A Culturally Validated Model of Student Success Services and Academic and Curriculum Enhancements at a Hispanic-Serving Institution

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Abstract

Though college enrollment rates for Mexican-American students have increased over the past years, Mexican-Americans still have one of the lowest rates for degree completion. However, more work is recognizing the strengths of students of Mexican descent, particularly those related to culture such as familism, and calling for asset-based programs that validate the student to increase student retention and persistence. Programs infused with such an approach likely address aspects that improve performance amongst Mexican-American students; however, evidence-based assessment is limited. This paper will detail an asset-based program that uses a culturally validated model of student success services and academic and curriculum enhancements at a Hispanic-Serving Institution to increase overall Latinx student retention and persistence. The program infuses Validation Theory (Rendon, 1994) to address cultural strengths of students and validate their life experiences as first-time freshmen, by creating a culturally relevant curriculum, enhancing culturally relevant student support services, and promoting education equity. Students involved in this program report a high level of belongingness at the university as well as have higher pass rates in their culturally validated courses. Recommendations are discussed for implementation of such a comprehensive program at other institutions as well as implications for higher education.

Keywords: Latinx, First-Year Programs, Retention, Higher Education, Validation Theory

Background

Rates of college enrollment have increased over the last 20 years for all groups, with Latinx students showing one of the largest increases (22% to 36%); however, they are still one the minority groups with lowest enrollment overall (i.e. 59% Asian, 42% White, 37% Black and 36% Latinx, 24% Native American) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Of the US Latinx population, Mexican-Americans make up the largest subgroup and Mexican-American youth are one of the fastest growing populations in the US (Flores, 2017). Once enrolled in college, the disparities in higher education persist as 30.3% Whites receive a college degree, compared to only 9.1% of Mexican American students (U.S. Census, 2010). Many challenges that Mexican-American students face in higher education include traditional stressors such as academic, financial, and time management (Quintana et al., 1991; Llamas et al., 2020), but also those related to cultural adjustment such as acculturative stress (Crockett et al., 2007), discrimination (Finch et al., 2001), and intragroup marginalization (Llamas et al., 2018), particularly at predominantly white institutions (Von Robertson et al., 2016). Even given these barriers, recent work has begun to identify signatures of resilience in Mexican-American students that can inform asset-based strategies needed to validate students and foster college success (Rendón et al., 2015).

Latinx students often experience a discord between their cultural values, and those of higher education (Torres, 2006; Llamas et al., 2020). In particular, higher education hails from an individualistic culture where competition, independence, and the self are highly valued. However, many Latinx cultures, including Mexican, which are more collectivistic, value collaboration, and group processes (Shkodriani & Gibbons, 1995; Hofstede, 2001). These values can feel at odds with university culture (Gloria & Kurpius, 1996; Gloria & Pope-Davis, 1997; Torres, 2006; Morgan Consoli et al., 2016). Students of Mexican descent often have to switch between or differentially balance their professional and personal values and identities depending on their social environment (Sanchez, 2006). This can have adverse effects on mental health (Smith & Silva, 2011; Arbona & Jimenez, 2014) and lead to the decision to leave the university (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005). Since students' ethnic awareness increases across the college years (Syed, 2010), the university as an institution bears the responsibility to create and commit to an inclusive environment that supports overall Latinx retention (Estrada et al., 2016). In fact, for Mexican-American college students traditional cultural values, such as familism, respect and

religiosity have predicted resilience (Morgan Consoli & Llamas, 2013). In particular for first year students, the cultural factors such as belonging and cultural identity, as well as more classic factors such as motivation, perseverance, study skills, and social support were beneficial for college adjustment (Llamas et al., 2020). Taken together, these studies increasingly point to the role of peers and feelings of belongingness and a *familia* atmosphere as important factors for Mexican-American students and calls for interventions that not only include academic and financial assistance but address cultural factors as well.

While programs have been begun to infuse aspects of culturally-based assets into their curriculum and services, few studies have evaluated if such interventions improve student performance. This manuscript details a first-year program for Latinx students named Pathways to Academic Success and Opportunities (PASO) that was developed based on past scholarly work to increase retention and graduation rates amongst Latinx students, mainly of Mexican descent. The PASO program as a model of Latino student empowerment via infusion of cultural validation theory and markers of student success are discussed. Overall, PASO aims to create a culturally relevant curriculum, enhance culturally relevant student support services, and promote education equity.

Theoretical framework: Cultural validation theory

Validation Theory, a theoretical and pedagogical framework developed by Dr. Laura Rendon, is based on the experiences of nontraditional college students in invalidating environments and how transformation can occur through validation, thus resulting in enhanced capacity of learning and student success (Rendon, 1994). As a theory, validation serves to challenge antiquated models of teaching and learning to actively engage institutional agents in academic and interpersonal validation so that students can harness and develop their "innate capacity to learn" and be successful. Academic validation can occur in the classroom through culturally enhanced curriculum and interpersonal validation via identities and building upon cultural assets (Rendon, 1994; Linares & Muñoz, 2011). Faculty initiation of contact and interactions with students have been found to play a significant role in student integration into the college experience, and supports academic persistence (Barnett, 2011). Retention of Latinx students and persistence in degree completion remains an ongoing concern for Latinx students in higher education, in addition to understanding mediators of cultural validation in student

success (Maramba & Palmer, 2014). Students of color rely heavily on informal peer networks for informational, and social support; therefore, these same types of networks should be facilitated in college (Hallett, 2013), thus providing validation of their established networking capacities.

The PASO program is based on the essential elements of Validation Theory: 1) institutional (validating) agents such as professors and advisors have the responsibility to initiate connections with students that are enabling and confirming, 2) strive to foster self-worth and confidence in learning capability, 3) validation can and should occur within and beyond the classroom, 4) validation is an ongoing supportive and developmental process that continues throughout the students educational journey, and 5) crucial when administered early in the college experience (Rendon, 1994). The cultural component is key in validation, and we operationalize the theoretical constructs of validation theory as "cultural validation" (CV) for the PASO program to reflect the culturally diverse approach that is infused with validation theory. This further builds upon the Yosso (2005) "Community Cultural Wealth Model" by focusing on cultural assets that Latinx students experience, specifically, aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005).

Since Rendon's theory was established in 1994, recent expansions have included asset-based theoretical framework constructs to include leveraging strengths and Latinx specific assets. These assets further extend Yosso's cultural wealth constructs to include perseverance, ethnic consciousness, spirituality/faith, and pluriversality, thus creating a "student success framework" that can harness innate determination, sense of purpose, giving back, and the ability to exist in different cultural environments (Rendon et al., 2015). Maximizing students' strengths and assets that can support and foster student success, can be achieved through implementation of these asset-based theoretical frameworks founded on validation theory, specifically using a culturally diverse approach (Rendon et al., 2015). Ultimately, cultural validation helps students to become active agents and productive consumers of knowledge in their educational journey. The approaches of the PASO program are based on researched and innovative responses to improving the cultural responsiveness and curriculum, academics, and student success, and support services as detailed below.

An Overview of the PASO program: Model of empowering Latinx Students

The *Pathways to Academic Success and Opportunities* (PASO) program is implemented at a Hispanic Serving Institution in Southern California with a 48% Latinx student population. The goal of PASO is not only to increase enrollment of first time Latinx freshmen students but to serve the Latinx student population upon their arrival to campus. Eligibility for the PASO program includes self-identification as Latinx and a first-generation, low income, full-time student. Additionally, students cannot be a part of another specialized program (i.e., TRIO SSS, College Assistance Migrant Program, Educational Opportunity Program). Upon enrollment, students that fit eligibility are automatically enrolled in the PASO program and sent invitations, announcements, and emails about PASO services. PASO seeks to support Latinx students and address the achievement gap among Latinx students through innovative student services, culturally-relevant first-year curriculum, and meaningful co-curricular offerings aimed at increasing retention, and graduation rates. PASO is based on two main objectives: 1) Culturally-validated (CV) Student Success Services and 2) Culturally-validated academic and curriculum enhancements (see Table 1 at end of document).

Objective 1. Culturally Validated Student Success Services

Improve retention and intervention strategies for academic probation and disqualification. The creative PASO approach targets students on Academic Probation (AP) or Dangerously Close (DC) students. Interventions were implemented by PASO staff to identify 'High Need" students who need academic support, based on University established measures for placement in math and writing for incoming high school students. PASO students that meet these metrics are identified, contacted and directly referred to tutoring centers (Math and Writing), "Pop Up" tutoring at the Latin@ Center, faculty advising, peer mentoring, and academic advising. Notably, pro-active or *"intrusive advising"* is essential to keep students on track academically and monitor their progress. Additional retention strategies included university-wide mid-semester evaluations to identify high risk PASO students and Early Alert progress reports generated from the University's record platform that are relayed to the PASO office. The PASO program advising is centered on a holistic approach to assess the needs of each student and utilize early intervention methods throughout the first semester and year.

Cultural validated counseling and advising services. The PASO program team consists of an advisor and an outreach and retention specialist that together are trained in cultural validation that target increased engagement and outreach to Latinx families. This outreach is geared to identify local school districts targeting Latinx high school seniors during the Fall semester. Once students are admitted, the PASO team continuously contacts admitted students to ensure that their admission, financial aid, and registration is complete. Each spring incoming freshmen are invited to PASO specific program overview workshops that assist students with the college transition in three simultaneous workshops for Spanish speaking parents, English speaking parents, and students. The following topics are covered: high-school-to-university transitional issues; non-traditional support strategies; student services/governing communication systems; getting involved; and acknowledging parental involvement through incentives.

Lastly, the PASO peer mentoring program is thematically centered on "sense of belonging" using evidence-based peer mentoring strategies for Latinx students (Zhao & Kuh, 2004; Moschetti et al., 2018). Upper division students are selected and trained in PASO goals and objectives with priority consideration given to previous PASO scholars. Peer Mentors provide information and guidance in the transition from high school to college for first-time incoming freshmen mentees that includes peer assistance with financial aid, admission, advising, enrollment, housing, health, and community resources.

Improving cultural responsiveness in Financial Aid. Improving timely financial aid awards to students is a key practice implemented in the PASO program. Although student financial aid alone does not guarantee retention or graduation, financial aid is a prerequisite for student success. In order to achieve a culturally responsive approach that meets the needs of Latinx students, the program utilizes a dedicated Bilingual/ Bicultural Financial Aid Specialist. This specialist fully implements improved practices for family and student advocacy and improved efficiency of communications of validation requests of applications in a culturally respectful manner. In addition, Financial Aid bilingual workshops are held (financial literacy, loan debt, and scholarship opportunities) for students entering the PASO program. Most notably, bilingual assistance to Latinx families is provided, thus increasing the efficacy of communications and the timeliness of awards.

Foundational support with other Latinx campus resources. The Latin@ student center established a strong partnership with the PASO program. The Latin@ center has been a welcoming place for all students to celebrate and enhance understanding of the Latinx culture, as well as offer services such as printing and access to items like calculators, headphones, laptops, etc. In addition, the Center continually offers support services aimed at helping Latinx students develop the leadership and academic skills they need for success. The PASO Peer mentors support the programmatic needs of the Latin@ Center director. A calendar of events is shared so that PASO Scholars are encouraged to visit the center to create a sense of community, support, and cultural connection. Partnerships are also formed with student organizations like the student chapter of Society for the Advancement of Chicano/Latino and Native American Scientists (SACNAS) to promote events and provide networking for PASO students.

Objective 1 of the PASO program directly addresses elements of Validation Theory. The PASO program addresses that first element of the theory by having advisors and other higher education professionals be validating institutional agents and initiate contact and connections with the students. This model does not rely on students *asking* for help or services, but rather faculty and staff as institutional agents of change. PASO also addresses the third element as it validates students beyond the classroom to encompass campus resources and student services, treating the student's experience at the university holistically. Lastly, to address the fourth and fifth elements of Validation Theory, the PASO program begins to validate students even before they arrive on campus as first-time freshmen with family orientations in Spanish and outreach to high schools. In addition, PASO closely follows and intervenes with students during their first year. Lastly, once a part of the program, students have access to PASO resources throughout their time at the university.

Objective 2. Validating Academic and Curriculum Enhancements

Faculty are trained in either a year-long Faculty Learning Community or intensive summer institute on infusion of cultural validation into their courses. The training is centered around Validation Theory (Rendon, 1994) to create culturally relevant curriculum focused on key elements presented in Table 2 (see at end of document) and each will be addressed from an academic and interpersonal perspective. The academic perspective includes learning

experiences that affirm the student's potential for success, such as guest speakers, inclusion of Latinx and/or the student's history/background in curriculum, as well activities where students witness themselves as powerful learners and opportunities for validation from peers. The interpersonal perspective includes in and out of class agents that foster personal development and social adjustment, affirmation of students as people, ability to build social network or groups, and lastly validation of student's personal identities, and occupational roles. Therefore, faculty create a classroom climate and include activities and/or assignments that:

- Demonstrate Latinxs are valuable contributors to the body of knowledge taught in the classroom;
- Affirm the value of student voice and experience;
- Actively reach out to students for help (not waiting for student to come to instructor);
- Create opportunities for students to validate each other (e.g., peer review, work in teams);
- Build on and focus on academic strengths;
- Provide positive feedback;
- Creating a *familia* atmosphere.

The following are four culturally relevant content examples from courses infused with validation theory. First, in a history course, the Zoot Suit Riot was used to educate the uses and identification of primary sources of information. Second, in an education course to teach about school desegregation, the Lemon Grove Incident was used. In this historical event, Mexican immigrants and their communities were the targeted groups of segregation by school officials during the 1930s, in the then rural community of Lemon Grove, California. This case was the first successful school desegregation court decision in the history of the United States. Third, in an environmental biology course, environmental issues were discussed, including the testing of water for toxins along the U.S.-Mexico border. Fourth, in a neuroscience course, students attend a talk, listen to a podcast or watch a documentary on an issue important to them (i.e. family separation at the border, depression, or stress) and propose a behavioral neuroscience experiment to address the issue. For example, one study addressing family separation at the border proposed separating mothers and pups at birth and looking at

neurogenesis in the brains of offspring. By validating the students in these ways in an educational setting, students will feel "I matter," "Somebody at this institution cares about me," and "I am capable of success."

Objective 2 of the PASO program addresses four of the elements of Validation Theory. First, professors directly reach out to students to initiate contact as agents of validation and do not rely on students seeking assistance. Second, the validated curriculum and course content fosters self-worth and confidence to amplify the learning abilities of the students. The course content validates students not only as scholars, but as members of both the academic community and the community in which they live. Third, with the inclusion of course content relevant for the surrounding community and the student's own community, validation of the student occurs holistically beyond the confines of the classroom. Lastly, PASO students take a series of general education courses their freshmen year that begins their exposure to validated academic and curriculum enhancements early. In addition, by training faculty in upper division courses (via faculty learning communities), as well infusing their courses with cultural validation, the program can continue to support students throughout their educational journey.

PASO First-Year General Education (GE) Courses Validating Latinx Identities & Perspectives

The University first-year courses include a set of two standard GE courses intended to establish college-ready proficiency in writing ability (GEW) and oral communication (GEO). These courses are taught in multiple sections and count toward the "Life-Long Learning and Information Literacy" requirements for Freshman students. Roughly, 80% of the University's first-year students take these courses and prior to the inception of PASO, none of these courses were intentionally taught during the regular academic year with the theme of *Latinx Identities and Perspectives*. With the full support of the Office of Undergraduate Studies, both departments offering the first-year GE courses agreed to launch GEW and GEO with a focus on the Latino students' identity. This included hiring trained faculty in CV, designing courses based on successful methods in other specialized programs (e.g., Education Opportunity Program), developing culturally sensitive curriculum based on the Latinx experience and offering PASO program designated courses in the course catalog. The first theme, *Latinx Identities*, emphasized a focus on the Latinx perspective with discussion built around Latinx

persons, culturally relevant content analyzed through critical theory, and exploration of the Latinx experience and cultural texts. The second theme, *Latinx Perspectives*, centered on student development to examine and present oral presentations with a focus on the historical, political, educational, economic, and cultural developments that affect the diversity of Latinx communities in the United States. The courses also added a cultural validation evaluation to the standard University evaluations for each semester. There are non-validated sections of these courses offered to all other students at the university. However, the PASO students are enrolled into designated sessions for PASO students only.

Evidence of Student Success

Retention and Belonging. In the third cohort, 107 Latinx mentees were enrolled into the Peer Mentoring Program and reported high feelings and a sense of university belonging. Almost all (98% of) mentees responded either "agree" (4) or "strongly agree" (5) on a five-point Likert scale that they feel a greater sense of belonging. Also, one-year continuation rates for these first-time freshmen indicated that mentees in the program (85.5%) was higher than that of student's university-wide (80.8%).

General Education (GE) Course Pass Rates. Course pass rates were calculated for all the PASO GEO and GEW courses, by cohorts and an independent samples t-test was used for analysis. Data collection began with cohorts 2 through 5 and was aggregated by PASO designated courses and the non-validated course sections. For the purpose of this analysis only the pass rates for the Latinx students in the non-validated course sections were compared.

Latinx PASO students completing the culturally validated GEW courses, had significantly higher course pass rates (*M*=86.6, *SD*=2.82, N=7) compared to Latinx students (*M*=79.9, *SD*=1.78, N=7) in non-validated GEW courses, $t(12) = 5.33$, $p < .001$. There were no differences found between the PASO GEO courses (*M*=90.4, *SD*=7.14, N=6) compared to Latinx students (*M*=86.5, *SD*=3.87, N=6, $t(10) = 2.14$, $p=.174$). Although non-significant, it is interesting to highlight that overall combined pass rates were higher in PASO GEO (90.4%) than the non-validated Latinx GEO (86.5%) sections.

It should be noted that at the inception of the program, GEO did not have a PASO section for the first semester of Cohort 2. In addition, pass rates for Cohort 5 Spring semester were unavailable at this time, therefore this incomplete/missing data affects direct Cohort

comparisons by semester and year. Lastly, Spring 2020 data might not provide a valid indicator of pass rates due to COVID-19 and credit/no credit University policy implementations.

Student Course Evaluations. Student evaluations were collected at the end of the courses that included novel culturally validation responsive evaluation items in Table 3 (see at end of document). Evaluations were only included for 3 cohorts (Cohort 3, 4, and 5) as evaluations were not implemented yet in cohort 2. Though a comparison with non-validated courses would be ideal, this preliminary data provides insight into aspects of cultural validation that the students found most helpful. Overall, in both GEO and GEW, students rated the following aspects as the top highly rated evaluations: 1) Representations of my cultural identity were included in course material and/or class topics, 2) Issues that are related to Latinx and the Latinx community were discussed in a positive way (e.g., immigration, jobs, education, bilingual), and 3) My instructor was culturally aware and culturally open (see Table 3 at end of document).

In addition, qualitative data supported these ideas. Students talked about comfort level in the classroom and with the professor, as one student stated, "Overall I am more comfortable being in a class full of PASO students because I feel like I can connect with them and the professor on a different level than I would in another class." Another student stated, "This class made me feel very comfortable and welcomed, knowing that there are other first-generation Latinos like me." Another student talked about the professor making them feel capable. They stated, "I like the class the professor was welcoming and spoke to all of us directly which although is scary for me, being the shy kid, it made me feel like I'm an equal. I really liked how the professor was always making sure we all knew we were equal and capable of so many things. He was a very encouraging person."

Others addressed course content: "Our instructor created a lesson plan that was designed not only to share material from Latinx authors, but also perfected designed to help students connect with the issues discussed in class. The material was relatable which helped facilitate student communication about the issues." One student commented on a reading by Gloria Anzaldua that was particularly defining for them stating: "It helped me open my eyes and realize that Latinos cannot be identified as a single group. We may speak the same language and celebrate the same traditions. However, I believe every single one of us is a special and unique variation of a Latino. We have all gone through different experiences in life and we are not the same. We all come from different families, socioeconomic status, and some even face the

challenges of being undocumented which by itself is stressful and terrifying. We may be Latinos at heart, but we are all different. This difference is what is helping our community expand and better every day."

Implications for Research, Policy and Practice

This work aimed to detail the PASO program, a comprehensive program focused on first year, low-income, first generation Latinx students (Table 1 at end of document), as well to provide evidence of markers of student success amongst Latinx students in PASO. PASO aims to increase retention and graduation rates amongst Latinx students by targeting the specific aims by culturally validating two key facets of the college experience for students, both in student services and in the academic curriculum. The student services side has focused on intervention strategies (intrusive advising and mid-semester evaluations) for academic probation and disqualification, cultural responsiveness in peer mentoring, advising and financial aid, as well as foundational support with other Latinx campus resources. For the academic curriculum, the PASO office has a faculty lead who directly meets with and trains faculty in cultural validation and culturally relevant curriculum with a focus on mandatory first-year general education courses. Both of these aims meet one of the key validating principles of Validation Theory by beginning validation early in a student's educational career (Rendon, 1994).

In the current pilot study, early data suggests that pass rates for core first-year courses are higher for Latinx students in culturally validated versus non-culturally validated courses. This is very important because one of the key concepts of validation theory is that students are validated early in their career, and this may lead to a "sense of belonging" and thus persistence in higher education, and an increase in graduation success. There was a statistically significant difference in pass rates in the GEW course while data suggest a trend towards higher rates in GEW compared to GEO. GEW is a challenging course because of the focus on the writing process and rhetorical and critical thinking skills that are influenced by language proficiency, thus cultural validation (CV) may have the most benefits in such rigorous courses. Students also reported more feelings of belonging at the university, though this was only measured amongst those who had peer mentors. However, this is similar to other first-year courses that have used cultural validation and found that a *familia* atmosphere was created (Quiñonez & Olivas, 2020). Also, as more faculty are trained in cultural validation and methods to infuse a culturally

relevant curriculum, more skills can be honed and students reached, thus a more in-depth assessment in future years is warranted. In fact, currently faculty teaching upper and lower division major courses with high drop, fail and/or withdrawal rates are being targeted for CV training to enhance student learning and persistence, particularly in STEM.

Our suggestion is to begin with pedagogical changes to the syllabus and course structure. This includes inclusive language in the syllabus, explicitly including immigration issues as an excusable class absence and an extensive rethinking of office hours, which in their classic form can be intimidating to students. Faculty may think about relabeling these hours as "student hours," and include a list of topics that can be discussed during this time other than class material, including their own educational journey, and assets each student brings to the classroom. Students could also be encouraged to come in pairs or groups to ensure comfort and ease of these meetings, which serves as a way to build and support peer networks. Once these changes are made, faculty can begin to address the content of their courses as identified by student assessments of 1) representations of cultural identity in course material and/or class topics and 2) discussion of issues related to the Latinx community in a positive way (e.g., immigration, jobs, education, and bilingualism).

Overall from this work, we have the following recommendations:

- Validate student services such as admissions, financial aid and student tutoring services, such as supplemental instruction or any on campus center (Academic Success, Tutoring, and/or STEM Centers);
- Have a designated faculty ambassador in each major/program that can be an easily accessible contact for the PASO office and/or Latin@ center to direct students to;
- Evaluate both culturally validated and non-validated sections of the same course, both quantitatively and qualitatively;
- Focus on validating core courses with high drop, fail, and/or withdrawal rates;
- Enhance collaborations with on campus Latin@ center including enhancement of peer mentoring services and events such internships and/or research fairs.

Conclusion

The Latinx population is growing, however, this growth is not matched by college enrollment, retention, and graduate rates, thus an educational inequity exists. Latinx students are more likely to be first generation students that experience not only traditional student stressors but also significant cultural adjustments. Student success can be fostered through a sense of belonging, cultural identity and perspectives and asset-based strategies that focus on community cultural capitals students bring to the university and in the classroom (Rendón, 2015; Yosso, 2005). Engaging validation theory, specifically "cultural validation", that focuses on both student services and in the academic curriculum for Latinx students can increase college retention and graduation rates.

The PASO model holds promise to enhance the empowerment of Latinx students through a cultural approach that includes the tenets of validation in student services, academic and curriculum enhancement, and general education courses. However, it is important to continually evaluate and operationalize what constitutes "cultural validation", as well as identify any mediating factors, and measure impact and outcomes in both academic and interpersonal contexts (Maramba & Palmer, 2014). It should be noted that CV may be more successful in rigorous courses (writing vs. communication); therefore, type of course and pass rates should be examined in evaluation of targeted curriculum for CV courses. Future research and programmatic efforts should expand upon the asset-based theories to include perseverance, ethnic consciousness, spiritually/faith, and pluriversality, to further develop a framework for retention and persistence success among Latinx students. Expanding Latinx resources (e.g. in community) and increasing institutional support is necessary as a foundation of growth and commitment to Latinx student success. Harnessing current assets and strengths of Latinx students is vital to increase college success outcomes, and these existing and innate capacities should be valued and supported throughout their educational journey.

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Table 1

An Overview of the PASO Program

Objectives	Activities	Overall Expected Outcomes
Culturally Validating Academic Pedagogical Practices	Faculty Cultural Validation Training Culturally Validated Curriculum High Impact Practices Dedicated First- Year PASO courses Required General Education (GE) College ready courses focused on Latinx identity GEO- Oral GEW- Writing	Increase college access, graduation and retention rates Institutionalize evidence-based CV pedagogy across campus curriculum Implement validated strategies for financial aid and advising Latinx student identity development
Culturally Responsive Student Success Services	Intrusive Advising Retention strategies- mid-semester evals, advising appointments, early alert progress support Early intervention for Academic Probation Dedicated Bilingual Financial Aid Specialist Peer Mentoring Cultural-responsive advising Outreach to families and parents	

Table 2

Key Validating Principles of Cultural Validation Operationalized (Rendon, 1994)

1. Validating agents (faculty, program staff, speakers, scientists) initiate and maintain student contact
- Refocus office hours to be "student hours" centered on initiating and fostering connections   - Be authentic and learn student names   - Offer encouragement and assistance through assets-based approaches
2. Make students feel capable of learning
- Affirm assets/capital students bring to the classroom (e.g., linguistic, familial).   - Show students they have the ability to learn and succeed   - Identify strengths each student has in learning course material via reflection/discussion
3. Validate the students to build their confidence
- Assign low risk/stakes assignments where students can have small successes   - Include guest speakers and course content that feature Latinx individuals   - Praise students' achievements and milestones during the course
4. Expand validation practices beyond the classroom
- Connect students with on campus or community organizations   - Offer service-learning opportunities with class curriculum   - Promote engagement in campus activities with specialized offices/centers
5. Carry out throughout a student's trajectory
- Structure experiences to build throughout educational career   - Be a mentor or link with potential mentors and specialized programs   - Connect with peer and social networks to support identity development and growth, such as Latinx organizations
6. Begin early in a student's college career
- Start as early as possible and be consistent in all areas   - Initiate cultural validation models in first year and transfer orientation and courses   - Engage both student and academic affairs in the validation planning and processes

Table 3

First Year General Education Course Evaluation Scores

Course Evaluation Item (Items were rated on a scale of 1-5)	General Education Oral Communication (GEO)					General Education Written Communication (GEW)			
	Cohort 3 Average (Fall 2017 - Spring 2018)	Cohort 4 Average (Fall 2018 - Spring 2019)	Cohort 5 Average (Fall 2019 - Spring 2020)	Average Rating		Cohort 3 Average (Fall 2017 - Spring 2018)	Cohort 4 Average (Fall 2018 - Spring 2019)	Cohort 5 Average (Fall 2019 - Spring 2020)	Average Rating
I frequently participated in class.	3.85	3.90	4.19	3.98		4.05	3.86	3.78	3.9
I felt comfortable asking my instructor questions on concepts I do not understand.	4.03	4.35	4.33	4.23		4.60	4.53	4.42	4.52
My instructor understood my strengths.	3.78	4.08	4.31	4.05		4.53	4.35	4.40	4.43
My instructor urged me to express my opinion in class or in my writing.	4.10	4.15	4.08	4.11		4.53	4.50	4.33	4.45
There are meaningful ways for me to share my life experiences in class.	3.90	4.25	4.50	4.22		4.40	4.29	3.98	4.23
Overall, I feel that I matter to my instructors.	3.80	4.28	4.56	4.21		4.58	4.38	4.37	4.44
The instructor helped me improve my performance in the class based on my strengths.	3.93	4.35	4.63	4.30		4.50	4.43	4.48	4.47

Representations of my cultural identity were included in course material and/or class topics.	4.35	4.63	4.67	4.55		4.75	4.52	4.58	4.62
I read books and articles by Latinos.	3.75	4.20	4.04	4		4.88	4.12	4.47	4.49
I participated in exciting projects and assignments related to Latino issues.	4.00	4.50	4.50	4.33		4.63	3.84	4.22	4.23
Issues that are related to Latinos and the Latino community were discussed in a positive way (e.g., immigration, jobs, education, bilingual).	4.35	4.65	4.82	4.61		4.75	4.36	4.43	4.51
I was introduced to Latino role models in class through guest lecturers, readings, service learning, campus events, and/ or the instructor sharing examples during the semester.	3.93	4.18	4.33	4.14		4.15	3.78	4.02	3.98
My instructor was culturally aware and culturally open.	4.35	4.55	4.79	4.56		4.70	4.55	4.42	4.56
Column Averages	**4.01**	**4.31**	**4.44**	**4.25**		**4.54**	**4.27**	**4.30**	**4.37**