conally, 2018). In return, many of these students often internalize these negative stereotypes and may begin to believe that they are not qualified for their intended major and don't have the academic ability to succeed (Sanchez-Conally, 2018). Other students have described their experiences in a PWI as "guests in someone else's house" (Gonzalez-Palacios, 2022). In response to these experiences and feelings, students may find it difficult to develop a sense of belonging which may then affect the student's academic achievement, retention, and persistence to degree attainment (Hausmann et al., 2007). Therefore, there is a need for more research to learn more about Latinx students' sense of belonging and identify potential protective factors that will help increase their sense of belonging on campus. This could also help other students and faculty members become aware of the potential barriers Latinx students face and the impacts they have on them.

Institutional Support for Latinx Students' Sense of Belonging

When looking at Latinx students specifically, it is crucial to find useful resources and methods that can increase a student's sense of belonging on campus and in return, also increase their student success. For example, literature has found that interventions such as co-curricular, activities, an inclusive academic curriculum, mentoring, peer support, family and community engagement, and incorporating students' cultures in implementation efforts all have a major influence in Latinx students' success and sense of belonging (Renn, 2022; Troy et al., 2022; & Tierney et al., 2004). It is crucial for higher education institutions to acknowledge these propositions and make efforts to incorporate them into a student's college environment to help create and maintain a welcoming and inclusive environment (Tierney et al., 2004). By establishing institutional practices to support Latinx student success, students can create more positive perceptions of the campus climate and feel like members of the college community (Hurtado, 2005).

Though there are many ways to improve institutional practices to support Latinx students, pertinent to this study is the role of the classroom environment. Students' experience inside a classroom, particularly for underrepresented students, can have a major influence on their sense of belonging and academic success (Kuh et al., 2006). If the experience is positive, they may feel more motivated to participate, interact with their peers, and continue their academic journey. Faculty members may use their classroom as an opportunity to create a welcoming and supportive environment for Latinx students (Cejda et al., 2010). If faculty use a supportive and collaborative approach with high expectations, students of color are more likely to be accepting of the faculty's support (Wood et al., 2015). Using a supportive and collaborative approach in the

classroom may encourage students to feel competent and challenged all while being supported as well.

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) is a method to incorporate a supportive and collaborative approach in the classroom. SoTL focuses on collaboration between students and faculty to help create new disciplinary, institutional, and educational knowledge in higher education (Felten et al., 2013). SoTL is particularly invested in classrooms which utilize culturally inclusive pedagogy (Felton 2013 et al.). Culturally inclusive pedagogy is often identified with specific outcomes related to Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Action (IDEA) (Fuentes et al., 2021). Though SoTL and IDEA classes are separate in nature, these frameworks paired together can lead to increased opportunities to learn and develop a cohesive environment for exploration and inclusivity (Garvey, 2019). In studying methods and/or programs to help increase student enrollment and success, Talbert (2012) found that incorporating IDEA initiatives to both undergraduate and graduate programs helped increase the retention rate of all students of color. Giving Latinx students the opportunity to speak about their experiences related to IDEA while being supported, helps create a sense of inclusion and belonging to the student's college experience (Passano, 2021). Each student will bring with them a rich, diverse set of perspectives, values, and experiences to the course and will have the opportunity to share and learn from others (Stanley et al., 2022).

Research shows that incorporating IDEA discussions into classrooms is associated with many educational benefits. It exposes students to different experiences, viewpoints, and opinions which they may not be familiar with, encouraging them to grow and learn more about people's differences (Hall, 2021). Antonio and colleagues (2004) looked at the impact of diversity and diversity-related discussions in class and found that minority students impacted the majority

members by introducing different perspectives into the discussion and influencing other students' thought processes. Their study showed how IDEA discussions with minority students present can be used as an educational tool to influence students' learning and development. Having the ability to influence and interact with students of diverse backgrounds may lead to increases in inclusivity, given that interpersonal relationships and perceived competence have been found to increase a student's sense of belonging (Rainey et al., 2018). Furthermore, including IDEA university courses can be used as a platform to encourage Latinx students to have discussions on topics that make them feel heard and understood and further help to create a sense of belonging on campus. These courses can help foster Latinx values that increase sense of belonging by being culturally engaging by emphasizing collectivist cultural orientations and providing holistic supports.

Higher education institutions are actively working to combat discriminatory experiences on campus due to their effects on student retention and sense of belonging. IDEA courses are one way to do so with evidence suggesting that diversity related discussions reduce racial bias among the college students, therefore they could potentially be used to increase student retention and sense of belonging as well (Bowman, 2010; Denson, 2009). If IDEA courses can serve as a resource towards increasing a Latinx student's sense of belonging and student success, there needs to be more attention put towards these courses. Pertaining to the current study, there is still no specific IDEA course that needs to be taken in order to graduate within psychology (Norcross et al., 2016). However, higher education institutions are beginning to discover the potential positive outcomes these courses may offer. This current study will examine the influences that IDEA courses have on Latinx students' sense of belonging to increase awareness of the impacts they may have on student success.

The Current Study

Based on the evidence found in the literature review, there is a clear connection between sense of belonging and student success, especially for Latinx students. Therefore, there remains a need to further understand Latinx students' sense of belonging on campus so institutions could identify and implement potential resources that considers both cultural and social factors to help aid Latinx student success. My study investigates Latinx students' sense of belonging on campus by stemming from a project that began data collection in 2019. For that reason, the current study consisted of secondary data which had previously been collected and primary data collection that occurred in late Fall 2022. The primary data collection was needed as the secondary data has not reached saturation of data regarding a sense of belonging. Both the secondary and primary data set were developed to identify Latinx students' sense of belonging on campus based on their involvement in a course which utilized an IDEA framework.

The secondary data set consisted of students who enrolled in one of five courses that focused on and supported an IDEA framework. Focus groups were created for Latinx students to encourage them to share their experiences in IDEA courses related to the Latinx community. The focus group questions pertained to the development of a more collectivist community on campus through more effective teaching practices, the development and offering of courses focusing on diverse identity groups, and stronger mentor-mentee relationships. For the primary data set, the focus group questions will pertain to the students' sense of belonging on campus and how IDEA-related courses have impacted their sense of belonging. Specifically, we discuss our findings using the following research questions:

1. How are Latinx students' sense of belonging influenced by their experiences on campus and community?

2. Which institutional and community resources influence the cultural and social factors of Latinx students' sense of belonging?
3. How do IDEA-related courses function as a support system to influence Latinx students' sense of belonging?

CHAPTER III: METHODS

The current data was collected from Fall 2019 to Fall 2022 with undergraduate students from Illinois State University. The study was approved by the associated university's Institutional Review Board (IRB 2022-230). This project was internally funded from the 2020 Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Seed Grant (#603) and 2022 Scholarship of Teaching and Learning University Research Grant. For this thesis, I described data collected before my involvement as secondary data and data that I was a part of collecting as primary data collection.

Participants

The secondary and primary data set combined had a total of twenty-four participants who identified as Latinx. The age of the students ranged from 19-27, with a median age of 22. A majority identified as female ($n = 16$) compared to male ($n = 8$). No participants identified outside of the gender binary. Additionally, 13 (54.2%) Latinx students were first-generation college students (i.e., their parents or grandparents did not go to college). The participants had an average GPA of 2.95.

Procedure

In the secondary data set, Latinx students were recruited from five classes within the Psychology, and Policy and Government department. Each of the courses were developed around an IDEA framework and utilized a SoTL design. All classes had particular interest and were devoted to supporting the Latinx community. These courses included *Topics in Latin American Politics*, *Latino Psychology*, and a *Senior Seminar* course directed at creating change within the Latinx community. Focus groups were created to better understand the unique cultural influences and perceptions of Latinx students in classes that were focused on their ethnic identity. Preliminary coding of the secondary data set demonstrated that belonging was a major influence on students'

connection to the university. To better understand this, two additional classes (for a total of seven classes) were given additional questions to dive more deeply into sense of belonging. The two additional courses were collected in an additional section of Latino Psychology and a course in Latin American Politics. The primary and secondary data sets followed the same procedures and protocol.

Throughout the duration of data collection, four graduate students facilitated the focus groups, of which the author led the two most recent groups (labeled primary data collection above). All the facilitators went through a similar training process. The facilitators had no previous contact with the class as to not bias students' perceptions towards the facilitators and vice versa. Though may be beneficial to have consistency in facilitators, given the data collection has spanned five years, it was not feasible to have the same graduate student lead all the focus groups. Instead, this may be seen as a strength as each facilitator brought their own positionality thus bringing multiple perspectives into the focus groups. To help Latinx students feel comfortable and open, ethnic matching of the facilitators was used (i.e., facilitators self-identified as Latinx). Students were informed that the purpose of the study was to learn about their experiences within the course concerning their sense of belonging and on campus. It was emphasized that participating in the study was purely voluntary and 1) would not affect the student's course grade, 2) would be collected without the instructor, 3) all data would be de-identified, and 4) any data analysis would occur after the semester was over and grades were finalized. Due to part of the secondary data set being collected during COVID-19, some of the focus groups were conducted via Zoom. Participants joined the class's original Zoom link, and from there, they joined separate and secure virtual meeting rooms. For the primary data set, we conducted all the focus groups in person.

For both data sets, the facilitators reviewed the purpose, consent forms, and procedures for the interview. Then informed consent was collected from each participant. Next, the participants were given a short demographic survey upon completion. The focus group questions followed the protocol outlined by Morgan & Krueger (1998). The facilitators initially posed broad questions to make participants feel comfortable and gain their trust. Then, facilitators asked more specific questions using probes to solicit more detailed responses to the questions/topics. To close the interview of each focus group, facilitators debriefed and shared reflections of the interviews. The focus group questions are available in Appendix A. We used keynotes from the debriefing to inform the subsequent analysis.

Data Analysis

In the primary study, we collected demographic surveys using an anonymous Qualtrics survey link and were analyzed in SPSS. We transcribed the interviews using the Microsoft Word transcription tool. Then the primary investigators listened to the audio files while simultaneously reading the transcribed document. Any inconsistencies were then reviewed, and errors or adjustments were made accordingly. The completed Latinx focus group transcriptions were uploaded into MAXQDA 20 (VERBI Software, 2019), a qualitative data analysis program. Both the primary and secondary data were analyzed cohesively through thematic analysis which is a widely used systematic qualitative data analysis method that captures patterns across data in relation to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006, Nowell et al., 2017). The construction and application of the thematic analysis was informed through Braun and Clark's (2006) model. Each focus group was analyzed independently for the development of the initial coding scheme. Hurtado and Carter's theoretical model was then used as a guide to further develop the coding scheme develop preliminary themes. After discussing these themes with fellow researchers, we

re-coded the data to focus on the initial findings. To ensure trustworthiness, this process was continued and repeated until all discrepancies within the data and coding scheme met a consensus and were supported through relevant quotes.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Based on their theoretical framework, Hurtado and Carter (1997) identified two main constructs (ease of transition and hostile climate) that impact a Latinx student's sense of belonging. Additionally, they found that discussion of course content with other students outside class and membership in religious and social-community organizations increase a student's sense of belonging. Below, we identified three similar themes that impact students' sense of belonging while also uniquely identifying how IDEA-related courses function as a support system to influence Latinx student's sense of belonging.

Theme 1: Transitioning from Hometown to College Environment

Hurtado and Carter's (1997) model emphasizes the importance that the transition to college has on Latinx students' sense of belonging. Different aspects of the transition to college are important to different dimensions of adjustment including academic and social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, and feelings of adjustment to the institution for Latinx students. Specifically, they found that having an ease in transition and maintaining family relationships are crucial elements in transitioning to college. In this study, we found that moving from a collectivist to an individualistic culture was challenging and created culture shock. These two sub-themes impacted a student's ease of transition into college.

Culture Shock

Many students reported experiencing culture shock when they first moved from their hometown to campus. Students' transition from their hometown to the college campus environment was a common experience that led to impacting a student's sense of belonging. Most of the participants grew up in family households in the greater Chicago area. These areas were much more diverse compared to the Bloomington-Normal community. The change in

demographic makeup between the two areas affected their transition into the college environment and challenged students' sense of belonging on campus. Students expressed that they felt as if they "did not belong" or "out of place" particularly due to the lack of representation. For example, a participant stated:

"In my experience, growing up in Chicago, I was surrounded by my people and culture. I was surrounded by people with like-minded values or similar experiences as mine. It wasn't much of a struggle to find people that were similar to you. But within campus specifically, it can be a struggle for students of color to feel like you belong in a predominately White university. I'm not sure this is the university's fault, it might just be the culture within the campus."

Another student with a similar sentiment expressed, *"Where I am from, I've never felt entirely out of place. I've never felt like I don't belong because I feel like I have a standing. But here I don't feel accepted. I don't even feel like I have a standing. I've never felt so profiled in my life and I've never experienced this. I had no idea what this felt like"*. Within this quote, we see that the student had not experienced racial profiling before coming to college. Both previous quotes demonstrate feeling "at home" in a diverse city and "out of place on campus." This data suggests that the primary difference stems from the lack of diversity and representation. It appears that it's not just the structures on campus that impact the ease of transition, but representation that makes the student feel as though they belong and have an easier transition on campus.

Moving from a collectivistic to an individualistic culture

Additionally, students reported that being around more individualistic cultural values impacted their ease of transition because they grew up in a family with collectivistic cultural values. For example, one student expressed, *"I think culturally I was raised that whenever you*

have people over, you should share and do things together. You should offer people food, drinks, and include everyone". This student explained that back home, he grew up with the collectivistic value of generosity and always sharing everything with everyone no matter the circumstances. Whereas on campus, he was often around people with more individualistic values where they value the self over the group and are not used to sharing everything. Many students expressed that it was difficult to adjust because they were so used to being close to their families and some of their collectivistic values are not valued or seen as much on campus.

Theme 2: Hostile Climate on Campus

Hurtado and Carter's (1997) model shows how perceptions of a hostile climate in college can negatively impact a Latinx students' sense of belonging on campus. In their study, they found that students who described their campus environment as having racial-ethnic tension and reports of discrimination had much lower levels of sense of belonging than students who did not perceive the campus to be a hostile climate with racial-ethnic tension. In this study, we also found that a hostile climate on campus, experiences of discrimination and racial-ethnic tension on campus and the community, negatively impacts a student's sense of belonging on campus. Additionally, we found that having a non-supportive community and lack of resources also negatively impacted students' sense of belonging. Below are the three subthemes that contributed to a hostile climate on campus.

Experiences of Discrimination

Overall, students who reported experiencing or witnessing discrimination (and microaggressions), reported that these events negatively impacted their sense of belonging. Unfortunately, most of the students had either witnessed or experienced these negative events on campus or in the Bloomington-Normal community. Despite the different forms of support that

the campus offers, students reported that they still felt as though they did not belong or were alienated due to the discriminatory events they witnessed or experienced. Many students expressed that this had never happened to them before since they came from a very diverse area where they were able to find and interact with people who had similar values and experiences.

For example, a student reported:

*“I identify as gay, and before coming to campus I had never been called any derogatory terms or feared my safety in my entire life. However, the first month of moving here like someone said ‘f***** f*****’ when I was walking down the street. I had never been called anything like that in my entire life and now it has happened multiple times here”.*

Non-Supportive Community

Students who reported experiencing discrimination or microaggression also expressed that they connected these issues to the school administration or community leaders. Though it is impossible for individuals to stop all forms of discrimination and microaggressions, when these events occur students are looking for leadership to address the situations and take actions to ensure similar situations will not occur in the future. This became especially true after multiple reported instances against LGBTQ+ students on campus. A student shared *“I don’t really know what the school has done towards the discriminative incidents of the LGBTQ community because it has not been addressed or acknowledged that much. It’s frustrating”*. This student expressed that it was frustrating not knowing what was being done about the discriminative incidents on campus towards the LGBTQ community. This student wanted to know if there were any actions being done to further protect the LGBTQ community to help them feel safer on campus. Students reported similar concerns about other discriminative events on campus.

Though these instances were often reported or discussed both within the administration and community, students often shared that increasing the amount of closure from the situation would benefit their sense of belonging. Becoming aware of an event is necessary, but once actions are taken, students want to know what happened. When issues were addressed, but not concluded, it led students to feel confused and afraid. Students expressed that a way the school administration could help address the discriminative events on campus is simply through clear communication of what occurred and demonstrating the actions that were conducted to provide closure. If students are aware that the school is taking action, they can feel safer knowing that there are going to be consequences towards the negative incidents rather than feeling isolated and not supported. Doing so can help stop the feeling that the event is ongoing. For example, a student who was asked what can improve students' experiences expressed, *"There are only brief comments that are made about discriminative incidents on campus. We should know if there are going to be consequences for the actions that were made. Demonstrating the consequences can make the marginalized communities actually feel like they are part of the community All students need to be and should be part of the community"*.

Lack of Resources

Additionally, students reported they would like additional support and clearer communication through making resources more accessible. Students expressed that not being aware of the resources that the university offers negatively impacted their sense of belonging. Although the university does offer lots of different types of resources, students reported that they felt unsupported and alone because they did not know how or where to access these resources. For example, a student expressed, *"There are a lot of resources that I think the university offers but they're just kind of kept away from students, and many of us are unaware that we're even*

paying for all of this". Specifically, these Latinx students reported that most of them were first-generation and felt as though they did not have the same advantage as other students who had parents they could ask for support or help them access resources on campus. They reported they often felt as though they did not belong because other students knew so much more about the university or were getting extra support. Overall, students would like clearer communication on resources and make them more accessible.

Theme 3: Ways to Increase Sense of Belonging

Hurtado and Carter identified common themes and events that helped students develop a sense of belonging on campus as part of their model. Overall, they found that having an easier transition to campus, having lower perceptions of a "hostile climate" on campus, joining specific student organizations, and the discussion of course content with other students outside class, all positively impact a student's sense of belonging. The themes above have demonstrated similar experiences. Yet below, we also find support for progress and hope for an increased sense of belonging. We additionally found that joining cultural student organizations, administrative and community support, and participation of IDEA-related courses positively impact Latinx students' sense of belonging. Each of the above were not specifically addressed Hurtado and Carter's model and is utilized as a sub-theme that increases a student's sense of belonging.

Joining Cultural Student Organizations

Commonly, students reported that joining cultural student organizations helped increase their sense of belonging. Many students expressed that joining these cultural student organizations helped them to find a sense of belonging as they were able to create a community within that organization. Examples of these ethnic and cultural organizations are multicultural sororities and fraternities, diversity advocacy organizations, and the Association of Latinx

American Students (ALAS). These organizations encouraged Latinx students to come together and create a sense of belonging on campus. It helped them create community and feel empowered to feel as though they do belong. More specifically, students expressed that joining a Latinx student organization would be a subsample of representation within the university. This increase in representation helped diminished feelings of loneliness and built a network of support for students who share similar barriers and experiences on campus. For example, a student who was involved with multiple student organizations stated:

“The university provides a lot of groups and organizations that people can be involved in, I think that’s really important, and they bring a lot of speakers to campus, especially alumni. I’m a part of ALAS. Here you can be part of something that can help you feel like you belong. You feel more comfortable when identifying Latinx and are surrounded by fellow Latinx people”.

Administrative and Community Support

While student organizations were a major form of support, students also reported other types of support that increased their sense of belonging on campus. Students expressed that receiving support from administration also helped increase their sense of belonging. A form of support from the administration that the student’s reported was having administration act as an advocate for them and provide the needed resources. For example, one student stated, *“The administration can make the small changes needed to help support us and create an impact”.* Although the results were mixed with students reporting that they perceived the administration being helpful or not, those that did found their actions as a form of social support. Their main sentiment was that administration helped by supporting and developing resources that helped them feel like they belonged on campus. The resources that were especially helpful for students

were those related to their supporting their ethnic identity and financial resources. These efforts were furthered by ensuring information about these resources was readily available for students.

Lastly, support from other students and the community seemed to greatly impact students' sense of belonging on campus. Specifically, students expressed that having students around them with similar demographic and cultural backgrounds helped them feel accepted and included on campus. For example, a student stated, "*Once I found people that come from the same background and demographics, I was able to find my support group and feel like I could be myself.*" It appeared paramount that Latinx students wanted to find fellow students with similar ethnic backgrounds on campus to connect with. Representation on campus was seen as particularly influential but could also be affected by the surrounding community. Students expressed that when they were able to connect to and meet other Latinx individuals in the surrounding community, they felt like they belonged and were not alone. Encountering peers and community members with similar experiences sheds light on the importance of support, but it becomes especially important when the source of that support yields from the same culture. Overall, students expressed that having more representation on campus and in the community could help increase their sense of belonging and feel more supported.

IDEA-related Courses

Having a course explicitly related to the Latinx community was a way for students to find a sense of belonging on campus. Students expressed that these IDEA courses helped them find a sense of belonging because they felt as though their voices and culture were heard and could connect with other Latinx students. Through these courses, students found a shared ground dedicated to learning about and supporting the Latinx community. These courses were seen as particularly influential at the PWI. One student stated, "*People are involved in the class and are*

able to talk about certain issues and see that they're not the only ones that are facing those issues. They're able to make friends with people who are going through the same struggle and can relate to the same topics." Students reported that they were able to create a community within the course by connecting class topics to university and community resources. Some students even said that they made friends in the class, which they connected with outside of class; thus, increasing their belonging beyond the course as well.

A common theme that helped students create a sense of belonging in the IDEA-related course were the discussions that they were able to have in class. As part of the SoTL design, classes were designed that ~33% of the structured class time was for open social dialogue about the class topics. Giving the students an opportunity to voice their opinion, without faculty direction, created a space for community to grow. This class structure appeared effective as students shared, *"The structure that was implemented in this classroom should be implemented in more classes."* Students appreciated having a space where they felt a sense of belonging and received the proper guidance towards navigating college.

Students reported that it was important that faculty provide support to the students both inside of class and outside. Ensuring a "safe space" made students feel included and valued in class. They appreciated that the faculty encouraged students to share their personal experiences or opinions and reported that they were always very respectful. Although the faculty members in these courses did not ethnically match with the Latinx students, after learning about each faculty member's background and experiences, they expressed that they felt comfortable and safe sharing their stories. Though faculty may not fully relate, they were willing to learn and be empathetic. Faculty's efforts to demonstrate that they are dedicated to Latinx students and the community positively influenced students' perceptions that they matter, decreased loneliness, and

increased belonging. For example, a student stated: *“I expected my professor to be Hispanic when I was going to take this course, to be honest. When I saw he was White, I was surprised. However, with the experiences that he has had related to the Latinx community, you can really tell that he cares”*.

Lastly, students reported seeing the faculty in these courses as mentors or friends who could guide the students through college. Students were particularly interested in learning what classes to take, how to apply to graduate school, and advice to make academic dreams a reality. Faculty were seen as resources with extensive knowledge of the process for which can help them succeed. This may be particularly true for first generation college students as they perceived that they had no one to ask such as their parents or family members. Parents or family members did not have experience in these areas, and thus faculty were seen as the primary location of knowledge on these subjects. Those that were able to make a connection with faculty, expressed increased academic support, and decreased perceptions of loneliness. Connecting with faculty helped them feel like they belong in the course and university. The students appreciated it when the faculty went out of their way to offer support and help them access different resources on campus. For example, a student stated:

“At the beginning of the semester, the professor said, ‘one of my favorite things to do is to help students go to graduate school and figure out their career plans’. I haven't had a professor say anything like that in class before. Nobody ever said that they wanted me to have meetings about my plans. Immediately I thought, ‘This is a professor I want a good relationship with and I will go to his office hours’. I've been wanting a professor as a mentor. Now I actually have one.”

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

As previous research has shown, sense of belonging is a crucial factor towards Latinx student success (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Billingsley & Hurd, 2019; Burke, 2019; Strayhorn, 2018). Within this study, we utilized Hurtado and Carter's model of sense of belonging to better identify the contextual factors which influenced Latinx students' perceptions at a Midwestern university. This study extended the sense of belonging literature among Latinx students by exploring how Latinx students' sense of belonging is impacted on campus and how it relates to interactions within classes designed around an IDEA framework. This framework was deemed successful and assisted in their success while in college. Similar to Hurtado and Carter's findings, we found that ease of transition and a hostile campus climate seem to impact a student's sense of belonging greatly. In addition to this previous work, the current study provided additional insights into how joining student organizations, receiving community and administrative support, and participating in IDEA-related courses helped increase Latinx students' sense of belonging.

Consistent with previous literature, when Latinx students transitioned to a college environment, many experienced culture shock, impacting their ease of transition and sense of belonging (Zeller & Moiser, 1993; Arevalo et al., 2016). Although Hurtado and Carter did not explicitly discuss culture shock in their findings, they did find that students who reported having a more challenging time transitioning due to the separation of their families; also reported having a lower sense of belonging. Family and maintaining family ties are fundamental cultural values in many Latinx families, which suggests that being separated from their families can be a form of culture shock (Dayton et al., 2004). As Arevalo and colleagues (2016) and Hurtado and Ponjuan (2005) have found, when Latinx students transition into a college environment, they may not

always have the opportunity to practice their collectivistic values due to the individualistic values that are seen in PWI's. Our work supports such claims, and evidence suggested that students had a hard time transitioning from a collectivistic cultural family household to a university that had more individualistic values. Students in this study expressed that not being able to embrace their collectivistic values fully made their transition to college much more difficult.

Our findings also detailed experiences of a hostile climate which negatively impacted students' sense of belonging. More specifically, we found that students who reported experiencing or witnessing incidents of discrimination led to perceptions that they do not have a supportive community and lack supportive resources. Experiences of discrimination became more detrimental when there was a lack of closure from administration; thus further decreasing their sense of belonging. As Contreras (2009) and Fisher (2007) found, Latinx students' negative perceptions of the campus climate all negatively affect students' sense of belonging and success. When there was no closure of such events, students perceived that little was being done to ensure nothing further happened in the future. This led to increased perceptions of loneliness and feeling unsafe on campus. Our results suggest that if a hostile or discriminatory event occurs, follow-through was a critical part of participants' perspectives of campus climate safety and institutional actions. Detailing what occurred, what action steps were being taken about the event, and how the university would move forward are all crucial components in improving students' sense of belonging. Providing additional support and making resources more accessible after such events may be one way a university can improve relations with students and ultimately rebuild a sense of belonging after such an event.

Beyond the above, which was tied explicitly into Hurtado and Carter's (1997) theoretical framework, the current study found additional perspectives that can increase student sense of

belonging and improve student success. Specifically, we found that ethnic and cultural organizations such as multicultural sororities and fraternities, diversity advocacy organizations, and the Association of Latinx American Students (ALAS) were the most common type of organizations where Latinx students reported feeling like they belonged and were included on campus. These results were somewhat different from Hurtado and Carter's initial model. They found that students who belonged to social community organizations and religious organizations had a higher sense of belonging. However, ethnic student organizations did not have a significantly higher sense of belonging on campus than nonmembers. Our findings dictated different results. Students who reported racial-ethnic tension and belonged to a racial-ethnic organization had relatively higher levels of a sense of belonging with the overall community than students who were not members of these organizations. This suggests that racial-ethnic organizations did play a role in students' sense of belonging if they had experienced racial-ethnic tension.

Given that their study was quantitative, the initial model may not have been able to detail the specific reasoning behind the lack of significance. With our qualitative results, we could hear from students first-hand why ethnic and cultural organizations were unique in helping to develop a sense of belonging on campus as compared to other organizations. Additionally, our study's social environment and timing may have also contributed to this discrepancy. It may be that cultural organizations currently have a more considerable emphasis and meaning to students. These organizations may also be more readily available to students than Hurtado and Carter's classic study. The influence of social environments and timing may also be seen in the impacts of IDEA-related courses since these courses may not have been an option for the students in

Hurtado and Carter's study. Overall, our results depict the rationale for the continued support of ethnic and cultural organizations on campus.

Further, receiving administrative and community support can help increase Latinx students' sense of belonging. Hurtado and Carter (1997) similarly found different forms of support from the school and community to be helpful in increasing a student's sense of belonging. In our study, students expressed that if they felt the school administration was supporting them, they could feel a stronger sense of belonging to campus and the community. They expressed that the main support they would like from the administration is to know they are actively working towards helping Latinx students feel as they belong and for it to be seen on campus. These findings suggest that there is a need for administrators to collaborate within the surrounding community to develop partnerships geared towards making students feel included within the community. Additionally, the administration must continue advocating and protecting Latinx students from discriminative incidents on campus.

Additionally, students expressed that receiving support from other students and the community also helps increase their sense of belonging. Latinx students are at risk of being underrepresented at a PWI, which can lead to feelings of isolation and alienation, especially if the Latinx student does not feel supported (Gonzalez-Palacios, 2022). This study found that students felt highly underrepresented on campus and in the community. However, students expressed that while they often do feel alienated and isolated, when they can connect with other Latinx students on campus, this helps increase their sense of belonging on campus. Similarly, while many of the students have experienced discrimination and hostile interactions with community members in the surrounding community, students found that when they were able to interact with other Latinx community members, they felt less alone, and more connected to the

community. These findings suggest a need for more representation on campus and in the community to help aid students feel a sense of belonging.

There remains an underrepresented amount of IDEA course designs in college, especially those focusing on Latinx college students. We found that IDEA-related courses helped students create a sense of belonging inside the classroom. It is important to consider that these IDEA-related courses were all designed to support the Latinx community in some way by providing valuable information and representation in Latinx politics and psychology. Consistent with Kuh and colleagues' (2006) findings, Latinx students' experiences inside a classroom significantly influence their sense of belonging that is carried outside of the classroom as well. Although it has been established that cultural curriculum contributes to student engagement among minority students, these findings additionally showed their function as a support system for Latinx students. They could be used to further promote student success among Latinx students by increasing their sense of belonging.

The courses helped develop a cohesive and inclusive environment. Specifically, students expressed that the discussions they had throughout the course helped them feel included as it gave them an opportunity to speak about their experiences related to IDEA while being supported, which helped create a sense of inclusion and belonging to the student's college experience. As Stanley and colleagues (2022) explained, each student has a rich, diverse set of perspectives, values, and experiences that they bring with them, and these courses encourage them to share a part of them that they might not be able to do in other courses. Additionally, students expressed that these courses helped them connect with other Latinx students. This encouraged students to express their collectivistic values and reduce the effects of culture shock. These courses could help students feel more represented and included in a PWI. These findings

push towards having more higher education institutions provide IDEA-related courses specific to supporting Latinx students to increase their sense of belonging and representation.

Another aspect of the course that helped students' sense of belonging was the faculty's interactions and guidance with the students. Students often expressed feeling like they were behind or confused because they did not have any mentors or parents who could help guide them through college. Students expressed that the faculty in these courses guided them toward student success. Additionally, inside the course, students felt heard and appreciated by their faculty members whenever they expressed their opinion and voice. Overall, faculty involvement plays an important role in Latinx students' sense of belonging. As literature has shown, the way faculty use their classroom, interact with students, and their approach to helping students succeed all have a major influence on Latinx student success and motivation (Cejda et al., 2010; Wood et al., 2015). Therefore, this study furthered the literature on faculty involvement by showing its importance in IDEA-related courses and how it can help students create a sense of belonging inside the classroom. Having faculty be involved, show they care, and provide guidance, can help Latinx students feel supported and less isolated on campus.

Implications

This study further contributed to the limited literature on college Latinx students by providing an in-depth look at Latinx student sense of belonging in terms of identifying why students report a lower sense of belonging. Additionally, we identified suggestions for helping them increase their sense of belonging unique to previous findings. While many factors played a role in students' overall sense of belonging within their respective university, this study specifically focused on the role IDEA-related courses have on Latinx student sense of belonging. Overall, we found that these courses have very positive impacts on Latinx students' sense of

belonging by fostering a safe space for them to have discussions, giving them the opportunity to meet other Latinx students, create a community, and receive guidance from faculty.

Given that there is low retention despite a better matriculation rate among Latinx students, implementing these courses is crucial for higher education institutions. The latest psychology degree requirements from the APA (2013) state that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) issues should be brought into each course. However, there remains no specific DEI graduation requirement within psychology. Norcross and colleagues (2016) showed that 66% of psychology departments offer cultural/multicultural psychology courses, but none are required.

Specifically, offering an IDEA-related course directed towards the Latinx community may have unique contributions to Latinx student sense of belonging as it serves as a space for Latinx students to have their culture represented and appreciated. A higher of sense of belonging can lead to higher student success and retention among minority students; IDEA-related courses directed toward the Latinx community could help aid Latinx students toward college graduation and success. Students reported being able to express and be exposed to their Latinx cultural values in the course, which may not have been possible in a general IDEA course. This suggests the need for psychology departments to consider their departmental course offerings if such courses are unavailable. Doing so may be an important IDEA initiative that can help address the “Latino educational crisis.” Future research is needed to confirm such beliefs.

Limitations & Future Research

Though this study provides unique insight into Latinx sense of belonging, it had some notable limitations. First, this study only consisted of Latinx students who volunteered from a Midwestern university that is a PWI. Therefore, students who do not attend this Midwestern university and do not identify as Latinx may view the courses differently and have different

perceptions of sense of belonging. Future studies should expand this research design to a broader population and identify the impacts of IDEA-related courses on non-Latinx students' sense of belonging. Second, given that our study followed Hurtado and Carter's (1997) theoretical framework, it is hard to make the same associations because we were not able to gather longitudinal data to identify differences in the sense of belonging within student's pre-college, first, second, and third year of college as Hurtado and Carter were able to. Instead, our data asked students to reflect on their initial experiences. This may have impaired students from accurately recalling and establishing the correct sequence of events and experiences from one or two years ago. Future studies should attempt to follow Hurtado and Carter's model more closely by creating a longitudinal, quantitative study to identify changes in students' sense of belonging and experiences with IDEA-related courses throughout their college years instead of having them recall and reflect on their initial experiences. Third, although we attempted to remove the bias within the study to the best of our abilities, the principal investigator also taught some of the courses, making it impossible to remove all biases. Having the principal investigator teach some of the courses may have influenced students' responses even though they were told their responses would not affect their grades before having them participate. They may have been more hesitant to report negative experiences related to the course or faculty member. Further studies may want to prevent that by not having the principal investigator be the one who teaches some of the courses to help further remove bias. Lastly, although we attempted to ensure trustworthiness in our findings by following Braun and Clark's (2006) thematic analysis model and conducting the data analysis in a precise, consistent, and exhaustive manner, further studies may want to ensure additional trustworthiness such as hiring an independent auditor to ensure more accurate and consistent analysis.

Conclusion

Sense of belonging is crucial within the Latinx college experience as it has been found to increase student success. This qualitative study added to the limited research on Latinx students' sense of belonging by gathering in-depth data on why students experience a lower sense of belonging at a PWI and identified suggestions for increasing sense of belonging. Specifically, this study focused on IDEA-related courses' role on Latinx students' sense of belonging to help further push the need for more IDEA-related courses at universities. Unfortunately, Latinx students report having a lower sense of belonging at a PWI due to a lack of representation and community, experiences of discrimination, and lack of support. However, Latinx students shared experiences where they can create a sense of community and receive support in a way that helps increase their sense of belonging. Students could find this support and community through cultural organizations and in their IDEA-related course that was directed towards their ethnic identity.

The IDEA-related course encouraged students to receive their needs of feeling like they belong by expressing themselves through class discussions, building a community within the class, and receiving support from other students and faculty members. Given that there remain too few IDEA course designs in college, especially that focus on Latinx college students, implementing these courses could help Latinx students succeed and lower the Latinx educational crisis. The findings of this study are to further inform higher education institutions on how to increase Latinx student sense of belonging and on the crucial need for more IDEA-related courses to be applied in all universities.

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APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Facilitator: Good afternoon and welcome! Thank you for taking the time to join our discussion on diversity, equity, and inclusion. My name is _____. (Facilitator introduces themselves). My role, as facilitator, is to gather information regarding your experience with respect to inclusion, diversity, equity, and action at Illinois State University.

RESPECT

Facilitator: To begin, we are going to ask you some basic questions about how you feel at ISU.

- 1) What experiences make you feel that you are a valued and essential part of ISU?
 - a. Have there been times when you did not feel valued or essential?
- 2) Have there been times when you felt respected or disrespected at ISU?
 - a. Who made you feel that way? (Examples: students, professors, administrators, staff, community members)
- 3) Are you comfortable being yourself at ISU?
 - a. What stops you from being your true self?
 - b. What encourages you to be your true self?
- 4) Have you ever felt as though you had to mask or downplay any aspect of your physical, cultural, spiritual or emotional self at ISU?
- 5) What was your impression of the respect given in this course?

BELONGING

Facilitator: Thank you for sharing that information. Now one of the major administrative shifts we are trying to make at ISU is to create a sense of belonging on campus. The next couple of questions that I will ask are geared around if you feel as though you belong on campus.

- 1) What makes you feel a part of the college environment?
- 2) What has been your favorite part of college?
- 3) Do you feel emotionally and socially supported at ISU?
- 4) Have there been times where you felt left out—either when engaging in academic activities or socially?
- 5) What information do you wish you would have known when you first arrived at ISU?
- 6) What could be improved to increase your interest in the university?
- 7) How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your sense of belonging at ISU?
- 8) How did this course make you feel as though you did or not belong?

EMPOWERED

Facilitator: A common misperception is that inclusion involves treating all students the same. Rather, inclusion involves recognizing that different students face unique challenges. Our next couple of questions are geared to uncover whether students feel they are empowered at ISU.

- 1) What obstacles and barriers have you faced at ISU?
 - a. Are those barriers experienced by all students on campus?
 - b. Do you feel they are unique to ISU or common at all universities?
 - c. What additional obstacles and barriers did you face due to the COVID pandemic?
- 2) What could ISU do to decrease the barriers that students face?
 - a. What would you like professors to know about student barriers?
- 3) What resources are available for you to succeed academically?
 - a. What resources are still needed?
 - b. How do you find out about resources on campus?

- 4) Can you identify people similar to yourself in positions of power or leadership at ISU?
- 5) How do you feel treated in the Bloomington/Normal community?
- 6) What are the best ways to support an inclusive classroom environment?

PROGRESSION

Facilitator: Ultimately, the extent to which ISU is inclusive is reflected in its future development. I will ask the following questions to uncover whether students feel they and the university itself is progressing fairly.

- 1) What were your first impressions regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion at ISU?
- 2) How have those impressions changed as you have learned more about ISU?
- 3) Would you consider yourself a successful student?
 - a. Why do you describe yourself in this way?
 - b. What could ISU do to increase your ability to be successful in college?
 - c. What is the difference between successful and non-successful students?
 - d. Do you feel that you have sufficient support to develop the skills you need to succeed academically?
- 4) Has this course impacted your perspectives about diversity, equity, and inclusion at ISU?
- 5) What effect do you think the COVID pandemic had on ISU's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion programs and initiatives?

CONCLUSION QUESTIONS

Facilitator: The focus group will conclude after I ask the following questions.

- 1) Of the issues we discussed today, which was the most important to you? Why?
- 2) Is there anything regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion at ISU that we should have talked about today during the focus group, but did not?

3) Of the issues we discussed today, has the COVID pandemic affected them in a way we have not discussed?