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## **MAKING MOVIDAS: CULTIVATING LEADERSHIP THROUGH CONOCIMIENTO IN AN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT RETREAT**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This educational case study examines the efforts of one Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) to counter deficit narratives and provide institutional as well as interpersonal supports for Latinx student success through a Student Leadership Retreat. We consider these activities and students' experiences therein through the lenses of Latinx leadership and Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of *conocimiento*. To do so, we rely on established methods in Chicana Studies that center the voices of participants and communities to foreground emic systems of knowledge and activity qualitatively. Specifically, we examined students' experiences in programming undergirded by *conocimiento* (iterative and dialogic understanding of ourselves and others), *cariño* (care for self and others), and *confianza* (trust) in contrast to more traditionally individualistic, competitive, and transactional arrangements within higher education.

**Keywords:** higher education, Hispanic-Serving Institution, student leadership, *conocimiento*, student affairs

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The retreat honestly had a huge impact on my life. It made me realize who I am as a person, and the importance my culture has. I developed a lot of great relationships with faculty and my [student] familia [so] that I know I have people to turn to for support and help me. It taught me so much about who I am, and it was something I could not stop talking about.

-Yazmin (Pseudonym), January 24, 2020

### **Introduction**

Latinx<sup>1</sup> students have markedly improved outcomes in the last 20 years with undergraduate and post-baccalaureate enrollment rates more than doubling and degrees awarded more than tripling (de Brey et al., 2019). Despite these gains, disparities persist as six-year graduation rates for Latinx students still considerably lag behind those for white and Asian students (de Brey et al., 2019) and Latinx students disproportionately enroll in two-year colleges, where they face notable obstacles to transferring and degree completion (Castro & Cortez, 2017; Crisp & Núñez, 2014). Moreover, qualitative research indicates that Latinx students endure racial microaggressions (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Tello & Lonn, 2017; Yosso et al., 2009), narratives of color-evasiveness<sup>2</sup> undermining their lived experiences (Vue et al., 2017), and feelings of isolation (Castro & Cortez, 2017).

Despite such evidence of Latinx students' adversities in higher education and the structural inequities in their pre-collegiate trajectories (e.g., Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Gándara et al., 2012; Solórzano et al., 2005; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010), deficit narratives pervade discussions of educational disparities (Valencia, 2012). These perspectives present their own barrier to improving outcomes insofar as they require shifting mindsets and not just implementation of new programs or resources.

For the particular Hispanic Serving Institution<sup>3</sup> (HSI) in California that is the focus of this case study, such inequities drive recent and ongoing efforts to improve experiences and outcomes for racially minoritized students. Previously, the university took a color-evasive approach, believing that programs developed for the general student population would help all undergraduates, including BIPOC<sup>4</sup> students for whom there was particular concern. As noted within Critical Race Theory (Gotanda, 1991) and in scholarship about Latinx students in higher education (Salinas, Jr., 2015; Suárez, 2015), color-evasive approaches presume that inequities manifest across racial lines and can be remedied without specific attention to racial classifications, downplaying the ways that resources and opportunities have been historically withheld from minoritized racial groups. As such, approaches that ignore racial inequities ultimately reify unjust conditions. The interventions at the focal HSI, while advancing supposedly universally relevant supports, included notable instances of pathologizing BIPOC students. This happened through reliance on deficit orientations to devise remedies such as study skills or time management workshops, presuming that students' lack of success was due to poor work ethic or lacking English proficiency rather than considering the ways they were racialized and marginalized in their academic experiences. The persistent equity gaps at the institution, which were concerning given

its HSI designation, proved such approaches ineffective and spurred the creation of a task force to develop and implement a student-centered model for Latinx student engagement and academic success. By January 2018, this task force became the Chicanx/Latinx Student Success Center (“Centro”). Centro built on the model of the task force and implemented comprehensive programming that connected Latinx students’ academic and ethnic/cultural/racial identities. This was highlighted by an annual Student Leadership Retreat (SLR) for first-year students (including transfer students) in which 50-60 students left campus for a weekend to engage in profound identity-exploration, community-building, learning about deficit narratives and counter-narratives, and discussion of how to apply learning from the retreat to their lives on campus and in their communities as leaders.

The new approach, foregrounding student awareness of individual and collective identity, understanding racialized power relations within historical and sociopolitical contexts, and strategies for academic success within a supportive community marked a radical departure from the previous color-evasive institutional practices. Securing Centro, the SLR, and additional such programming required informal, and at times, subversive coordination, what Espinoza and colleagues (2018) call *movidas*. In this work, we examine the Student Leadership Retreat at our HSI in the 2019-2020 academic year as a case study (Merriam, 1988) of *movidas* and experiences that actively disrupted deficit narratives about students and provided participants with opportunities for meaningful participation and agency in their development as learners and leaders. We are guided by two overarching questions:

1. What were students’ experiences in the culturally sustaining programs and processes put in place through *movidas*, particularly the SLR?
2. How do complementary frameworks of Latinx leadership and *conocimiento* improve understanding of how these *movidas* support student success?

We begin with a literature review regarding practices (organizational and interpersonal) for supporting Latinx student success in higher education, including moves that foster Latinx student leadership and the literature on HSIs that is especially relevant to our context. We follow with our theoretical framework of *conocimiento* (Anzaldúa, 2002), intertwining concepts of Latinx student leadership development. We then present our methods for data collection and analysis, including a description of the concepts undergirding the design of the SLR and situating our positionality within the work. We proceed with findings from analysis of debrief conversations with students and surveys after the SLR, and finally close with discussion of the implications of our findings from this case study toward broader practice across HSIs and serving Latinx students in higher education.

### Literature Review

The work of Centro and our own inquiry is substantially informed by previous scholarship on culturally-sustaining practices that seek “to perpetuate and foster--to sustain--linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” for Latinx youth in institutions of higher education (Paris, 2012, p. 93). In this review of relevant literature, we

consider organizational and implementational perspectives on the task of creating dignity-affirming and liberating educational settings, culminating with a focus on how these culturally-sustaining approaches align with literature on Latinx student leadership development.

### **Interpersonal Factors**

Relevant literature highlights extensive interpersonal elements that support Latinx student success. Positive interactions with faculty members, including meaningful participation in activities such as research and campus-based employment, improve persistence outcomes demonstrably (Crisp & Nora, 2010; Crisp et al., 2015; Flink, 2018; García et al., 2019). Such positive interactions include the ability to speak Spanish with peers and faculty, teaching practices that affirm Latinx students' individual and collective experiences and cultural identities, and mentoring (García & Okhidoi, 2015; García et al., 2019; Tovar, 2015). Likewise, efforts by outreach staff to engage with students and families through asset-orientations and invitation of their funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) help provide a sense of welcome, belonging, and reassurance for Latinx students encountering institutions of higher education (Mariscal et al., 2019). Counselors and advisers who incorporate culturally relevant practices into their relationships with students similarly provide integral information for navigating higher education. They also provide socioemotional supports to ameliorate feelings of isolation and inadequacy and to take action against discrimination (Tello & Lonn, 2017), including with counselors themselves being advocates for students in spaces of power (Cook et al., 2012). Even university administrators have important roles to play at the interpersonal level, given that they, too, can provide mentorship to students and, in public fashion, advocate for resources, services, and the dignity of Latinx students (García & Ramírez, 2018; Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

### **Organizing for Liberation**

The effectiveness of such interpersonal measures rests largely on their ability to shift cultural and structural paradigms. Scholarship on supporting Latinx students in higher education has called attention to the kinds of shifts required. Santiago (2012) notes that HSIs cannot be assumed to inherently improve Latinx educational attainment simply because they enroll a critical mass of Latinx students, but that conventional metrics of accountability in public policy likewise underestimate the efficacy of such institutions. Santiago, focusing on HSIs, recommends public policy discussions to promote concerted institutional efforts to recruit, retain, and graduate Latinx students that account for their specific circumstances and accountability metrics that acknowledge this work alongside conventional measures. Such policies, of course, are broadly applicable and perhaps even more relevant to predominantly white institutions (PWIs) where the discussions may be less tied to institutional mission.

Any efforts to improve outcomes for Latinx students must be guided by information about students' experiences in and out of school and about institutions themselves. Castro and Cortez (2017), examining the incorporation of Mexican and Mexican American community college transfer students to a four-year PWI, argue that institutions must adopt clear protocols for

introspection and process-mapping to ascertain how Latinx students experience the campus, including the spaces they frequent and the nature and quality of their interactions with staff, faculty, and administrative offices. Only through attention to these subjective elements of the college experience, the authors argue, can systemic change be fomented. Castro and Cortez (2017) explain:

Programming aimed at students cannot be the sole response...because that kind of programming fails to address the culture of the institution. In this sense, cultivating a receptive culture is about turning the gaze inward toward the institution and away from individual students and student communities...Using a framework of lived experience and intersectionality holds promise for receiving [institutions] so that the broader campus context becomes the site of organizational change, not individual students themselves. (p. 89)

García and Dwyer (2018) echo this need to organize the institution with attention to students' experiences and note that messages of inclusiveness, equity, and diversity within an organizational mission matter most when students recognize and identify with that organizational identity. In their specific study, they found that students attending an HSI and an emerging HSI were keenly attuned not only to the HSI designation but to the institutional organization that either supported or undermined the supposed mission. For instance, some students noted that the designation rang hollow without significant Latinx representation in curriculum and positions of administrative power, as well as the half-hearted efforts by the institutions to actually recruit Latinx students from the neighboring communities. Indeed, institutions that promote Ethnic Studies within their offerings and support Educational Opportunity Programs<sup>5</sup> on their campuses demonstrably improve outcomes for Latinx students (García & Okhido, 2015).

Several important reviews of the literature on Latinx student success in higher education also highlight the centrality of institutional culture. Crisp and Nora (2010), Flink (2018), and Crisp et al., (2015) all find that students' perceptions of discrimination and campus racial climate generally are associated with persistence, reinforcing the need to attend to students' subjectivities. The reviews also identify other systemic elements, such as access to robust and varied streams of financial aid, opportunities to participate in culturally relevant campus programming including community service, and access to developmental courses as positively associated with Latinx student success.

Offering a comprehensive framework from the perspective of organizational theory, García (2018) outlines numerous dimensions that colleges and universities must consider to create a liberating campus environment for Latinx students. García advocates that HSIs pursue critical consciousness and community revitalization alongside conventional measures of academic success. Providing examples from a pair of transformative pre-collegiate summer programs for Latinx students, Gutiérrez, Hunter, and Arzubiaga (2009) challenge the convention of framing students with a lens of remediation by focusing on *re-mediation*, a fundamental reorganization of a learning ecology "with its focus on the sociohistorical influences on students' learning" that "disrupts the ideology of pathology linked with most approaches to remediation" (p. 13).

Reiterating the importance of diversity to Latinx student success (Crisp & Nora, 2010; Crisp et al., 2015), García (2018) adds that the membership of decolonized institutions must be multiracial and multiethnic, in turn requiring systemic policies to recruit and retain such a student body as well as faculty, staff, administration, trustees, and community partners. With respect to governance, a liberatory organization demands pluralistic and decentralized processes that deliberately incorporate the voices of historically marginalized groups informing the development of dynamic community standards that protect the community and ensure its progress (García, 2018, p. 140), relying on restorative and community-centered practices rather than punitive approaches to justice, and creating systemic incentive structures (e.g., in hiring, retention, and promotion processes for faculty) aligned to this holistic mission.

### **Cultivating Latinx Student Leadership**

Lest strategies for Latinx student achievement and attainment remain within frameworks of adapting to oppressive systems, cultivating leadership also assures that students will be agents within their educational journeys. We review several frameworks of Latinx leadership in our theoretical framework but note for now that various conceptualizations accentuate that Latinx leadership includes facets of self and community understanding, personal and communitarian aspirations and purposes, and mutualistic relations of trust within collective mobilization (Bordas, 2001, 2013; Lozano, 2015).

In order to support Latinx students in their development within these frameworks, student organizations and leadership retreats have been noted as powerful opportunities. Beatty (2015) notes that participating in student organizations cultivates a sense of belonging and integration into campus life, and that ethnically focused organizations, in particular, provide space for building community and liminal spaces in which to counter deficit narratives, place them within appropriate historical and sociopolitical context, and gain more positive self-concept. In this context, Beatty (2015) offers that Latinx student leadership exercised within student organizations is understood as a form of activism seeking to transform personal learning conditions as well as social and institutional factors perpetuating oppression. Guardia (2015) similarly notes how within fraternities and sororities, Latinx students specifically can increase their cultural awareness, advocate for goals prioritized by the Latinx community, experience a familial atmosphere in often hostile institutional climates, and coalesce the Latinx community within a campus.

Of particular relevance to our inquiry, Salinas, Jr. (2015) examines student leadership retreats for Latinx students across institutions. Based on analysis of materials and responses from five institutions sponsoring such retreats, Salinas, Jr. notes the ways in which they promote skill development, communities of support for collective action and profound conversation, and ongoing self-reflection regarding individual and collective goals. Specifically, Salinas, Jr. finds that despite differences in the extent of student involvement in planning, the involvement of outside speakers or a campus academic entity such as a department or cultural center, and the nature of funding, retreats require thorough institutional support in order to deliver on their

potential to “provide a unique space for students to validate and empower their lived experiences of both privilege and oppression, while learning to navigate obstacles and successes” (p. 112).

One question that hangs over this body of literature is how to take the beneficial actions of individuals in staff and faculty roles and institutionalize them into an organization’s ethos and systems. Our consideration in our methods section of *movidas* undertaken not only to address in-the-moment needs but to intentionally and permanently reorient institutional culture seeks to elucidate this process by analyzing the case of Centro and the SLR. These *movidas*, in turn, like the programming of Centro and the SLR, were heavily shaped by notions of *conocimiento* and Latinx leadership.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Our review of the literature on practices and organizational features that bolster Latinx student success highlighted the need to understand supports for, and leadership among, Latinx students in nuanced and distinct ways from student success or leadership broadly defined within the scholarship of higher education. This need is particularly salient at HSIs such as our own, where the ultimate aim should be to liberate students and the institutions themselves through “development of critical consciousness and democratic participation,” “advanced academic self-efficacy,” and “development of racial/cultural identity,” alongside interest in academic progress (García, 2018, p. 137). To this end, our theoretical framework intertwines scholarship on Latinx leadership with the concept of *conocimiento*. Our framework seeks to understand success and leadership development for Latinx students through cultivation of self-awareness and sociopolitical consciousness, as well as students’ meaningful participation in the cultivation of their own capabilities and collective social aspirations and mobilization.

### **Conceptualizing Latinx Leadership**

It is important to conceptualize Latinx leadership as distinct from more color-evasive interpretations and interventions. As observed at our own HSI and within the student success interventions that perpetuated deficit framings of Latinx students as dispositionally or culturally to blame for their academic shortcomings, Suárez (2015) notes that campus leadership programming often marginalizes Latinx students by not accounting for their familial financial obligations, failing to create inviting and affirming spaces for Latinx students within leadership development activities, and providing curriculum and programming rooted in Eurocentric and patriarchal notions of leadership.

In contrast to color-evasive approaches, Bordas (2001) offers early theorizations of Latinx leadership by identifying the centrality of cultural values including collectivist orientations; the importance of mutual trust, respect, and congeniality; and continuous hard work and service toward community-advancing goals with an awareness of historicity. In later work, Bordas (2013) expands on this framework by identifying 10 distinct principles that again coalesce around the importance of self-awareness, mutual relations of trust, expansive and inclusive collaborative networks, community-oriented aspirations and purpose, and finding joy in collective mobilization.

Lozano (2015) builds on this work with a robust synthesis of research on student leadership in higher education, noting particularly the absence of work including Latinx students and a prevalence of color-evasive approaches to leadership development on campuses that often alienated BIPOC students. She combines this review with insights from her empirical work with Latinx undergraduates describing their understandings and experiences of leadership in a Historically White Institution. This analysis provides a framework to understand Latinx students' leadership development as a journey consisting of gaining greater awareness of self and community connections, growing awareness of issues requiring action and of leadership opportunities to address these issues, increasing networks of collaboration within the institution and grounding in networks outside (such as family), and a collective orientation desiring to improve conditions for subsequent generations.

By placing these various works in conversation, we can derive an understanding of Latinx student leadership as a multidimensional and ever-ongoing process. Leaders consistently reflect on their own identities, capabilities, and aspirations. Simultaneously, they build community, identify and learn collaboratively about issues often rooted in conditions of oppression, and strategize and mobilize collectively to overcome challenges and make lasting change. The cyclical and overlapping nature of this conceptualization invites parallels to the theory of *conocimiento* (Anzaldúa, 2002), which further guides our inquiry.

### ***Conocimiento***

*Conocimiento*, though directly translating as “knowledge,” encompasses great depth within Chicana epistemologies. Anzaldúa (2002) defines the term as a “form of spiritual inquiry” in which “you embed your experiences in a larger frame of reference, connecting your personal struggles with those of other beings on the planet, with the struggles of the Earth itself” (p. 119), and as a way to “challenge official and conventional ways of looking at the world, ways set up by those who benefit from such constructions” (p. 120). In other words, *conocimiento* entails courageous and sincere introspection to grasp the breadth of one's experiences, how these have shaped one's perceptions of the world, and how these experiences and perceptions have themselves been shaped by external relations and conditions. *Conocimiento* advances subjective, experiential, and collective knowledge as equally valid to that derived from rationality and empiricism. Within the context of Centro, *conocimiento* guides the ways that faculty and staff seek to know students--understanding them as more than objects of academic support--and the ways students are encouraged to relate to each other.

Just like Lozano's (2015) theorization of Latinx student leadership, Anzaldúa (2002) likewise explains *conocimiento* as a journey. It begins with an *arrebato*, an earthquake, that shakes one from the familiar, the routine, from accepted wisdom, and casts one into *Nepantla*, the second stage in the journey marked by an openness to new understandings and possibilities. The third stage is *Coatlicue*, a phase of despair as one is overwhelmed by the disjuncture between dominant narratives and the new realities of which one has become aware, before entering the fourth stage: a call to action, *el compromiso*. The fifth space (*putting Coyolxauhqui together*, which references

the dismembered moon goddess of Mexica mythology) is one of information gathering and sensemaking as one tackles the realities of which one is newly aware, and in the sixth stage, *the blow up*, one again faces disappointment and turns inward when individual action and expression prove ineffective. In the seventh and final stage, *shifting realities*, one builds mutualistic and humanistic alliances and finally is able to act transformatively through collective effort. Thus, as with the journey of leadership development, students in the process of *conocimiento* experience reflection about themselves and the world around them, identify and challenge conditions of injustice, and ultimately rely on community-oriented approaches to learn and create change. As we examine students' experiences in the SLR, we attend to these processes of growing self-awareness and sociopolitical consciousness as well as building community and envisioning collective action.

## Methods

### Site Context

The institution that houses Centro is a public 4-year, comprehensive university offering bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in 250 areas of study. The campus serves more than 33,000 students, over 71% of whom identify as students of Color (including 40% Asian, 27% Latinx, and 3% Black students), and 76% of undergraduates received financial aid in 2017-18, with 46% being Pell Grant eligible. The research site is located in a city and region that has been a critical portal of immigration from Mexico and Latin America for generations and is well-known as a hub of Latinx cultural production, activism, and educational justice work.

In this context, the programming of Centro seeks, first and foremost, to establish spaces (virtual and physical) that foster skills and self-efficacy for students to thrive academically and socially where Latinx students can be meaningful participants in their own educational journeys. Centro's ethos draws from extensive scholarship regarding racially minoritized students. Avoidance of deficit perspectives and a focus on students' assets are assured by adherence to the Community Cultural Wealth model (Yosso, 2005), which highlights the ways that students' familial, linguistic, aspirational, social, navigational (knowledge and networks to navigate bureaucratic processes), and resistance (knowledge and experiences combating injustice) resources can be leveraged for their educational success. *Cariño* (Bartolomé, 2008; Valenzuela, 1999) builds on frameworks of pedagogical caring (Noddings, 1988) whereby educators must concern themselves with students' holistic well-being and development rather than exclusively focus on academics but adds the specific ways in which such caring must entail political consciousness that interrogates and opposes racist, nativist, and other oppressive forces. *Confianza* (Fránquiz & del Carmen Salazar, 2004) guides the pursuit of "mutual trust" embedded within patterns and expectations of sustained relations within a social network and "expectations of being attentive to and investing emotionally in a variety of such relations" (Vélez-Ibáñez, 1996, p. 165). The concept, originally describing the reliance and solidarity across Mexican and Mexican American households, underlies Centro's efforts to make students' cultures part of the institution's own material culture and to promote a culture of unity, collaboration, and openness wherein

student voice is valued (Fránquiz & del Carmen Salazar, 2004). Finally, of course, Centro also relies on the concept of *conocimiento* (Anzaldúa, 2002) to nurture students along their journey of awareness, reflection, and development.

The center and its Culturally-Sustaining Mentorship model explicitly focus on bridging Latinx students’ academic and ethnic identities, but notably the work of Centro extends to changing the institution and not just the students. To this end, Centro staff and affiliated faculty mobilized to secure support across the campus and, as a result, Centro is now highlighted as part of recruitment, orientation, and welcome days. It provides a signature community learning and study space featuring Latinx student artwork; in-house academic and career advising as well as counseling support; peer mentorship; a faculty fellowship that partners students with faculty for research and mentoring; academic workshops on topics such as academic resilience, graduate school preparation, and time management; identity and leadership development; and community-building events like dinners and study breaks.

In addition, Centro annually organizes and facilitates a 2.5-day Student Leadership Retreat (SLR) with a team intentionally composed of 10-12 Latinx faculty, staff, and student staff. This team works closely with around 50 student participants in their first year at SJSU roughly evenly split between transfer students and first-time undergraduates, to emphasize a shared culturally-grounded understanding of their individual, collective, and historical experiences, along with leadership development and empowerment toward action. The programming challenges deficit-based approaches that students internalize through their K-12 experiences by emphasizing culturally-sustaining relationship building with the aforementioned model of *conocimiento*, *confianza*, and *cariño* to enhance academic engagement and success.

Taking place off-campus, the SLR provides a mix of structured group activities and discussions, opportunities for individual reflection and meditation, and downtime for studying and hanging out with new friends, organized around seven core workshops (Table 1).

**Table 1**  
*SLR Sessions*

<b>Session Title</b>	<b>Description</b>
<i>Conocimiento</i>	<i>Familias</i> of six students each engage in an intensive guided exploration of their family backgrounds, ethnic identities, and educational journeys.
Latinx Lived Experiences and Educational Pipeline	Students are introduced to the Latinx educational pipeline and historical factors that have shaped it, including critical concepts such as imposter syndrome and subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999).
Community Cultural Wealth	Facilitators walk students through Yosso’s (2005) Community Cultural Wealth framework and help them identify examples from their lives to address current personal, social, or academic challenges at the institution.

Developing Your College Identity	Students learn how to strengthen their student identities by centering their personal commitments, community connections, and capacity-building with peers.
Radical Healing	Students reflect on the impacts of systemic violence and inequities experienced by BIPOC and identify ways to heal and protect themselves.
Leveraging Strengths through Campus and Academic Engagement	Participants receive an overview of on and off-campus engagement opportunities and how to locate and create spaces that affirm Latinx student experiences.
Envisioning Collective Responsibility	Students create vision boards to capture the takeaways that they will convert into concrete actions when they return to campus.

**Researcher Positionality**

While all members of the research team took part in planning and facilitating the SLR, our positionality vis-à-vis students and the present inquiry vary, as do our roles at the institution. Poza is a Cuban American cis-hetero male serving as an assistant professor at the time of this inquiry. With relative class, gender, citizenship, and educational privilege, he envisions his role with Centro (as affiliated faculty providing regular office hours and leading occasional workshops) and in the SLR as heavily dependent on listening to students to better understand their experiences, concerns, and questions. As a scholar of language ideologies in educational policy and practice, Poza approached this inquiry with a focus on the interactional ways in which structural oppression is perpetuated or challenged. Pinedo Gangai was raised in a traditional Mexican Catholic household, where the Spanish language was exclusively used to communicate with family members. She was the first in her family to attend, navigate, and graduate from an institution of higher education in the U.S. and has assumed various staff positions within student and academic affairs in the last 15 years. As the director of Centro, Pinedo Gangai’s racialized and cultural experiences as a Latina have shaped her strength-based approach to developing programs and services that holistically support Latinx students. Barrera, the granddaughter of Mexican immigrants, was the first in her family to attend college, but as someone who attended an elite institution on a full scholarship, she had the privilege of focusing solely on academics without the work and family obligations that many Latinx students balance. Embracing the idea of “be the professor whom you needed,” Barrera draws upon her memories of confronting the unspoken customs of higher education to create interactive workshops that make transparent and disrupt those assumptions for Centro students. Burciaga identifies as a Chicana whose parents were the first in their families to attend college. Burciaga grew up on the Stanford University campus where her parents modeled high-impact practices to support first-generation college students. She holds a joint appointment in Educational Leadership and Chicana and Chicano Studies. Pizarro is a Chicano first-generation college student who has taught in Chicax Studies for many years, helped create and develop Centro and the SLR, and has been actively supporting Latinx student engagement and success at the university for more than two decades. He has also conducted research with student researchers in the SLR to

understand the experiences and needs of Latinx students on campus and the unique strengths they bring to the Centro and the university. This diverse array of experiences and roles shaped the ways in which we individually and collectively could connect with students, make demands of administrators, and interpret our observations.

### *Movidas and Centro*

Having reviewed the institutional context including Centro and the SLR, we describe the *movidas* that brought about Centro and the SLR in the first place, since this too plays an important role in examining our positionality. Description of the *movidas* certain members of the research team undertook to shift institutional culture and resources demonstrate our involvement and investment in Centro's activities and success that must be acknowledged as we consider its effectiveness in serving students. Analysis of our reflections upon experiences and efforts as Centro director (Pinedo Gangai), senior faculty (Barrera and Burciaga) and administrators involved with the task force and Centro (Pizarro), and junior faculty newly engaged with Centro (Poza), shed light on three pivotal *movidas* that supported and sustained Centro's mission and vision.

The first major *movida*, undertaken by Pinedo Gangai, combines expansion of professional roles, the building of strategic relationships, and fostering asset orientations about students. Institutional compartmentalization often leaves little room for faculty, staff, and student engagement beyond the day-to-day roles and responsibilities, hindering challenges to existing practices and policies that impact Latinx student success in isolation from a critical community. One way Pinedo Gangai approached this challenge was by setting aside personal time to engage with the Chicax/Latinx Task Force working towards campus-wide coordination to support Latinx students. This asset-based approach to supporting Latinx students countered the frustration Pinedo Gangai felt towards deficit-based approaches and punitive advising practices, including checks and holds on students' progress. The collaborative approach sought to validate students' individual and collective cultural, historical, and academic lived experiences and affirm their academic abilities. Pinedo Gangai began implementing such practices in her advising and was eventually hired as the Centro Director, where she continued the task force's momentum by making it a priority to strengthen campus partnerships and develop new cross-departmental collaborations in support of Latinx student success. This *movida* consisted of a sustained approach to community building in otherwise siloed institutions. These efforts were instrumental in helping identify like-minded colleagues willing to do the "extra" work.

Recognizing that the ability to understand and navigate the institution's political landscape is critical, Pinedo Gangai also undertook the second major *movida* of influencing people and policies vertically and horizontally through healthy working relationships with key campus leaders as part of strategic planning. During Pinedo Gangai's first month directing Centro, she met with the interim Vice President of Student Affairs (VPSA) to create a personal and professional connection through discussing departmental goals and areas of alignment. The VPSA was receptive to meeting regularly to ensure she felt supported during her transition. As the workload

grew exponentially, Pinedo Gangai quickly realized that Centro lacked the necessary staff and permanent base funding to support its ongoing work. Drawing upon the recommendations from the task force's external review, she submitted a memo directly to the VPSA requesting an additional FTE position in the midst of university budget discussions. To amplify this request, Pinedo Gangai reached out to the former Co-Chair of the Task Force for support. This *movida*, combining role expansion with strategic relationships, embodies advocacy further described by Pizarro.

Pizarro found it critical to the success of the task force and later Centro that decision-making administrators were challenged to re-think conventional approaches to supporting Latinx students. A key facet of this approach to engage administrators was to constantly highlight the research and complex conceptual framework that informed Centro's model. Administrators, even when supportive of efforts like Centro's, rarely understand the research on Latinx student engagement, and thus, in conversations, meetings, and at events with these administrators, Pizarro always referenced: 1) the research that demonstrated the negative effects of deficit thinking on Latinx students as well as the ways that deficit thinking was present on our campus, 2) the necessity of an assets-orientation and the specific ways we were using Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth model, and 3) the data we were obtaining on the positive impacts of this approach for Latinx students, along with specific students' examples of these successes on our campus.

As a full professor, department chair, and someone who had served on high-level university committees, Pizarro had relationships and a sense of trust with administrators that facilitated the success of this *movida*, even in challenging circumstances. In one instance, a new senior-level administrator came to one of Centro's large community events and emphasized a "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" message to a ballroom full of Latinx students. After this messaging, Pizarro requested to break from the planned program so that he could intervene right after this administrator presented. Pizarro then explained the Community Cultural Wealth model, provided examples that aligned with students' experiences, and centered the power of Latinx students and communities that they could build on for success in the university.

This *movida* challenged administrators to learn more about the work, but also provided them with concrete examples that they would later share with others on campus. Through that deeper understanding, these administrators became stronger allies and requests for additional resources were better received.

A final salient *movida* once more involved role expansion and strategic relationships. At the focal institution, one of the top reasons Latinx students leave is because of difficult encounters with academic advisors. Due to high student-to-advisor ratios, many advisors must adopt a more transactional approach; in addition, they rarely receive release time for community engagement. Although an external review recommended the assignment of a single academic advisor, Pinedo Gangai drew upon relationships cultivated with advisors whom she knew to care deeply about the relational elements of their work and recruited one from each college in order to extend advising at the center. This *movida* challenges conventional ways of assigning academic advising and faculty fellowship roles. Barrera was recruited as one such adviser, noting that while challenged

to meaningfully connect with students among other demands on her time, reimagining the ways that research, teaching, and service operated within the institution helped advance professional goals while also bolstering her ability as a mentor. Through regular office hours at Centro and by using Centro as a space in which to work on her own scholarship, she connected with students through spontaneous conversations and by letting them see her grapple with the writing process as well. Over time, these choices led her to develop a professional narrative that enabled others to see how engagement with the Latinx community both reflected institutional efforts to increase retention and graduation rates and enhanced her ability to mentor other colleagues in this work and facilitate more meaningful attachment to campus. This bridging of Student Affairs and Academic Affairs has helped Latinx students feel a greater sense of belonging, increasing campus involvement and academic engagement.

Taken together, these *movidas* speak to the ways individuals can shift institutional norms and practices through strategic, collaborative, and, at times, subversive agency. Expanding professional roles, forming relationships across departments, and leveraging these to bypass conventional chains of command, and foregrounding asset orientations about students guided significant shifts in resource allocation and programming at our institution. The student leadership retreat most clearly epitomizes these shifts, which we show after describing our methods of data collection and analysis.

### **Data Collection**

Our inquiry operated within the mold of a qualitative case study, requiring “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit” (Merriam, 1988, p. 21). Drawing from ethnographic, historiographic, and sociological methods, case study research may describe, interpret, or evaluate the case under examination, whether an individual, process, or institution (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2018). Given that our research questions sought, first, to capture students’ experiences within Centro programming and particularly the SLR, and second, to interpret those experiences through the lenses of leadership development and *conocimiento*, we collected first-hand student report data for this case study through surveys (Qualtrics questionnaires with open-ended questions administered before and after the SLR to all participants) and, most importantly, from a large group conversation among 36 SLR participants available for a reflective gathering several weeks after returning to campus (of 47 that participated in the retreat). Of the 36 students in the reflective conversation, 16 were transfer students and 20 were first-year undergraduates, with 21 female-identifying students, 10 male-identifying students, and five identifying as non-binary or not indicating a gender identity. All participants identified as Latinx albeit using a variety of terms (“Hispanic,” “Mexican,” “Mexican American,” “Chicana” or “Chicanx,” and “Latina”). As such, the group was closely representative of the larger group that attended the retreat overall. Moreover, since all retreat participants completed post-retreat surveys, it is fair to assume that scheduling was the primary reason for not attending the reflective conversation. We frame this conversation through the Chicanx epistemo-methodologies of *testimonio* and *pláticas*.

We foreground these approaches because they center the experiences and collective sense-making of BIPOC students (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Pizarro et al., 2018). *Testimonios*, echoing counterstories as a method from Critical Race Theory, allow non-majoritarian perspectives and experiential knowledge to serve as central systems of knowing and sources of strength in hostile environments. Students' responses to the surveys served as written *testimonios* in which they grappled with questions that prompted reflection of how they identified themselves, how they defined success and leadership, and how they envisioned contributing to the greater campus community both before and after attending the retreat. Students' responses to these questions were conversational in tone, with notable sincerity and vulnerability and spanning one or two paragraphs per question. The added layer of a group conversation allowed counterstories to interweave as *pláticas*, conversations that "allow us to witness shared memories, experiences, stories, ambiguities, and interpretations that impart with us a knowledge connected to personal, familial, and cultural history" (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016, p. 99). *Pláticas*, unlike individual *testimonios*, include elements of negotiation, dialogic interpretation, and instantaneous theorization to "make sense of the historical and theoretical foundations and complexities...by merging our personal experiences to them" (Ibid, p. 99).

Framing these *pláticas* were questions about students' overall experiences and learning at the retreat, their perspectives on leadership and how they had developed as leaders, as well as how they planned to follow through on their learning after the retreat, including what challenges they foresaw or were already encountering. The SLR facilitators participated in the *pláticas* and occasionally answered questions from their own positionalities, but mainly focused on creating a space where students were able to share anything and everything that reflected their experiences in the SLR and the impact it had on them over the weeks.

### **Data Analysis**

Recordings of the SLR *pláticas* were transcribed using Otter AI voice recognition and then finalized manually by the research team. While transcription was verbatim, responses are represented herein with repetitions or verbalized pauses ("like", "um") that occur in natural conversation reduced for clarity. Responses to the qualitative surveys and the conversation transcripts were reviewed by each individual on the research team with deductive and inductive approaches. Pursuant to our first research question, which asked what students' experiences were in Centro programming and especially the SLR, we began with descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2009) to identify information within student responses that characterized their actions, thoughts, emotions, and learning during the SLR. To address our second research question, which asked how frameworks of Latinx leadership and *conocimiento* could help interpret students' experiences, we proceeded with structural coding (Saldaña, 2009) and captured student commentary linked to the concepts in our theoretical framework either explicitly or implicitly. As such, we specifically identified elements of Latinx leadership and *conocimiento* such as self-awareness, sociopolitical consciousness, building community, and transformative action. The research team then jointly reviewed the codes at which we had arrived, consolidating in cases of overlap, and negotiating in

cases of disagreement, until arriving at a place of reliability. From our codes, we identified a trajectory that students’ *pláticas* revealed, encapsulated in four sequential questions. These questions and their related concepts and codes are captured in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Coding Scheme for Survey Testimonios and Transcribed Pláticas*

<b>Descriptive Codes (Inductive)</b>	<b>Structural Codes (Deductive – Facets of <i>Conocimiento</i> and Latinx Leadership)</b>	<b>Emergent Categories (Questions in the Journey)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Introspection</li> <li>● Feeling seen/Belonging</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Conocimiento: Nepantla</i></li> <li>● Self-awareness (Suárez, 2015)</li> </ul>	Who am I?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Shared experiences</li> <li>● Internalized deficit perspectives</li> <li>● Awareness of systemic inequities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Conocimiento: Coatlicue</i></li> <li>● Sociopolitical consciousness (Suárez, 2015)</li> <li>● Building community (Lozano, 2015)</li> </ul>	How have I/we been shaped?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Embracing ethnic identity</li> <li>● Connection with peers and faculty</li> <li>● Transition from anxiety to calm/Academic confidence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Conocimiento: El compromiso, assembling Coyolxauhqui</i></li> <li>● Collective identity and strategizing (Lozano, 2015)</li> </ul>	What strengths do I/we have?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Improved feelings toward institution</li> <li>● Uplifting peers</li> <li>● Reclaiming voice to enact change</li> <li>● Sense of ownership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Conocimiento: Shifting realities</i></li> <li>● Transformative legacy (Lozano, 2015)</li> </ul>	What can I/we do now/next?

**Limitations**

The present work is not without its shortcomings. While qualitative surveys provide some form of written *testimonio*, there is no questioning that an oral interview process would likely yield richer and more descriptive accounts of students’ experiences before and after the SLR. Likewise,

holding the *plática* as a single, large group debrief no doubt allowed some participants to avoid speaking at length, whereas smaller focus groups could have fostered more dialogic and in-depth conversations. From the perspective of institutional administrators seeking specifically causal relationships to student success, a more longitudinal period of observation, as well as comparison to comparable peers not afforded by the experiences of the SLR, would also bolster the analysis.

### **Findings and Analysis: “We Can Use Our Voice”**

Analyzing students’ discussions of their experiences with Centro, particularly the leadership retreat, revealed a trajectory of personal growth and collective coming together. As we noted in Table 2, this path could be characterized with four overarching themes aligned to central concepts in students’ responses: introspection and knowledge of self, understanding of self within systems of power and social relationships, shifting from deficit to asset orientations of self and community, and leadership as the capacity for transformative collective action. We present our findings aligned to those themes and intertwined with analysis consistent with Anzaldúa’s development of *conocimiento*, in which the journey and the subjective sense-making are interwoven with chronological events and descriptions.

### **Who Am I?**

In Anzaldúa’s (2002) framework of *conocimiento* with seven co-occurring and cyclical stages, there is a seismic shift in one’s understanding of self wherein “an emotional bottom falls out from under you, forcing you to confront your fear of others breaching the emotional walls you’ve built around yourself” (p. 122). Students repeatedly invoked this shift for themselves as they reflected on the retreat. Observations noted first and foremost the novelty of extensive dedicated introspection, with one student appreciating “having to actually think about who I actually am as a person and that there is a lot to me” and another expressing gratitude that it “gave me the space to reflect on the things that define me.”

This focus on introspection stirs uncertainty and ambiguity. Poignantly, one student commented:

I really learned a lot of real-life things that I took into myself, the people I surround myself with every day, my career...like a lot of self-reflection...So, coming back from the retreat, the main thing that I still think about all the time is, Am I really doing this for myself?

Similarly, another student offered, “It just makes me think a lot more. Well, what am I? What am I doing every day?” This stage of ambiguity and uncertainty, which Anzaldúa dubs *Nepantla*, is a “liminal, transitional space...split between before and after” (p. 122). Unsurprisingly, this process of deeper knowing also elicits feelings of self-judgment or regret, as one student articulated, “[W]hy did I do that before? Why did I close myself off to that option, to seek help?”

The outcome of this exploration is a sense of being seen and belonging. One student described how “[i]t was nice to be seen for who you really are in some way.” The opportunity to

reveal a true self establishes the foundation for belonging: “It gave me relief in the sense that I don’t feel so alone anymore, that there are many people with similar struggles,” one student explained, while another expressed, “I also realized that I am not the only student experiencing struggles in college...it helped me feel a sense of belonging.” Of course, reflection upon oneself quickly invites reflection on one’s formative experiences, relationships, and sociopolitical contexts in order to understand why some of these internal conflicts emerge.

### ***How Have I/We Been Shaped?***

Anzaldúa’s (2002) framework of *conocimiento* also includes scrutiny of “dominant and ethnic ideologies and the mind-sets their cultures induce in others” (p. 123) alongside questioning one’s place in broader social systems. Indeed, one student connected deeper knowledge of self to a greater understanding of white supremacy and systemic inequities, saying, “knowing my history made me feel included.” Undaunted by this historical rootedness, another student proclaimed, “We must also be aware that the system is not built for us and we must find ways of resistance through education.” This particular statement is both hopeful and critical, noting how education itself can be emancipatory and empowering, even if the educational institution is part of a web of systemic oppression.

Of course, such journeys to self-awareness and resistance of oppression require *confianza* and mutual trust, which students also highlighted. Students repeatedly accentuated feelings of empathy and understanding that they both felt and extended to others, such as one respondent who contributed, “I was able to truly communicate who I am as an individual,” and another who described a deep bond with her retreat *familia* by saying, “Having a *familia* and being able to connect with others that have a similar pathway as you has been very helpful and calming. My *familia* members have been there to console me during any obstacle.” In a particularly evocative moment, one young woman said to another:

I hope you know that you had a really big impact on my life...we just started getting into this really in-depth conversation about struggles that we all were going through and like struggles that we saw in the world and...that was so inspiring because it was why we care about the same things...but having these situations, like the retreat that sparked these conversations, and these conversations into relationships and just things that you carry out in life, and it was a very special moment.

As the student’s expression of gratitude demonstrates, mutual trust helped unearth shared experiences and notably, shared struggles “in the world,” that is, extending far beyond their experiences on campus and in line with Anzaldúa’s framework of knowing the self within larger systems and histories.

Frequently mentioned in these struggles were internalized deficit perspectives and the weight of systemic oppression that manifested as feelings of inadequacy and anger, albeit sometimes yielding to hope. One student shared about her initial self-doubt saying, “I remember sitting in my Bio-Statistics class, and I was like, oh, there's no way. All these kids are one up on me, what am I doing? And I just felt this moment of just being small.” Similarly, another student

shared, “These historical issues have impacted me in a way that in class I know the answer, but I don’t raise my hand. There are multiple students that raise their hand all the time and I feel like maybe my ideas are undervalued for not speaking up.” Grappling with the language of race, another student chimed in, “I always feel less smart than my peers due to my stereotype of my race. I try even harder to participate and work harder than my peers that are not my race to give a better view and contrasting stereotype.” It bears noting that the awkward phrasing here underscores how, for many students, the SLR is the first opportunity they have had to academically engage with the language and history of race. Echoing this turn away from deficit orientations, another student recollected, “I never spoke Spanish. I [used] to separate my academic life and home life. I felt that they had nothing to do with each other, but my family values actually help me.”

These latter quotes evidence not only awareness of systemic oppression, but also recognition of the assets that minoritized students bring with them that can foment individual success and broader transformation. Anzaldúa holds this growing awareness as the seventh stage of transformative *conocimiento* wherein one develops “holistic alliances” and an ability to “transform conflict into an opportunity to resolve an issue, to change negativities into strengths, and to heal the traumas of racism and other systemic *desconocimientos* [ignorance, self-destructive tendencies, limitations of imagination or spirit]” (p. 154). Correspondingly, students also affirmed their awareness of personal and collective strengths brought to their attention and eventually expressed commitments to put to use toward transformative ends.

### ***What Strengths Do I/We Have?***

Centro’s specific focus on asset orientations resonated with students, as several expressed increased self-assurances linked to pride in their ethnic and bicultural identities. One student, for instance, situated his newfound sense of belonging as stemming from embracing his biculturalism: “I felt like I wasn’t Mexican enough to be Mexican and not American enough to be American. Relating to others on this level makes me want to embrace my culture. I can now say that I am truly happy about my background.” Comparably, another student reflected on the retreat workshop about Community Cultural Wealth and opined, “It really made me realize that I shouldn’t be afraid to be who I am and made me proud of where I come from.” Another student, one of the few Latinx students in his major, shared his growing self-respect and self-efficacy recounting his interaction with a professor shortly after the retreat:

I reached out to one that I’m really intimidated by just because it’s like [a] super successful guy...What am I going to talk to him about? We’re like polar opposites. He’s like super white and I’m Brown. But being, I guess I just kind of went for it...Because I realized that one, I really do want to connect with him just because I feel like it’s an opportunity that I’ve never given myself. But it’s also that, well, I’m here and I’m studying this major, and I’m part of this. And, yes, you know, we might be different in certain areas, but I think there’s some commonalities. So, I definitely felt like that changed after I came back. I’m like, I’m still working through that. You know, it’s weird to be Latino in that, but it’s okay. And it might feel awkward. But

I definitely do agree that having that insight and now it's really cool because I feel like there has been a shifting...

The act in itself, speaking to one's professor, seems minor, but the student's affirmation that "I'm part of this" makes a twofold claim. Along with the recognition of commonalities with the "super successful" professor despite a racial difference, the claim is one of shared humanity and one of entitlement to equal opportunities for meaningful participation in his learning. Such recognition of belonging comprises the final theme in students' trajectories of leadership development.

### ***What Can I/We Do Now/Next?***

Closely linked to a shift in seeing themselves and their communities through asset orientations were desires to apply those strengths toward transforming the institution and the broader society. Shifting to a focus on strengths constitutes a reclaiming of voice both to create narratives for oneself rather than having them socially imposed and to speak with and for others in ways that allow their own power to emerge. Succinctly, one student shared a growing appreciation for collective notions of success and propagated this reclamation of voice by defining the leadership she aspired to as "you empower others, and if you make others leaders, and that makes you yourself a leader." Students also acknowledged the vulnerability in stepping forward to become a campus leader; one participant explained, "Representation matters, and I can be vocal about that, even if it makes me feel uncomfortable." Another student provided a concrete example, recounting an experience of studying with friends shortly after the retreat:

So, after the retreat I met up with some of my friends from class and the three of us are English majors. And they were like super nervous about finals and everything and...[W]e spent like a whole hour talking about, just like the struggles of being like a Latina English major. And I felt like some of the stuff that I learned at the retreat, I kind of like, remembered it and passed it on to them and just reminded them, hey, you know, this...doesn't define who you are, you know, and I just tried to motivate them and make them feel like they're, you know, they're worth more... I think that's when I noticed like I felt really good that I helped them out and they even told me like, 'Oh my gosh, thank you so much, we feel so much better now.' And I think that I learned some stuff at the retreat, and like it showed in those ways by also reaching out and passing it on to other students.

In this quote, we can see that the student is still in an early stage of this journey as she hedges her claim ("I *kind of* like, remembered it" and later, "I *think* that I learned *some stuff* at the retreat"), even as she passes her learning on to other students.

While these students focused on their capacity to lead on the university campus by using their voices to encourage others to share their own, another student drew specifically from his interest in public health as a major and eventual career, recounting his advocacy for more multiculturally cognizant public health research during one of his classes after the retreat:

And then I was like, ‘Well, what about my community?’ ...and I brought it into HIV infection rates in the Latinx community. And it just kind of was baffling me that our white counterparts, their rates for HIV was constantly getting lower where our rates as our community was also getting higher and higher and higher. And also to like my professor, she researches colon cancer and in my own community, specifically, and it's kind of like, taboo to talk about it...[She] was like, ‘We just don't have the data,’ and I like I got kind of offended like, ‘why are we not worthy enough to be researched?’ ...I got really upset that our community and our rates are not going down when it could be and just the fact that we don't, we're not given the proper education. It made me angry. And it's, I want to start researching.

This exhortation for community-specific medical data and public health education demonstrates a reclaiming of voice to assert belonging and entitlement to meaningful participation as a student in the present and researcher in the future. It marks, as do the previous examples, an understanding of leadership that is in service to others and subverts oppressive systems that fracture those connections. Another student's reflections on the retreat workshops offer a concise yet moving summary: “They helped me better understand why some of the problems in our communities persist to be problems, and how we can *use our voice* to speak out against such inequities,” (emphasis added).

We chose to highlight this particular utterance, “we can use our voice,” to title the findings and discussion section because it encapsulates the ethos and arc behind our own *movidas* and students' experiences with Centro. Our voices, speaking for the research team and students alike, enable our deeper knowledge of self as individuals and as collectives through sharing and dialogue. Our voices help us reclaim the historical narrative and political power by contextualizing and articulating our conditions within systems of oppression and liberation. By asserting our claims of dignity, equality, and value within the educational process, our voices help enact this liberation.

### Discussion

The reclaiming and purposeful direction of voice is no small feat. While certainly no formal proscriptions silenced students prior to their involvement with Centro, their contributions during the retreat *pláticas* attest to socially enforced silencing as a result of individualistic and competitive white supremacist modes of organizing higher education, manifested as internalized deficit perspectives and lack of belonging. However, the findings regarding our first research question speak to the ways that students' Centro and SLR experiences nurtured and amplified *conocimiento*, *confianza*, and *cariño*. These, in turn, provided students with deeper knowledge of self and society as well as a supportive community in which to share their challenges and recognize their individual and collective strengths consistent with both the frameworks of Latinx leadership development (Lozano, 2015) and *conocimiento* (Anzaldúa, 2002). The resulting transformations that students articulated of consciousness and of behaviors suggest that meaningful participation in Centro contexts spurred movement toward meaningful participation elsewhere in students' academic and personal lives.

The assertion of students' voices--in defining themselves, critiquing oppressive structures and histories, and demanding more inclusive educational experiences--reveals an affirmation of their leadership capability through the creation of contexts that enable their meaningful participation in their educational journeys. The recountings of students exerting agency in contexts removed from the leadership retreat such as classrooms and faculty office hours further speak to the lasting effects of these engagements with *conocimiento* and leadership development.

Several additional lessons can be learned from students' experiences vis-à-vis the specific *movidas* and contexts that provided the affordances for such occurrences. The SLR would not have been possible without the contributions of participating faculty, staff, and students, as well as institutional support. Critical to obtaining the latter was the collection and strategic deployment of Latinx student data. Information on retention and graduation rates for Latinx students and any existing equity gaps can be utilized to inform strategic interventions. Sharing this information with high-level leadership can usefully influence the reassignment or expansion of staff/faculty roles to maintain, analyze, and act upon data. Likewise, institutions seeking to develop holistic support for Latinx students should tap into staff and faculty who can serve as liaisons to key support services and academic departments. Far from viewing their role as an institutional responsibility, individuals within this talent pool approach their work through the lens of a core personal commitment. As a result, they invest in an integrated, proactive, and personalized delivery of student services that are culturally resonant.

### Conclusion

Our examination of the organizational shifts that institutionalized Centro and the interpersonal shifts that students experienced on the leadership retreat provides insight into the systems and practices that elucidate Latinx students' leadership capability and humanity as denizens of the university. Programmatically, spaces both psycho-emotional and physical must be created in which students can reflect deeply on their motivations, experiences, and challenges both as individuals and as members of shared identities, including challenging patterns of oppression. Further, students must be given a legitimate and meaningful voice in their educational trajectories, which we contend based on observations and extensive prior literature, is supported by affirming their experiences and identities within the curriculum and institutional culture. We revisit Gutiérrez and colleagues' (2009) distinction between focuses on "remediation" and those on "re-mediation:"

[R]e-mediating a history of inferior education required reframing what counts as education generally and literacy specifically and redesigning new curricula that created new linguistic and cognitive demands through an historicizing education and its transformative potential...where the overarching goal was to reframe education so that students could begin to reconceive their identities as learners and historical actors in the academy and beyond. (p. 15)

We believe that the efforts of staff, faculty, and students within Centro's programming, particularly the SLR, provide precisely this shift, rejecting pathologizing approaches to explain

academic disparities and instead cultivating Latinx student leadership as collaborative, transformational agents within and beyond the institution.

We have characterized these efforts as *movidas* insofar as these were grassroots and often subversive actions undertaken with intent not to palliate conditions but to fundamentally alter them. In the case of this particular HSI, these shifts required collaboration, role expansion, and advocacy to garner support and resources from the highest levels, or to make do without these benefits. Individual faculty and staff can only support students so far without resources and vocal endorsement from the institution as a whole. In turn, institutional proclamations and allocations cannot meet their stated ends if individuals are not willing to engage students with respect, humility, and sincere dialogic intention.

In practice, this interdependence has translated to two notable dilemmas. First, it has meant that the individuals who are already active in Centro (both students and faculty/staff) have been asked to play increasingly large and visible roles within the institution, marking dramatic increases in responsibility and obligation, but without commensurate support or remuneration. This mirrors the documented pattern of BIPOC and other minoritized faculty performing disproportionate and “invisible” service that is less recognized in processes of retention and promotion (SSFNRIG, 2017). Thus, while individuals like those at Centro accept these additional roles out of a commitment to students and in recognition of their capacity for good, they do so at a risk to the sustainability of their career and well-being. The second concern that emerges from this work is that as Centro has grown in recognition across the campus, its rhetoric has been adopted at higher administrative levels and across academic departments, although not always with corresponding knowledge, skills, and ideological commitments. It is one thing to proclaim support for Latinx students and to sincerely wish for their success, but another to explicitly confront systemic oppression, invite students’ identities and experiences into the curriculum, and build from students’ strengths.

We hope this work elucidates pathways for others to enact *movidas*, enabling students to become more meaningful participants in the narratives about themselves and their educational journeys. Further, as students’ stories attest to the widespread and institutionalized nature of deficit perspectives and other marginalizing forces in higher education, we seek to push this movement from surreptitious *movidas* to widespread institutional action. The inherent dignity of our students warrants nothing less. At the moment of this writing, mass mobilizations across the U.S. protested racist police violence and systemic racism across political, economic, educational, and medical domains. Organizers and community leaders serve as bulwarks of resistance against white supremacy and anti-democratic forces such as the mob that stormed the U.S. Capitol in early January 2021. Youth spearhead much of this justice work, and we believe this moment is ripe for the enactment of these shifts that honor and open space for students’ voices.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Latinx* refers to those of Latin American descent and is intended to represent the intersectional nature of language, race, ethnicity, and gender identity, notably by eschewing a binary notion of

gender from previous labels *Latina/o* and *Latin@*. For a review of the term's evolution, see Salinas, Jr. and Lozano (2019).

<sup>2</sup> While the literature in Critical Race Theory and its applications uses the term “colorblind” (e.g.: Gotanda, 1991), we use the term “color-evasive” to avoid the ableist trappings of the original term (Annamma et al., 2017).

<sup>3</sup> HSI, a federal designation for tertiary institutions with at least 25% full-time Latinx undergraduate enrollment

<sup>4</sup> We use the term BIPOC to center the experiences of Black and Indigenous peoples within the broader community of people of Color in this case, noting that they have disproportionately experienced symbolic and physical violence through existing systems of oppression (Grady, 2020). We use “of Color” when addressing general demographics or situations that do not involve students identifying as Black or Indigenous.

<sup>5</sup> EOP is a comprehensive advising and counseling services for students from historically minoritized groups

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