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Latinx on the Rise Mentoring Program's Impact on Graduating Student's Professional Integration Past Undergraduate Studies

Lucero Martinez-Salas
University of Arkansas, Fayetteville

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Integration Past Undergraduate Studies

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Lucero Martinez-Salas
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_____
Kimberly Stauss, Ph.D.
Thesis Director

_____   _____
Luis Restrepo Fernando, Ph.D.   John Gallagher, Ph.D.
Committee Member   Committee Member

Abstract

Mentoring programs are implemented to create a space for skill and information transmission between a mentor and mentee. Mentoring programs are typically implemented in an academic setting with professors or peers acting as a mentor and students as mentees. Based on the under-representation of Latinx students in higher education and further career paths, mentoring with this population could be positively impactful to their student experience. This thesis focuses on the Latinx on the Rise mentoring program and the experience of the mentees with a focus on the Latinx student experience. Implications for implementation of such programs and their impact will be explored as well as a focus on future research needed to address gaps in mentoring research.

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Introduction

Latinx college students have increased over the past few years with 21.7% represented in the undergraduate student population (Post-Secondary National Institute, 2020). With the current professional job market increasingly requiring a college degree as a foundation for criteria, young adults are encouraged to obtain an undergraduate degree. Additionally, post graduate studies are also required. Thus, the importance of degree attainment beyond a high school diploma has become increasingly crucial for young adults to enter the professional world. Despite this increasing need, many Latinx students struggle to obtain the next education level. Even though Latinx students make up approximately 21.7% of the undergraduate student body, only 20% of the Latinx population obtain a college degree compared to their white peers (Post-Secondary National Institute, 2020). For those Latinx students that are foreign-born, there is an 11% rate of bachelor's degree attainment (Post-Secondary National Institute, 2020). Additionally, only 9.5% of Latinx students obtained a master's degree and 7.5% a doctoral degree (Post-Secondary National Institute, 2020). In recent years, those with more advanced degrees have shown increased employment rates as well as having more opportunities in professions requiring a degree (Brown et al., 2020). Thus, there is a need to address this gap and better equip Latinx students as their representation in the professional world is essential.

There are many contributing factors related to this high education disparity between Latinx students and their white peers. Some of these include financial difficulties, lack of knowledge of the college environment, and differences in academic integration (Sanchez-Gonzales et al., 2018). An individuals' academic integration is a key factor to one's success and directly impacts the rate of students going on to higher education and integrating into the professional world. Thus, creating mentoring programs that specifically focus on Latinx

individuals are important. Furthermore, intervening during a complicated transition may be beneficial to the students.

To address the gap above, mentoring programs have been studied and show positive results in this regard. Prior research reflects the benefits and execution of successful mentoring programs such as mentor matching and program criteria (Association for Talent and Development, 2020). Mentoring takes shape in formal and informal settings with the family, friends, peers and coworkers among others serving as mentors (Association for Talent and Development, 2020; Booth et al., 2016). Such mentoring programs are seen primarily in professional and academic settings, yielding results specific to the success of an individual within these environments. Successes include increasing student retention rates (Andrew et al., 1987; Bernier et al., 2005) and professional team integration (Tolan et al., 2020). Unfortunately, there is minimal research focusing on the transition from higher education to integration into the professional world or continuing graduate work. Considering the positive impact seen when evaluating mentoring programs, this research gap is surprising. It is equally important to understand the impact and process of mentoring programs on students integrating into graduate school or future professions.

This thesis will review literature on mentoring programs, focusing primarily on the presence of these programs in the academic and professional world. Specifically, this study will explore the impact of a mentoring program located in Northwest Arkansas called Latinx on the Rise. This mentoring program was developed to help Latinx undergraduate students transition to either a professional environment or graduate school. College students for this program come from either Northwest Arkansas Community College (NWACC) or the University of Arkansas (U of A). This study addresses the gap seen in the research described here and discusses the

 outcomes of this innovative mentoring program.

Literature Review

Mentoring

Mentoring is difficult to define because of the multifaceted ways it can be delivered. Mentoring is commonly defined as an informal or formal relationship, typically between two individuals, that is an exchange of useful information and advice (Association for Talent and Development, 2020; Grima et al., 2014). This mentoring relationship has been described to include peers, family, professors, and co-workers (Association for Talent and Development. 2020; Bernier et al., 2005). Due to the versatility of mentoring, the goals of the relationship may not always be clear, but all support some transmission of knowledge and skill. For example, some studies identify that having a measurable goal is a key requirement for mentoring (Association for Talent and Development, 2020; Bernier et al., 2005; Grima et al., 2014), while others set a criteria for meetings with both mentees and mentors (Association for Talent and Development, 2020). Despite these inconsistent details, many common themes of mentoring relationships include providing coaching, guidance, and support that can be mutually beneficial (Association for Talent and Development, 2020; Booth et al., 2016; Grima et al., 2014).

Mentoring Benefits

The literature describes the benefits of mentoring programs within certain environments. In one study, new employees were mentored by senior employees as they entered the field of medicine (Stamm & Buddeberg-Fischer, 2011). The results showed that retention rates were statistically improved by the program (Stamm & Buddeberg-Fischer, 2011). In another study, students transitioning into college increased academic performance and satisfaction with college life because of participating in a peer mentoring program (Andrews et al., 1987). Similarly,

another program targeted academic 'at-risk students' and academic success increased as a result

of a peer-professor mentoring program (Bernier et al., 2005). Additionally, another study

described increased confidence of students within a college environment and being able to seek

out on-campus support (Bordes & Arredondo, 2005). The benefits detailed above were attributed

to the involvement of students in mentoring programs.

Successful Mentoring Programs

With so many positive results stemming from the implementation of mentoring programs,

it is important to understand the specific criteria for success. This is another complex aspect of

mentoring as some situations are informal and do not have a structured format to follow.

Regardless, one commonly stated criterion that was seen as beneficial was working towards a

common goal (Association for Talent and Development, 2020). Another essential criterion was

strategically choosing the mentoring pairs based on characteristics of both the mentee and the

mentor (Bell & Treleaven, 2010). Lastly, Booth and colleagues (2016) found the importance of

having a reciprocal learning relationship and this, subsequently yielded better rapport and overall

benefits for both the mentee and mentor.

Latinx Students and Mentoring Programs

Previous research has also connected the benefits of mentoring programs specifically for

Latinx students. Some of these mentoring programs have infamously focused on 'at-risk'

students and research centering on these programs have scrutinized them for their lack of support

systems and knowledge rather than empowering students through the program and their already

established cultural support (Yosso, 2005). Despite this lack of cultural perspective, mentoring

programs focused on the Latinx students have yielded positive results. One study cited that a

direct focus on Latinx individuals may be more efficient and created recognition on key cultural

factors (Crisp et al., 2020). Due to first-generation students entering an unknown environment, these mentoring programs have shown to increase self-confidence and foster a sense of belonging (Bordes & Arredondo, 2005). A qualitative study interviewing Latinx students reflected that the participants wanted to utilize their community cultural wealth and benefited from a mentor that helped develop this connection (Crisp et al., 2020). These studies above showed that understanding the Latinx student's culture and using it as a tool, was beneficial to the students and their success.

Gap Seen in the Mentoring Research

Although there is an extensive amount of research conducted over the benefits of mentoring and its implementation in various environments, much of the research focused on starting college, getting a job, or learning from your coworkers. These are two drastically different points in life and can be difficult to navigate. Mentoring programs are often implemented to help a student adjust to new academic and social atmospheres, both of which are vital for academic success. In the professional environment, new employees are trained and mentored on the mission of the company and ways that all employees can work towards that common goal. The events not typically addressed in research are the transitions from undergraduate studies to either the professional world or to graduate level studies. The transition between these two worlds is not limited to the brief weeks after graduation and the applications sent to jobs. This transition begins in classes and networking starts in their undergraduate studies and continues as one chooses their next steps. The academic side of this transition occurs in the preparation to graduate while simultaneously addressing job applications and resume building, required for the next step. Thus, this transition seems equally important to target with a mentoring intervention.

Latinx on the Rise

The Latinx on the Rise Mentoring Program was created in 2019 under the Hispanic Leadership Council (NWA HLC, 2021). The mission of NWAHLC was to promote the growing presence of Latinx individuals living in Northwest Arkansas (NWA) by empowering the community to aim for a diverse and equitable society. Through this mission, a committee was developed to focus on the Latinx students, thus the mentoring program was created. This mentoring program focused on Latinx college students in their second to fourth years of their undergraduate career. The purpose of Latinx on the Rise was to encourage college students to develop mentor-like relationships within the community and with their assigned professional mentor. The program hoped to see skills and networks built through these relationships to help the undergraduates as they finish their college education and continue to other endeavors. This program was imbedded in NWA due to the Latinx population being 18% (NWA Council, 2021). NWACC has a Latinx student population of 22% (Data USA, n.d.) and the U of A with a student population of 8% Latinx students (Data USA, 2021).

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Theoretical Considerations

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The Multi-Systems Life Course Perspective is a perspective that incorporates four distinct theories and practices for an all-encompassing understanding of a social need (Murphy-Erby et al., 2011). In this study, the MSLC framework sheds light on the intersectionality of social situations of being a college student and the cultural and societal impacts on being Latinx. As described above, college students are navigating the social and structural world of academia and university setting. This environmental change is difficult and requires many students to seek out resources to navigate and succeed within it. A direct impact of the student experience is the cultural and societal differences of identifying as Latinx. The mission of the Latinx on the Rise

program directly acknowledges the differences of being a Latinx individual while specifically targeting the impact this can have on one's ability to successfully be prepared and navigate the academic world and the future professional work. In understanding the intersectionality of these two experiences, this study is designed to explore the impact a mentoring program can have on the Latinx student experience as well as sharing the stories of the Latinx student in a transition to future career paths. With the results of this study, information about cultural differences, identified support systems, mentor impact, and other factors will enhance our understanding of how to support the Latinx student to succeed in future career paths.

Methodology

Research Design

This study sought to understand the impact of Latinx on the Rise on past mentees' future career plans past their undergraduate studies. This qualitative study focused on previous Latinx on the Rise mentees through a semi-structured interview process. Given that this topic has not been explored greatly in the research a qualitative, exploratory approach was appropriate (Patton, 2001). Further, it provides an opportunity to focus on individual experience and provides perspectives on involvement in mentorship programs. The purpose of the study was to better understand the experiences of these mentees and the interactions with their assigned mentors.

With a focus on previous mentees, the participant pool was limited to the previous 30 mentees who completed the program. Participants who did not complete the program were excluded from the research study. For recruitment, an email was sent to all previous mentees with information about the study. Within the email, a research proposal was attached to explain the voluntary nature of the study as well as the confidentiality protocols. The University's Internal Review Board approved all research procedures (Appendix A).

Data Collection

Of the previous mentees, five students completed interviews. The semi-structured interviews were completed and conducted via zoom due to Covid-19 precautions. The interview questions were developed by the researcher based on the mission of the Latinx on the Rise Mentoring Program and overall focus on the Latinx experience. Interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed by the researcher. The participants' names were removed, and the audio recordings were deleted after transcriptions. The interview consisted of collecting introductory demographic information followed by questions related to the experience of the mentorship. The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes to an hour. Interviews were conducted during the fall semester of 2021. The researcher was the sole transcriber of the interviews and transcripts were saved with non-identifiable information.

Data Analysis

Transcriptions were analyzed by the primary researcher. Utilizing an open coding process, patterns in ideas, experiences, and thoughts expressed by the participants were grouped into themes and subthemes. Transcripts were reviewed over a two-month period with verbatim transcriptions being analyzed line-by-line. This open coding is important in building categories and concepts from data sources; this framework later being analyzed directly using raw data (McCaslin, 2017). Preliminary analysis was compiled into a Google document with non-identifiable information. Additionally, participants were given their full transcripts of the initial interviews with the developed themes. Participant checks are a recommended way to validate emergent themes (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The participants were asked to comment on the accuracy of the interpretations and encouraged to clarify any areas they may have felt misunderstood or misinterpreted. The researcher was able to reanalyze original transcriptions

based on the feedback from the participants.

Reliability and Validity

To heighten rigor, the researcher initially completed an autoethnography (Jones & Adams, 2016). Within this autoethnography, the researcher self-disclosed personal biases and thoughts on the Latinx student experience based on their personal experiences (Appendix B). Further the researcher discussed how their own personal involvement in the Latinx on the Rise Mentoring Program shaped the approach taken on this research topic. In self-disclosing these personal experiences, the researcher attempted to identify biases for readers to provide transparency. Further, the researcher took additional steps to increase rigor by conducting online focus groups with the individual participants after initial analysis. During these groups, the researcher provided preliminary analysis. Also as presented above, the researcher provided an electronic copy to the participants requesting feedback regarding the accuracy of the analysis and to provide corrections if needed. Finally, the rigor and validity of the findings were further increased by including disconfirming evidence.

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Results

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Demographics

There were 5 previous mentees that volunteered to complete interviews, having previously completed the Latinx on the Rise Mentoring Program. Of the participants, 60% (n=3) were female. The age ranged from 21-30 with the mean age being 25. All the participants (n=5) identified as Latinx with 60% (n=3) identifying as Mexican, 20% (n=1) identifying as Salvadorean, and 20% (n=1) as Guatemalan. All the participants (n=5) were undergraduate college students at the time of participation with 60% (n=3) seniors, 20% (n=1) junior, and 20% (n=1) sophomore. Due to the mentoring program criteria, all students were either from the

University of Arkansas (U of A) or Northwest Arkansas Community College (NWACC).

Thematic Findings

From the interviews gathered, two core clusters emerged. These included the Latinx on the Rise mentoring experience and the Latinx student experience. Many of the experiences described provide insight to the Latinx student experience and the potential benefits of having programs created to target this cultural difference. Despite having five distinct participants, many of their experience and described feelings were similar in cultural and academic experiences.

Mentoring Experience

Due to the study being focused on the participants experience in the Latinx on the Rise Mentoring Program, this cluster was broken into themes based on the interview questions regarding their experiences with mentoring. The themes that emerged included previous knowledge of mentoring programs, impact on future plans, skills acquired, and mentor connection.

Knowledge of Mentoring Programs

The participants had varying degrees of definitions and experiences with mentoring programs. One of the participants discussed never having participated in a mentoring program and not knowing what to expect. They further stated that they did not know what their role would be as a result. Another also described not having experience within a mentoring program but described their expectation of the program was to offer knowledge from a wiser individual on a certain topic. Other participants had a more concrete definition. Participant C described their perception of a mentoring program as:

> Anything that involves learning from an individual with more experience, that has
> more wisdom to offer. They have more experience in a particular field or area.

Just someone who has more skill and has some recognition through their work by

their peers.

Additionally, Participant C detailed how they hoped to receive many skills and guidance

through this experience. Similarly, Participant D defined mentoring the same as Participant C but

added that the information was important in preparing for future work within the profession. One

participant provided a definition that contrasted these describing mentoring in informal settings

with family friends. Participant E continued this definition by describing mentoring from family

friends including guidance in navigating academic and work-life balance.

Although not all participants had prior experience with mentoring programs,

understanding their initial knowledge was important in understanding what programs are offered

and how they are perceived by students. Despite spending an average of about 13 years within

the academic world, two out of five participants had some understanding of what mentoring was

and one out of five had previously been in such a program.

Program's Impact on Future Plans

Most of the mentees gathered more information on their future aspiration but some had a

drastic change in their desired career path. These participants attributed these changes directly

through the skills learned within the mentoring program.

When asked about the impact of the program, most of the participants (n=4) reported

modifying their plans due to the new information learned from their mentors. One participant

discussed their desire to apply to a counseling program after graduation but was uncertain of this

due to lack of understanding of the steps in the application process. Because of the knowledge

gained through the mentor, the participant discussed concrete graduate plans because of the skills

learned such as resume building and networking. Another participant detailed their experience

helped them firm up plans on getting their masters, but until participation, they did know what field to pursue.

One participant illustrated this theme not only as a change in future plan but also a new direction of prospective careers. The participant expressed:

I was die-hard set on being a business major and bring in as much money as I could; being the great entrepreneur. One conversation with my mentor and things seemed to change. I prioritized my relationship with people, and I get more fulfillment advocating for people and more than money could ever get me. My dreams and aspirations have completely turned.

Another participant discussed their new aspiration of obtaining a public relations related degree, a turn from the business degree initially being pursued, a change that had not been seen as an option before membership in the program. Participant E also described a similar change in majors due to being introduced to different courses. This participant was originally seeking out a degree in communication and was able to learn about social sciences through their mentor. In discussing this realm and later taking a psychology course, Participant E discussed changing their course of study to major in psychology. The participant discussed not knowing about this option and "resorted to a communications major" as a default.

Not all participants shared a desire to change their future plans due to the program. One participant discussed having a clear idea of wanting to teach history throughout her life and that this option became more viable as time continued but not necessarily due to the program itself. The participant discussed that the program gave her a clearer understanding of how to get to this goal but also stated that they would have sought out the resources to accomplish this path regardless.

Skills Acquired

Another theme of the mentoring experience, and potentially the most impactful, were the skills acquired by the participants. As some expressed in their perceptions of a mentoring program, there was an expected transmission of knowledge and thus, guidance in future plans. The participants consistently reported many takeaways from the program.

Participant A described their search to obtain a scholarship to fund their post-graduate education and subsequently was able to apply, and received, a graduate assistantship position through one of their mentor's networks. The participant discussed this opportunity as drastically increasing their odds of attending a post-graduate program. Participant B additionally described a unique experience because they were a part of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), and consequently were limited in their career possibilities. The participant described their mentor providing resources and information needed and eligibility criteria. Participant B described this newfound understanding as essential when exploring job applications, scholarships, and community resources at their discretion. They reflected feeling hopeless in this realm as a DACA recipient and perceiving they were forgotten and rarely had accommodations to help.

Participant C additionally described empathy and wisdom from their mentor as a skill obtained in understanding the differences between societal lines of success, balanced with exploring things one was passionate about. The participant described this skill as extending to overall skills in maintaining mental health; the participant previously mentioning to the mentor this was an area where they struggled. Similarly, Participant D described confidence building as the most important skill acquired. Participant D stated, "I gained more confidence, I had always been on the quieter side, but he told me that I need to stand out so other students of color, or my

own students, would learn to do the same and not blend in."

Additionally, Participant D described how their mentor sent them information about assistantships, academic conferences, and job opportunities. The participant described this information as being extremely valuable and allowed them to integrate into the academic realm when previously, they did the "basic requirements of an undergraduate student." Participant E's response resonated with this as well stating that they did not see the opportunities available in college due to being focused on academic and not having knowledge of other extracurriculars.

Though most participants described gaining some skills from the program, one participant described information about other majors being the most valuable. This person discussed having had support through their university already. The participant continued and described that no new skills were acquired but the program provided a space to discuss studies and increased their exposure to academia.

Mentoring Connection

The crucial component of the mentoring program is the mentor and mentee professional relationship. There were two mandatory meetings needed per academic semester as a requirement for participation, but further connections were dependent on the pair. With the program focusing on the pairing, the participants described the details of these meetings and the professional relationship established.

All participants reported meeting the minimum of two meetings per academic semester with an even spread of in-person and online meetings. Participant B described having a mentor within the same area of their studies, therefore it positively impacted their pairing. The participant described feeling comfortable knowing the mentor was actively practicing in their field of interest and they were able to relay first-hand experiences. Participant C described their

mentor as being completely opposite of their studies but was able to transcend this and offer insightful advice and engaging in conversations that went past just academics. Participant D described establishing a connection with their mentor due to being passionate about their area of study. The participant described the pairing organically created a connection due to being "as true to the definition of mentoring".

On the other hand, Participant E described difficulty finding a connection with their mentor due to having different areas of study. Additionally, this pair only met the minimum number of sessions. Regardless, the participant perceived the pairing worked due to the mentor's connections to other individuals with similar interests as the mentee. The participant also described that the Covid-19 pandemic inhibited the relationship, and they were not able to meet in person. The participant continued and reflected that the distance of their connection, "strengthened due to communicating through a screen in such uncertain times." Despite having this difficulty connecting, the participant described the connection slowly evolved when they were able to discuss different areas of academics. For example, "There were interesting conversations regarding the details and events of being in academics. My mentor was younger and could relate on the stress and difficulty to excel in certain areas that were not my primary focus."

All participants reported the mentor-mentee relationship being strong at the end of the program and many expressed actively being in contact with their mentor. These relationships were built on the transmission of knowledge and guidance provided as part of the mentor-mentee connection. Further, these connections seemed to transcend the required guidelines set by the program. The experiences shared by the participant in these interviews creates a story of the benefits of a mentoring program and the impact it can have on the participants.

Latinx Student Experience

While the cluster above came from the questionnaire, the student experience cluster emerged more organically. Even though the participants were asked to describe their experience in the academic settings as a Latinx student, they detailed many disparities in the resources available as they entered undergraduate studies. Within this cluster two themes emerged: navigating college as a Latinx student and available resources.

Student Experience

In order to share and reflect on the Latinx student experience, the researcher wanted to present the context of each participant more fully. With the lack of graduation rates in college of Latinx students, it is important to understand why or how their experiences may differ from their peers. In understanding how to tailor a mentoring program to Latinx students, the student experience is important to understand to provide the necessary guidance and support for their particular needs.

Participant A identified as a first-generation student, as they were the first in their family to attend college. They described being lonely and isolated from their peers. Additionally, they perceived themselves as the "only Latin(x) in the classroom" and constantly thought "I do not belong here." Navigating the multiple departments at a university was difficult and often felt like they had to jump through many hoops for simple answers. The participant also never had a Latinx professor until they took class in Latinx studies or foreign languages. Subsequently after having this professor, they were encouraged and finally believed that she belonged.

Participant B identified as a DACA recipient and also a first-generation student. Impactfully, she stated that her experience was, "not that easy because we are like in the shadows." They continued by stating there was frustration in not being able to apply for financial

aid and only recently qualified for in-state tuition. They also described fear in speaking out or even identifying as a DACA student due to the political atmosphere heavily impacting here and they would be received by others. According to this student, their student experiences were masked by fears beyond failing an exam but of being deported, getting an ID, and even getting a job. Their involvement in a leadership program called DREAMERS, where their status and experience were understood were essential in providing her additional support.

Participant C identified as a first-generation and DACA student. They reflected that their experience was unaccepted. The participant stated that they perceived they were not Latinx enough for the Latinx community and not American because they were not born in the United States. The mentee believed that having a high sense of self was necessary when others responded that they were not enough. They further explained that having resources and connections would have made the experience easier. In acknowledgment of their peers, the participant described navigating the academic world and relying on their own network to help with resources. By navigating the academic realm, the participant perceived it was breaking ground for their siblings and resulted in a sense of pride for their parents. This participant continued to reflect on a personal need and pressure to succeed because of their parents by stating, "They are sacrificing everything for me." Impactfully the client shared the experience of applying for scholarships and applications where all criteria were exceeded. Unfortunately, they stated "one caveat requirement that you do not meet, citizenship status." The participant shared:

> Nothing messed with my psychology more than that, being young and
> transitioning into adulthood, that put me in a bad mental state. Just knowing that
> was the only requirement I did not meet, if I am being honest, it made me feel like
> I was less than human… But that was soul crushing and that still sticks with me.

Participant D identified as a first-generation student as well. They reflected on the difficulty of being a student of color and being scared to stand out in the wrong way. Participant D described the financial difficulty being a primary obstacle. To alleviate this, the participant reported building up their resume with extracurriculars to increase the chances of obtaining a scholarship. They described completing one step towards school admissions as being nothing compared to all the other steps that were needed. The participant perceived they were not up to par with their peers in their academic achievements. They also struggled not relating to teachers or past mentors due to them not being Latinx. The participant shared always feeling a disconnect and being uncomfortable in potential perceptions as identifying as Latinx. The participant limied themselves to who they reached out for help and who they allowed themselves to connect with due to not everyone being able to understand the Latinx experience.

Participant E was a first-generation student also. The participant came from a large family but was the first to navigate the academic world. "There was a moment when I thought, 'What else could I possibly do?'" The participant perceived they got the short end of a stick and were limited in their options for schools. Similarly, to the students above, they had minimal representation within the university and knew of no programs geared towards Latinx students. The participant reflected on a lonely experience as well and did not feel comfortable joining clubs or sororities due to the additional worries of needing to take care of their family, needing a full-time job to fund school, and not wanting to jeopardize her academics.

Support and Resources

The participants described similar experiences of lack of resources when applying to and participating in college. One participant described having to actively seek out resources in their freshman year due to not knowing what was important. Another participant commented in

gratitude on the financial aid resources they received due to not having financial support for tuition. Another participant described a program, Life Program, at their college being the place where they build lifetime relationships, this program described as being all-inclusive for all students.

Most participants described their family's supportive role in their studies. One participant described their family was a source of motivation due to, "not wanting to have the same struggles as my family and having a better future." Participant E stated that the Latinx culture valued education and thus their family was supportive in all the ways they could. Another participant prioritized school to payback their family for the sacrifices they made in migrating to a new country. One participant described the monetary emphasis that work brought, a positive view when their parents had struggled financially for many years. A few participants shared a similar experience of a push for them to pursue high-paying jobs despite not having a passion for the field.

In describing the family support, many described a lack of support during the process although two disclosed a lack of support. One participant described feeling no emotional support from the family. The participant described this through cultural norms stating:

It is a Latinx thing that when you marry then you are done, that is your role. I got backlash and resentment from them. I had to compartmentalize; it is something that we don't learn to do coming from a collectivist culture. There were familial obligations that were required of me that would have to take precedent over my studies like translating for my parents or arranging appointments for my younger siblings. For education being pushed so much, it was not seen as important in comparison to the family.

Another participant described their family as "brushing off their stress," because school was seen as a necessity to the point that it was perceived as easy. The participant further described the difficulty of this experience to her parents that had come from a country where it was normal to drop out in elementary school to help out on the family farm.

The Latinx student experience is a unique one that seems to be shared across many students. Understanding this narrative is important in understanding how to best help Latinx students. With many programs focusing on the academic side of the students' lives, incorporating aspects to fill in gaps in resources and understanding of the Latinx culture could be beneficial in providing the most effective support for the Latinx students.

<div align="center">**Discussion**</div>

The purpose of this study was to examine the experience of the Latinx on the Rise Mentoring Program through the shared experiences of previous mentees. There are disparities of the completion of academics and higher degree attainment among the Latinx students. Additionally, there is an underrepresentation of mentoring programs that are focused on the Latinx student (Yosso, 2005; Crisp et al., 2020). In developing a program to best address this, the narrative of the Latinx student experience adds a unique perspective.

With education being a prime requirement for the professional workplace, this educational disparity translates as a lack of Latinx representation in the professional world. To target this difference, Latinx on the Rise Mentoring Program is specifically focused on the Latinx student and the transitions from undergraduate studies to the workplace or graduate studies. The results from this study suggest that this particular focus is beneficial to the Latinx student as they navigate the academic realm and prepare for the professional workplace. The findings seen are relatively novel as this program focuses on the undergraduate student's

transition to later graduate studies or the professional world, a focus not previously seen in the mentoring literature.

The emerging themes are supported by prior research about the benefits of the mentoring programs as well as adding unique findings on the skill building for plans after undergraduate studies. Within participant interviews, a common theme of difficulty in succeeding within a new academic setting mirrored previous mentoring literature (Andrews et al., 1987; Bernier et al., 2005) as well as the impact involvement in a mentoring program had on this struggle such as skill building and mentor connections (Bell & Treleaven, 2010; Booth et al., 2016). Previous mentoring findings suggest that the integration into higher education is a struggle for students when initially adapting and present that the mentor-mentee relationship increased the academic success of the student by increasing social involvement and grades (Bernier et al., 2005). The concept of being a Latinx student and, for some, a first-generation student, introduced a unique student experience in addition to an already difficult student experience. Most of the participants in this study detailed their student experience as paving the way in an unknown system. They reported that their parents and siblings had not attended college, thus the process from admissions to succeeding as a college-student were unknown and difficult to navigate. One participant discussed how they felt a unique connection with the mentor knowing that with the participants being Latinx students, the struggles of identifying as one would be met with understanding and allyship.

Previous research discussed the importance of focusing on the Latinx student with utilization of allyship and connectiveness as a way to empower this unique experience (Yosso, 2005). With this program being unique in focusing on the transition from undergraduate studies to either further studies or integration into a professional field, many participants discussed the

skills acquired as beneficial in the transition process. The participants mentioned networking skills as opportunities to meet current community leaders, hear about opportunities to attend conferences, and applying for internships. Further, participants reported having essential help with resume building and graduate school admissions processes. With one of the participants describing the transition as another situation where they would be the first-generation, the mentoring program acted as a social support to navigate the transition.

Program participants provided feedback on areas that could be better improved in upcoming years. For example, participants discussed the mentor-mentee compatibility as vital to transmission of knowledge and impacting their willingness to schedule meetings. Additionally, the availability of the mentor was often discussed by the participants and those that reported having increased accessibility to their mentor, disclosed more positive program experiences. Overall, participants reported relatively positive experiences and offered solutions to these difficulties previously mentioned. Some of the participants proposed proposing having access to all mentors while still being paired with one primary mentor. These findings can provide guidance in future program execution.

<center>**Limitations and Implications**</center>

Limitations

Due to the qualitative nature of the study and the focus on previous mentees from a mentoring program, the sample size was small. Still, having a limited potential participant pool, the size of the sample was still able to reflect on the mentoring experience. With the participation being voluntary, those participants who completed the interview may have been more inclined to participate if they had a positive experience in the program. Thus, the results may be biased towards the positives of the programs without knowing if other participants had different

experiences. To combat this, the researcher included results that were contradictory and disconfirming as well. With the qualitative study having semi-structured interviews, the thematic findings may incorporate bias in the findings. Although an auto-ethnography was used to reflect on the researcher's potential for bias, this could not be completely eliminated. To further combat this, a participant check was held with the participants to clarify and provide feedback on preliminary analysis and findings.

Research Implications

Future research could examine this program in a quantitative format using the variables which emerged in this study. With this study relying on the researcher to gather thematic findings, a quantitative format would help provide statistical data to the reported experiences. Additionally, research could be gathered to examine the transition after undergraduate studies in other student populations to identify if there is a need for mentoring programs to aid in this transition. Further, with the student experience being unique for diverse populations, the development of student specific programs should be further explored.

Practice Implications

One practice implication of this study would be on the execution of future Latinx on the Rise Mentoring Programs. With this being the first evaluation of the program, the participants provided valuable feedback for future criteria for this program. Another practice implication of this study would be on the implementation of programs with similar missions. With this program focusing on a transition that will be experienced by most graduating students, similar programs can be developed in other areas and with different student populations. With the disparities seen in the Latinx student experience, it is important to create policy that alleviates disparities seen in resources available and completion of educational studies. With an increase in advocacy

regarding these disparities, the education system can provide additional supports during their involvement in the academic system. The incorporation of cultural sensitivity and awareness would also be beneficial to be incorporate in the academic system. With some Latinx students being unable to receive financial assistance, many students are working full-time jobs to fund their academics. Further, with some Latinx students having parents without status in the U.S. the admissions process may create fear and uncertainty for the family. With the inclusion of programs designed to provide awareness to the school system, students can be met with understanding and sensitivity as they begin their student experience.

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Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval

UNIVERSITY OF
ARKANSAS

To:	Lucero E. Martinez Salas
From:	Justin R Chimka, Chair IRB Expedited Review
Date:	08/16/2021
Action:	**Exemption Granted**
Action Date:	08/16/2021
Protocol #:	2106338818
Study Title:	Latinx on the Rise Mentoring Program's Impact on Graduating Student's Professional Integration

The above-referenced protocol has been determined to be exempt.

If you wish to make any modifications in the approved protocol that may affect the level of risk to your participants, you must seek approval prior to implementing those changes. All modifications must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have any questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact the IRB Coordinator at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.

cc: Kim Stauss, Investigator

Appendix B

Autoethnography

As a Latinx student myself, my personal experience highly motivated my involvement in the Latinx on the Rise Mentoring Program and the overall topic of this research. I first understood the differences in the Latinx student experience when I entered elementary school. My family spoke Spanish primarily at home and I assumed this was appropriate at school. My kindergarten teacher pulled me aside the first week to let me know that English was only to be spoken. Although her intention was for me to be able to communicate with my classmates, this was my first instance of having a different experience than my other peers.

As school continued, I understood that many of my experiences were different from my peers. To begin, my mother was not able to help me on my homework or projects. My mother had the equivalent of a 3rd grade education in Mexico but had to drop out shortly after due to the death of her mother. Although her wisdom is beyond what I hope to one day gain, she was not able to provide the academic support that my peers' parents were able to. This added an additional motivation to pay attention in school and to excel in my academics. Through my middle and high school years, I would strive to have perfect grades all in hopes of becoming successful one day. "Success" was subjective and highly influenced by my family's and my communities' perception of what the "American dream" was.

It has commonly been stated that individuals move to the United States in pursuit of the "American dream." My mother's perception of this was continuing education and obtaining a successful job. A successful job being limited to a lawyer or a doctor. This had been constantly discussed and reiterated as I grew up. No one in my family had gone to college at this time and the concept seemed so out of reach but a necessity. As I began to be informed about college, I

realized that although I had the grades to be accepted, I had no idea of the other processes necessary. At this time, most of my peers were speaking of college but their conversations had a sort of certainty to this occurring. Many discussed the various colleges they were applying to and the sororities/fraternities they were to join. I unfortunately did not have the opportunity to think this way. To begin, I knew that I would need to find some funding to get me through college. I sought out my counselor almost every day at the beginning of my senior year in order to apply to any and all scholarships that I could qualify for. I would take my lunch in her office to gain some knowledge of how to write an essay that would appeal to someone and grant me the opportunity to go to college. I had to seek out any resource that was available to me and had to find any information to guide me in this process. I was not able to convey the difficulty of this to my mother because she had a perception that college was possible to anyone if you tried hard enough. Another obstacle I face was the FAFSA application. Alongside my mother, we attended a school sanctioned event to fill it out. It was here that I realized that my mother's undocumented status was needed to be written on the form. Under parent's social security, I wrote down nine zeros and could hear my mother speaking with a Latinx faculty about the insecurity she felt with this. I had always known that my mother was undocumented, any law enforcement siting would send a panic to my stomach as I had been conditioned to avoid any interactions with them. I never knew that I would one day I would have to put her undocumented status on a form to enter college. As I saved the document, not allowing myself to turn it in until my mother was reassured that no repercussions would come to her, I wondered what else I would be lacking in this process.

At this point, I had secured the funds and still maintained the academics to apply for schools. Though my counselor was very supportive in seeking out many schools for me to apply

for, I applied to only two. I applied to the University of Arkansas as my dream school and the

Northwest Arkansas Community College as my safe school. Here I was a senior in high school

with over a 4.9 weighted grade point average, a 28 ACT score, and countless extracurricular

activities, and I was convinced that a community college was my only option. Though I do not

believe myself to be above any of my peers who attend community college, I now know that I

limited my opportunities to a slim two because I was not well equipped to believe myself to be a

candidate elsewhere. As I waited to hear back from these to colleges, I knew that they difficulties

of entering this new area were just beginning.

When I got accepted to the University of Arkansas, I soon realized how my lack of

college-going culture in my family was apparent. I did not know what classes would be the best

to take, I was not aware of which professors were more easy-going, or that living on campus did

not include a meal plan. I realized that there were few Latinx students around me. The few times

that I was surrounded by Latinx peers was when I was at a solely Latinx function. This

representation was not just limited to my peers but also the professors at the university. It was

not until my Spanish language course that I had a Latinx professor. In that class and a future

biliteracy service-learning course, I learned the importance of taking pride in being bi-cultural

and developed a confidence that I was too scared to adopt. I learned that many of my Latinx

peers shared similar academic experiences and were too learning a new perspective on being a

Latinx student. This has continued through my almost six years of post-high school education.

Thus, inspiring me to become involved in programs such as the Latinx on the Rise Mentoring

Program and overall focused on the Latinx student experience.

This research is focused on the Latinx student experience of mentees that have gone

through the program. I understand my personal thoughts on the Latinx student experience, being

influenced by my own experiences as well how my involvement in the mentoring program has influenced my particular approach to this research area. Thus, I am sharing my Latinx student experience to self-identify my prior experiences that have contributed to my current perspective on the topic.