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# Strengthening Networks of Support Among Latin@ Students at UO

**RESEARCH EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**                                                April 2016

## Context

The Latino Strategy Group (LSG) is an emerging alliance of faculty, staff, students, and community members collaborating to improve educational access and equity among Latin@ students at UO and in the local area. The LSG seeks to make mentoring and advocacy work for and with Latin@ students visible to the wider university community, to coordinate with networks of support already in place, and to advocate for the expansion of resources in accordance with increasing Latin@ student enrollments. In 2015, with a grant from Center for Latino/a and Latin American Studies, we researched how UO Latin@ students perceive and negotiate the academic and sociocultural expectations of a flagship state university. We sent a Qualtrics survey to 1,700 undergraduate students, who self identified as "Latin@". 117 students responded. This research gathered useful information for administrators and faculty members as they continue to improve the recruitment, retention, and on-time graduation of Latin@ students.

### Enrollment, retention and on-time graduation of Latin@ Students at UO

Efforts to recruit Latin@ students have been successful. Today Latin@s have more of a presence on campus than ever before. Since 2008 alone, the number of Latin@ undergraduates has increased nearly 150%, and is now over 2,000.[1]

However, efforts for retention and on-time graduation are not equally optimistic. Graduation of Latin@ students is 6% lower than non Latin@ students. Among Latin@ freshmen who entered in 2009, only 44.6% graduated within four years.[2] Daily retention endeavors fall mainly on Latin@ faculty, staff, and community allies.

UO faculty and advisors have noticed that Latin@ students often lack some of the insider knowledge needed to take advantage of academic and professional opportunities. They also face challenges related to class, ethnic, linguistic and cultural norms at the university. In addition, Latin@ students may also struggle with accessing and understanding financial aid information, especially when their parents are not fluent English speakers. This study was undertaken in order to generate an initial assessment of those concerns.

**Research Questions**

- How do UO Latin@ students perceive and negotiate the academic and sociocultural barriers they may face as members of underrepresented groups on a predominantly white campus?

- What are the issues and concerns raised by current UO Latin@ undergraduates?

- How can UO expand resources to support Latin@ students who may also be first generation, transfer, non-traditional students?

- How can these resources support students academically, socially, and financially?
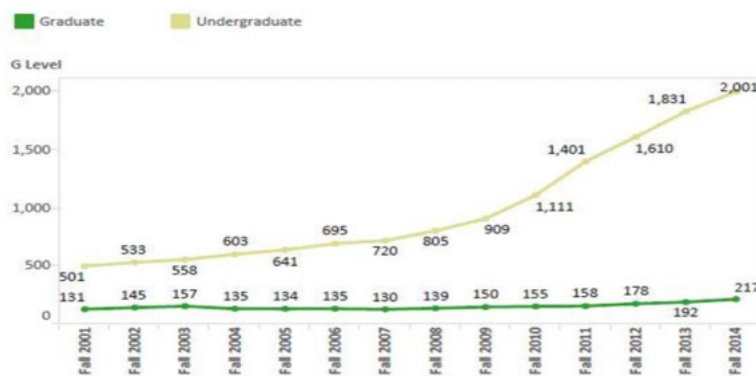


Latin@ students at UO by level

Chart taken from the Heritage Month Special Report by the Center for Multicultural Academic Excellence 2015.

# Research Key Findings[3]

The following results come from data collected in 117 online surveys and 10 semi-structured qualitative interviews completed with self-identified UO Latin@ students. 26% of students who participated in this study were freshmen, 17% were sophomores, 31% were juniors, and 26 % were seniors.

**Personal Factors** include academic preparation and identity, as well as perceived family support and financial means.

Only 52% of students felt that faculty and staff at UO understand their family's needs with regards to their enrollment.
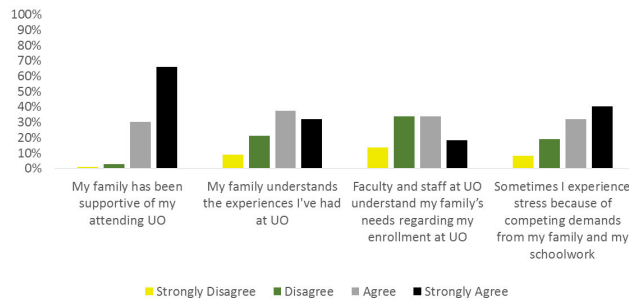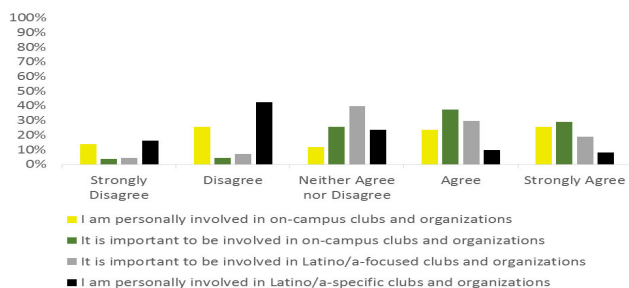


*Interview quotes by students:*

*"I'd like for my family to understand the university cultural context...like at the university there are ideologies and philosophical concepts about the culture of the US and without this (referring to a residential college experience), sometimes it's hard to understand certain customs or certain ways that exist."*

*"It is hard to have the time to do homework, find time to talk to my parents, work and study. Sometimes I have to spend days without calling my parents and they get upset and say that I have forgotten about them. Somehow I still manage and find at least 10 minutes and give them a call or text message."*

**Involvement Factors** include participation in student organizations, faculty-student interactions, and perceived institutional supports for academic and social integration.

Students insisted on the need for a wider range of clubs, celebrations, student organizations, including additional Latin@ focused groups.
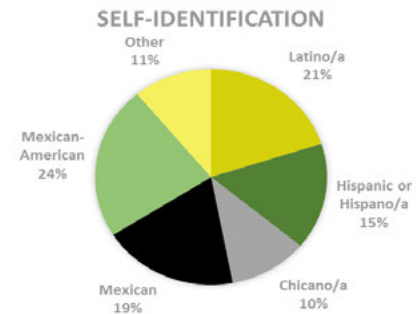


*Interview quotes by students:*

*"It's been difficult to find mentors from a similar background as me in higher education. Since I am a first generation college student, there's also been no real reference point in navigating higher education."*

*"I found CMAE through a friend at the beginning of my third year at the UO. I was not informed about the supportive systems for low income, first-generation students. If I'd have known...my first two years would have been less stressful and I'd probably have done better in my classes."*

*"I can't talk to the people in my room about pozole o menudo, like I normally do with other family members and friends."*

**Sociocultural Factors** include ethnic identity development and community orientation.

Students at the UO enact their identities in ongoing, ordinary interactional routines. These enactments display, resist, and authenticate forms of ethnic and linguistic identities. Use of Spanish, perceptions about race and assimilation are among the authenticating practices[4] by UO students.
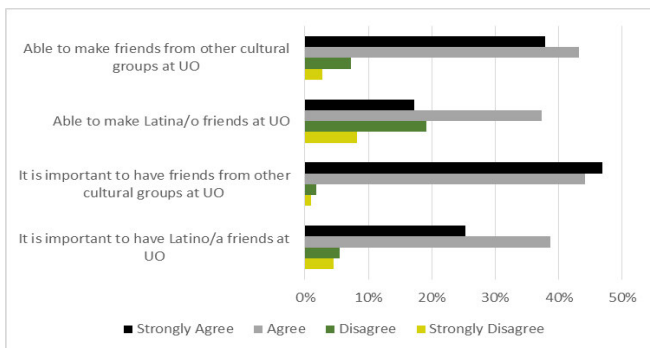


*Interview quotes by students:*

*"I'm so angry at the university because we really don't have any like way for people, like, to back them up [...] It makes you feel a little bit more prepared talking to like an advisor, it helps too, and also even talking to like a CMAE advisor, because we actually discuss some of these like race issues and like sexism because like that stuff definitely happens."*

*"They label everyone Mexican, even when someone is from Central America, they are all called 'Mexicans.' I used to feel embarrassed to speak Spanish in public, but now it's like...I'm here in school, I am learning about heritage speaker[s], about Latin American studies, which I love because I have learned about the history of Latin America, which I never knew before."*

**Environmental Factors** include campus climate, the presence (or absence) of an ethnic and linguistic communities, and living situation (on or off-campus).

Interview quotes by students:

*"My high school and community college were diverse. UO is a lot less diverse than I expected and I've been the only person of color in a couple of my classes. It can be pretty off putting at times and a little discouraging."*

## Key Takeaways

✓ UO can help Latin@ students and their families to find the insider knowledge and access necessary to take advantage of academic and professional opportunities, as well as challenges related to class, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural norms at the university.

✓ Latin@ students are engaged in the campus community, but would likely be even more involved if given a broader range of options for participation, including more Latin@ focused on-campus clubs and organizations.

✓ The terms "Latin@" or "Hispanic" do not capture the multiple identities of students to whom this label is traditionally ascribed.

✓ UO Faculty and staff need to continue learning how to better understand cultural & familial roles and responsibilities/needs of Latin@ students and their families as well as different identity constructions regarding ethnicity, language, migration, gender, and social class.

## Institutional Recommendations

✓ The Office of President should appoint a Latin@ advisory group in charge of reviewing UO resources and advocating for additional services/programs for Latin@ underrepresented students.

✓ UO must enhance systematic approaches to the integration/desegregation of Latin@ students at recruitment, orientation, retention and graduation.

✓ UO must continue expanding more aggressively existing programmatic efforts in the Office of Equity and Inclusion that address micro-aggressions, biased campus climate, and racism.

✓ UO must continue expanding and supporting successful programs such as CMAE, Spanish as a Heritage Language Program, Oportunidades, among others, that integrate Latin@ Students at UO.

✓ UO must recruit and retain more ethnically and linguistically diverse faculty and staff.

## Appendix: Why this research matters for UO

- Undergraduate Latin@ population has increased 148% between 2008 and 2014.
- Rate of Latin@ on-time graduation improved by 10% but still lagged behind white students by 6%.[5]

### Hispanic

| Cohort Year | Return Fall 2nd Year | Return Fall 3rd Year | Return Fall 4th Year | Graduated within 4 Years | Graduated within 5 Years | Graduated within 6 Years |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2002 | 77.4% | 69.9% | 69.9% | 34.4% | 59.1% | 64.5% |
| 2003 | 81.0% | 71.4% | 69.5% | 34.3% | 50.5% | 60.0% |
| 2004 | 78.7% | 74.1% | 68.5% | 38.9% | 53.7% | 63.0% |
| 2005 | 84.3% | 74.5% | 73.5% | 41.2% | 65.7% | 68.6% |
| 2006 | 80.9% | 66.7% | 60.3% | 36.2% | 54.6% | 56.0% |
| 2007 | 80.6% | 70.8% | 65.3% | 38.2% | 55.6% | 63.2% |
| 2008 | 79.1% | 75.6% | 74.6% | 33.3% | 65.7% | |
| 2009 | 82.7% | 74.3% | 73.8% | 44.6% | | |
| 2010 | 82.5% | 75.7% | 72.1% | | | |
| 2011 | 80.4% | 73.5% | | | | |
| 2012 | 81.4% | | | | | |

### White

| Cohort Year | Return Fall 2nd Year | Return Fall 3rd Year | Return Fall 4th Year | Graduated within 4 Years | Graduated within 5 Years | Graduated within 6 Years |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2002 | 82.5% | 71.9% | 68.4% | 42.8% | 61.9% | 66.3% |
| 2003 | 85.0% | 76.8% | 73.7% | 47.1% | 67.3% | 71.3% |
| 2004 | 83.5% | 74.6% | 71.8% | 44.5% | 65.0% | 68.4% |
| 2005 | 83.4% | 74.7% | 71.0% | 42.6% | 63.2% | 67.1% |
| 2006 | 84.1% | 75.4% | 71.8% | 45.4% | 64.7% | 69.1% |
| 2007 | 83.4% | 75.0% | 71.7% | 45.5% | 64.5% | 68.4% |
| 2008 | 83.2% | 76.0% | 72.6% | 47.5% | 66.3% | |
| 2009 | 85.4% | 77.3% | 73.9% | 50.9% | | |
| 2010 | 86.8% | 78.4% | 75.4% | | | |
| 2011 | 85.0% | 78.2% | | | | |
| 2012 | 86.8% | | | | | |

### Academic Publication Submissions

In addition to this Executive Summary, findings will also be reported in two scholarly articles to be submitted in 2016 to sociolinguistics and higher education policy journals. Abstracts for the two proposed manuscripts follow.

### Abstract 1 Higher Education Journal

This study investigated the experiences of self-identified Latin@ students at a mid-sized flagship state university in the Pacific Northwest. One hundred seventeen students responded to an online survey and 10 participated in a follow-up interview. Students were asked how they learned about, accessed, and participated in campus services and student organizations. In addition, they were asked to describe interactions with faculty and staff in terms of how well supported they felt and whether faculty and staff understood their backgrounds and needs as non-dominant students. Three themes were apparent in the data: first, students had varying levels of engagement in student organizations, including Latin@-focused groups; second, students reported that there were supportive faculty and staff on campus, but they were not always easy to find; and third, students felt that more faculty and staff members needed to understand the needs of Latin@, first generation, and non-traditional students. Implications for university administrators are discussed.

### Abstract 2 Critical Sociolinguistics Journal

This paper analyzes identity constructions among college students with a heritage or background from Latin America or Spain. This qualitative analysis reveals sources of social tension regarding issues of representation that have been overlooked in academic settings. We find complex students' narratives regarding their experiences dealing with how perceptions of the institution limit their identity constructions as members of an ethnic minority. This reflects a micro-cosmos of the current sociopolitical environment in educated and self identified 'liberal' academic circles. Tensions emerge when students are labeled as Latin@s, the more acceptably and "politically correct" term in academic circles.

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[1] Data provided by the UO Office of Institutional Research.

[2] Data provided by the UO Office of Institutional Research.

[3] Classified in categories defined by Hernandez, J. C., & Lopez, M. A. (2004). Leaking pipeline: Issues impacting Latino college student retention. *Journal of College Student Retention, 6(1), 37-60.*

[4] Shenk, Petra Scott. 2007. I'm Mexican, remember? Constructing ethnic identities via authenticating discourse. *Journal of Sociolinguistics. 11/2: 194-220.*

[5] Data provided by the UO Office of Institutional Research.