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INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL EDITION ON LATINA/O/X POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Advancing Organizational and Institutional Opportunities Aimed to Disrupt Deficit Narratives
and Expand Latina/o/x Postsecondary Education Success

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Current discourses around race have resulted in increased racism and violence in universities (Conchas & Acevedo, 2020; Pérez-Huber & Muñoz, 2021). Anti-blackness, racial injustices, a global pandemic, and a national racial reckoning are the current conditions of Pre-K to postsecondary education. Coupled with this education reality are continued rising price tags of postsecondary education, high loan debt, and persistent challenges for higher education institutions to attract, enroll, retain, and graduate Latina/o/x students (Espinosa et al., 2019). Latina/o/x students are the largest racial/ethnic group enrolled in college (Fry & Taylor, 2014), yet they are only about half as likely as their white counterparts to earn a bachelor's degree (Conchas & Acevedo, 2020; Fry & Taylor, 2014). The lower attainment and representation are witnessed across several educational levels extending to graduate school and to Latina/o/x faculty presence in postsecondary institutions, which hovers at just 6% (Espinosa et al., 2019). This then reduces the likelihood of hiring Latina/o/x into senior-level administrative roles as they often come from the faculty ranks. Only 3.4% of academic department heads are Latina/o/x (Espinosa et al., 2019). The economic and social advancement of the nation is enhanced by educating Latina/o/x populations, thus, the focus of this special edition centers Latina/o/x experiences at the postsecondary level.

In Pérez-Huber and Muñoz's (2021), *Why They Hate Us: How Racist Rhetoric Impacts Education*, the editors examine the damaging educational consequences Students of Color including Latina/o/x students experience because of racist nativism, xenophobia, homophobia,

sexism, and other systemic injustices. While the conditions seem grim, the collection of articles in this special issue pushes us further than just admitting students into postsecondary education but interrogates whether we are intentional in serving students. It also challenges us to critically examine existing policies and practices to reduce the harm experienced by Latina/o/x students attending U.S. postsecondary education. While the global pandemic highlighted existing inequities already evident in postsecondary education, there are opportunities and glimmers. These works in this special issue include the voices and perspectives of scholars, practitioners, and programs pushing to disrupt inequitable practices and urge us to challenge the ways postsecondary institutions are designed to exclude Latina/o/x participation.

This special edition on Latina/o/x education is a fortuitous labor of love between the Latinx Research Center at Santa Clara University, the Center for Leadership, Equity, and Research (CLEAR), and the Pennsylvania State (Penn State) University with additional contributions from faculty affiliated with Penn State's Center for the Study of Higher Education and doctoral students from the Educational Leadership Program. This collaborative vision between Sabrina Zirkel, Dean of the School of Education and Counseling Psychology at Santa Clara University; Ken Magdaleno, Executive Director of CLEAR; Mahmoud Suleiman, Managing Editor and Editorial Director of *JLER*; and, Gilberto Q. Conchas, Wayne K. and Anita Woolfolk Hoy Endowed Professor of Educational Leadership at Penn State, reflects a platform to amplify the voice of minoritized groups through core research in educational equity, anti-racism, and social justice. This special issue also represents a process of intergenerational mentorship and extends this notion of providing Latina/o/x voice to the manuscript authors included in this special issue as it was the intentionality to support early and mid-career scholars working to center Latina/o/x voices. The original intent was to produce one special issue that concentrates on educational issues impacting Latinas/os/xs but we received several quality manuscripts that we secured permission to produce two special issues.

While the first special issue titled, *Listening to Latina/o/x Voices: Maximizing Opportunities and Minimizing Obstacles in Distinct Educational Contexts* focused on Latina/o/x issues across PreK-12 educational contexts inside and outside of schools, this second special issue focuses on the roles of Latina/o/x students, families, staff, and faculty and the possibilities and limitations of educational policy aimed to support Latina/o/x students as they journey through postsecondary education environments. Like the first edition which contextualized Latina/o/x experience at the PreK-12 level, this collection contextualizes the Latina/o/x experience within the historical, political, and local processes that have influenced and continue to play a role in the educational opportunity structures that Latina/o/x folks experience at the postsecondary level. The voices of students, faculty, administrators, and families of Latina/o/x students supporting them on their journey are showcased as are interrogations of institutional and statewide policy efforts. Latina/o/x students continue to be the largest and fastest-growing ethnic group but they are still underrepresented in postsecondary education and even fewer are in positions of senior leadership to address persistent challenges (Espinosa et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2021). What makes this issue a significant contribution is that the articles in this special issue each offer research aimed to

expand opportunities and disrupt deficit narratives. Together they weave a story of resilience and strength. Drawing on fields like Ethnic Studies and critical race theory, the authors in this special journal center the experiences of communities of color and other marginalized groups unapologetically and celebrate their experiences, their ways of knowing and being, and validate how they resist racist and unjust systems.

This second special edition, like the first issue examining PreK-12 schooling, brings together diverse theoretical and methodological perspectives, including empirical qualitative and quantitative manuscripts centering Latina/o/x experiences and interrogating organizational practices. The campus contexts include a mix of community college and comprehensive public and research-intensive public and private institutions across the U.S. with historically white institutional designations and Hispanic serving institutional designations. The special issue concludes with a book review examining ways for Hispanic Serving Institutions to define and live out the word “servingness” to better meet the needs of Latina/o/x populations that move beyond a numerical federal designation/definition.

This special issue opens with an explosive essay about rights to spaces and hence the university and rights to an education and how one’s admittance to the university should also mean a right to the university’s spaces and all the privileges associated with attending a university without being harassed or bothered. Using one Latina/o/x sub-population in the northeast, **Gonzalez** combines critical theories of public space use with lived experiences. He makes the case for why institutions need to change the ways they serve Latina/o/x populations and, more importantly, that how Latina/o/x populations want to experience the university should be delivered by the university. This article outlines how admitted students should have the right to spaces and the right to be present, but the university falls short of creating this space for ethnic minoritized students as space continues to be contested and not everyone has equal access to shared spaces. The next two manuscripts offer strategies to empower ownership over Latina/o/x populations’ educational journeys and to resist inequitable structures. They celebrate and affirm the power of Latina/o/x ways of knowing and doing. The **Lara and Nava** piece is evidence of ways families support undocumented Latina/o/x student journeys in college using Home Based Pedagogies (Bernal, 2001). Specifically, the authors illustrate the valuable learnings students acquired through their families’ migration, labor experiences, and resistance strategies. One of this manuscript’s contributions is establishing (and celebrating) non-traditional ways of knowing and doing that occur in Latina/o/x families and homes. **Poza, Pinedo-Gangai, Barrera, Burciaga, and Pizarro’s** case study on the Student Leadership Retreat for new students examines students’ experiences in programming undergirded by asset-based *conocimiento* (iterative and dialogic understanding of ourselves and others), *cariño* (care for self and others), and *confianza* (trust). This manuscript illustrates the power to equip Latina/o/x students with culturally relevant and transformative strategies of ownership over learning in contrast to more traditionally individualistic, competitive, and transactional arrangements within higher education.

The second part of the special issue investigates organizational and policy reforms meant to assist in Latina/o/x students’ journeys but also cautions how these efforts can be undermined.

Contreras, Prado Robledo, and Gomez encourage us to consider the role of a system of research universities, many of which are also designated as Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), and their role in developing more Latina/o/x faculty to then lead these institutions. Contreras and her co-authors encourage HSIs to take responsibility for cultivating the next generation of Latina/o/x faculty. They assert that this system of public research-intensive institutions has the unique opportunity to transform the social and economic infrastructure of the state by investing in Latina/o/x students at the graduate level and through efforts to diversify the faculty, staff, and leadership of the system and its campuses. The **Baca** piece examines a statewide developmental education reform initiative impacting community college students from the perspective of faculty, staff, and administration who were charged with addressing compliance with the statewide mandate that illustrates the organizational challenges of policy implementation. While the author identifies ways in which the college implemented changes to enable more Latina/o/x students to succeed, the author also uncovered negative behaviors of instructors and administration to intentionally sabotage success. This is followed by **Rolón-Dow, Covarrubias, and Guerrón Montero** who examine a Historically White Institution's (HWI) commitment to diversity. The Rolón-Dow et al. piece examines a historically white institution's commitment to diversity through an institutional lens framing and concludes that a race-informed Latina/o/x cultural consciousness is only present in shallow ways within the culture cycle of the university studied. The authors advance that a Latina/o/x cultural consciousness must be infused in all phases of the culture cycle to facilitate an understanding of Latina/o/x student perspectives, to meaningfully serve Latina/o/x students, and to extend the benefits of diversity to all students.

This special issue concludes with a book review by **Rodell** of Gina Garcia's *Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) in Practice: Defining Servingness of HSIs*. Rodell offers a review of the book including the multidimensional conceptual framing guiding the organization of the book and emphasizes the argument of educational policy as race-neutral and that while federal funds are allocated to serve Latina/o/x students, many fall short of this goal to reduce inequities and improve student outcomes. Rodell's review summarizes each chapter's empirically driven contribution and what lessons are learned for HSI leaders. The collection of chapters in this edited book illustrates the ways that the practitioners at various HSIs are defining and advancing "servingness" to/with their Latina/o/x populations.

Advancing Organizational and Institutional Opportunities Aimed to Disrupt Deficit Narratives and Expand Latina/o/x Postsecondary Education Success tackles student experiences as opportunities to disrupt the status quo. It offers those committed to leading postsecondary education institutions and those invested in addressing the inequities in such systems, the critical consciousness necessary to advance the successful experiences of Latina/o/x *gente* along their postsecondary journeys. It will appeal to university leaders, system administrators, university-based scholars, students, and policy analysts at social research institutions. It is also intended for a broader audience, including those interested in anti-racism and social justice in education. Advocates for minoritized groups will also find this research valuable as the research in this special issue identifies ways to disrupt systems not created for minoritized groups. The focus on programs

and policies geared toward success has broad appeal. There are concrete ways of re-envisioning success. This issue is a powerful collection of how groups resist and transform spaces. We hope this accompanying special issue on postsecondary education contributes to educational research and advances social justice approaches and builds on the Latinx Research Center's mission and vision of ensuring "equity-based solutions to the complex educational phenomena that build from the Latina/o/x community's strengths to promote social and economic mobility" (Latinx Research Center Website, 2020).

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