A Case Study of the Campus Climate for Diversity at a Hispanic-Serving Institution: Perspectives from Latinx Undergraduate Students

Ariana Vargas
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A CASE STUDY OF THE CAMPUS CLIMATE FOR DIVERSITY AT A HISPANIC-SERVING INSTITUTION: PERSPECTIVES FROM LATINX UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

The College of Human Sciences and Education

by

Ariana Vargas
B.S., Texas State University, 2011
M.Ed., Texas State University, 2013
August 2020
This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Major Gricel Rodriguez. She is a first-generation college student, retired military nurse, wartime veteran, and loving mother. She has dedicated her entire life to supporting our family and putting others first. I would not be who I am and where I am without her unwavering love, support, and lifetime of sacrifices. For that, I am eternally grateful.
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate how Latinx students perceive the campus climate in curricular and cocurricular settings at a four-year public Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) in Texas. In addition, the study examined Latinx students’ understanding of the HSI designation and how their expectations of institutional diversity and inclusion are shaped by this awareness. Specifically, the study explored elements of the climate for diversity, as related to the Multicontextual Model for Diverse Learning Environments (Hurtado et al., 2012), including classroom experiences, cocurricular experiences, and relationships with faculty, staff, and peers. The primary sources of data included interviews with a total of eight participants and a collection of university documents. Results indicated that while the participants mainly described the campus climate as positive, there were a few instances of bias and exclusion reported. The saliency of Latinx, first-generation college student, and commuter identity were also significant for students. Additionally, classroom diversity and relationships with peers, faculty, and staff shaped their cocurricular and curricular experiences. Lastly, most of the students lacked general knowledge about HSIs, and the participants noted areas to enhance student success and support for Latinx students.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

For decades, researchers and policymakers have explored the benefits and challenges of campus diversity. Advocates for increasing the diversity of college campuses argue that with coordinated efforts institutions can meet outcomes that greatly benefit students, campus community members, and the greater society (Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012; Williams, 2013). These benefits include increased discussion with individuals from different backgrounds, increased intergroup interactions in the classroom, and successfully graduating racially and economically diverse students who contribute to overall social and economic growth (Densen & Chang, 2009; Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999; Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012; Williams, 2013). In addition, inclusion of diversity-related activities and diversity-related curriculum in academic courses contributes to student success outcomes, such as developing multicultural competencies for a global society (Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012). Meaningful diversity-related activities outside of the classroom also contribute to positive student success outcomes and shaping diverse learning environments.

Despite the documented benefits of increased racial/ethnic diversity on college campuses, experiences of isolation or bias in and outside of the classroom; a lack of compositional diversity among faculty, staff, and students; and a lack of clear commitments to institutional diversity can negatively impact student educational and social outcomes (Hurtado & Guillermo-Wann, 2013; Hurtado et al., 1999). Furthermore, encounters with a hostile campus climate can greatly influence how students experience the campus, perceptions of the campus climate, and students’ overall sense of belonging on campus (Cabrera et al., 1999; Hurtado et al., 1999).

Conversely, meaningful interactions with peers and faculty can positively impact students’ sense of belonging (Tinto, 1995; Museus, 2014). The ways in which faculty foster
relationships with students and support students on obtaining educational goals are related to positive sense of belonging (Maestas et al., 2007). In addition, student engagement activities that present opportunities for students to build meaningful relationships with peers are documented as beneficial to student development and sense of belonging (Park, 2014). Research suggests that students from historically underserved racial groups benefit from engagement in counterspaces strongly tied to identity and community. For instance, Soto and Deemer (2018) found communal goals among Latinx students to be a significant factor that contributed to their sense of belonging and perceptions of the campus climate.

Awareness of student academic and social experiences linked to campus climate is critical for understanding potential positive and negative consequences on student outcomes, such as retention and degree completion (Museus, 2014). Thus, meeting the needs of a diverse campus community also brings attention to institutional commitments made to advance diversity. Institutional commitments to diversity are reflected by the institution’s mission and values; the commitment to access and equity for students, faculty, and staff; and commitment to enhancing positive learning environments that cultivate diversity and inclusion through policies and practices (Williams, 2013).

While researchers have investigated the campus climate experiences of Latinx students in higher education, most of the existing research focuses on students attending Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). It is critical to understand the experiences of students of color attending PWIs as institutional leaders place more of an emphasis on institutional diversity; however, the campus climate experiences of Latinx students attending Minority-serving institutions (MSIs) are also significant. In particular, examining the experiences of Latinx
students attending Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) requires more examination due to a number of reasons, including the expansion of the HSI sector.

HSIs are one of the fastest growing sectors in higher education and among Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) (Benítez & DeAro, 2004). The Department of Education (2017) defines HSIs as non-profit, accredited institutions of higher education with at least 25% Hispanic undergraduate full-time equivalent students. The growth in HSIs is in response to shifting Latinx population in the United States, immigration patterns, and the high concentration of Latinx in particular areas of the United States (Núñez et al., 2016). HSIs enroll nearly 60% of all Latinx students and make up about 15% of all colleges and universities in the U.S. (Vargas, 2018). Furthermore, among all MSIs, HSIs enroll the most students and often serve a diverse study body, including “large proportions of low-income, first-generation, and other students of color besides Hispanics, including a greater share of Black or Native American college students, than either HBCUs or TCUs” (Núñez et al., 2016, p. 57). Given that HSIs are serving a greater role in educating the growing Latinx population among all sectors while also continuing to serve diverse student groups, it is necessary to gain a better understanding of campus climate experiences of students attending these institution types.

Thus, this chapter will introduce the study, which examined the perceptions of the campus climate for diversity among Latinx students attending a four-year public Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI). A discussion is included on the current enrollment and attainment trends of Latinx students in higher education to illustrate the growing diversity of college students in postsecondary education. Lastly, this chapter provides an overview of student success in higher education and introduces the purpose of this study. Subsequent chapters provide an in-depth exploration of HSIs and campus climate literature, in addition to the methodological
procedures used for this study. Lastly, subsequent chapters will include discuss key findings and implications for practice, theory, and research.

**Latinx Students in Higher Education**

The number of enrolled students from historically underserved groups has grown significantly in American higher education over recent decades (St. John et al., 2012). Increased access to financial aid programs, policies to increase compositional diversity, and intentionally designed pre-college programs geared towards increasing pathways to postsecondary education for historically underserved student groups are factors in the growing number of diverse students in higher education (St. John, et. al., 2012). Consequently, higher education serves more first-generation college students, racial minorities, and low-income students. Latinx students are among this growing group of diverse students and one of the fastest growing college-going racial/ethnic groups in higher education.

Between 2000-2016, Latinx postsecondary enrollment grew from 22% to 39% (de Brey et al., 2018). In addition, Latinx postsecondary enrollment grew by students grew from 1.4 million to 3.2 million students between 2000-2016, an increase of 134% (NCES, 2019). Furthermore, NCES (2019) reported the six-year graduation rate for Hispanic students in fall 2016 as 51%, in comparison to 70% for Asian students and 64% for White students. The number of degrees awarded to Hispanic students grew by 202% between 2000-01 and 2015-16 from 77,700 degrees awarded to 235,000 degrees awarded. Latinx postsecondary degree attainment has slightly increased over time, but graduation rates remain disproportionally lower than the graduate rates of White students.

The data highlights the evolving changes to American postsecondary education and shifting compositional diversity on today’s college campuses, yet the data indicate the need for
additional efforts to remedy enrollment gaps in effort to advance postsecondary education and achievement for Latinx students. The data also reveals that strategies are needed to ensure that supportive environments and institutional practices are in place to advance Latinx degree attainment, especially when comparing the number of degrees awarded to White students during this same period of time (an increase of 29% from 927,400 to 1.2 million) (NCES, 2019). Latinx students represent diverse ethnic, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds and make up an increasing share of all total postsecondary student enrollment, thus assisting Latinx students on the path to completion requires attention to factors that may present barriers to completion for this student population.

Conditions for Student Success in Diverse Learning Environments

Researchers have employed a variety of qualitative and quantitative research strategies in efforts to understand underlying factors that shape the campus environment and student success outcomes for underrepresented racial groups. Literature on student success has informed scholars, practitioners, and policymakers about the factors influencing student success. Tinto’s (1975, 1987, 1993) notable theory of student integration raised the importance of academic integration and social integration on student success. A student’s commitment to an institution and the institution's commitment to the student’s success play a critical role in a student’s decision to depart from the institution.

Enhancing student success is achievable through intentional action set forth by the institution (Tinto, 2012). Institutional action encompasses commitments made to support, assessment and feedback, involvement, and expectations. Institutional action should involve some level of action within the classroom. Tinto (2012) asserted that although cocurricular experiences are associated with positive aspects of social integration, the most effective way to
engage students is in the classroom. Achieving student success involves more than adding a course requirement or program to address an issue but rather involves establishing “those educational conditions that promote the retention of all students, in particular in the classroom, the one place most actions have failed to touch” (Tinto, 2012, p. 116).

Engaging issues of diversity within a classroom setting rather than just cocurricular activities presents an opportunity to interact with all students, especially given that this will be the primary source of interaction that a student has with an institution. Adding a diversity course requirement would not be sufficient for addressing all aspects of campus climate; however, diversity intentionally embedded across curricula is more effective at cultivating culturally engaging campuses. Thus, implementing policies that require the completion of diversity-related courses, coupled with other strategies for assessing campus diversity and campus climate, can engage students in curriculum that invites new perspectives and promote intergroup relationships.

Other scholars have addressed the importance of institutional commitments to diversity in shaping student success outcomes and a positive campus climate. Academic policies that focus on diversity related educational outcomes reflects an institution's commitment to diversity and improving campus conditions for diversity. Mayhew et al. (2005) stressed that “moving forward and providing students with opportunities to have diverse experiences, the more experienced students develop greater expectations for their institutions to honestly embrace diversity and create a positive campus climate with respect to diversity” (p. 409). Compositional diversity can also positively impact diverse interactions (Denson & Chang, 2009; Pike & Kuh, 2006), but intentional conditions must be met to truly accomplish diversity related educational outcomes (Hurtado, 2001). Achieving student success outcomes can also be accomplished through the
adopted of high-impact practices (HIPs) in educational settings, such as first-year seminars, learning Communities, and other experiential learning opportunities (Kuh, 2008). These activities dedicate considerable time to educational tasks while offering opportunities for students to engage with faculty and peers. In addition, HIPs ensure the application of knowledge to real-world experiences and problems (Skipper, 2017).

Attention to student success outcomes for Latinx student groups is critical given the demonstrated social and economic benefits of obtaining a college degree (Ma et al., 2016). Individuals who earn a bachelor’s degree earn more over their lifetime, in comparison to those with a high school degree or equivalent (Ma et al., 2016), placing degree completion as a top priority in higher education. Furthermore, Hurtado et al. (2012) emphasized, “The success of diverse college students is tied to our collective social and economic success” (p. 42).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of the campus climate for diversity among Latinx undergraduate students attending an HSI in Texas, the University of Houston. The expansion of the HSI sector in higher education presented an opportunity to examine the campus climate experiences that shape educational and social outcomes of Latinx undergraduate students attending the University of Houston. The students’ perspectives in this study highlight the curricular and cocurricular experiences within this institutional context of the climate for diversity.

Furthermore, this study attempted to gain a greater understanding of how undergraduate Latinx students interpreted and defined the HSI designation and how their understanding influenced their expectations of the institution’s commitment to advancing diversity and
inclusion. The experiences of Latinx students provided considerable insight from the population that is the center of the HSI designation

**Theoretical Framework**

The Multicontextual Model for Diverse Learning Environments (MMDLE) (Hurtado et al., 2012) guided this study. This model discusses aspects of the campus climate for diversity that influence student success outcomes for students from diverse backgrounds. These overarching outcomes include, habits of mind for lifelong learning, competences for a diverse and global world, and retention and achievement with the purpose of fulfilling social equity, democratic, and economic outcomes (Hurtado et al., 2012). This model expands upon the Campus Climate Racial model (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999) and identifies macrolevel and microlevel dimensions that influence the campus climate for diversity and student outcomes (Hurtado et al. 2012). Sociohistorical, policy, and community/external commitments shape that the institutional context (Hurtado et al., 2012; Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012), in which the institution is “an educational environment enveloped in a climate that reflects the institutional- and also individual-level lived experiences of organizational life” (Hurtado et al., 2012, p. 58). Racialized identities of students, faculty, and staff remain a central aspect of this model; however, this model places a stronger emphasis on the multiple identities that shape an individual’s lived experience and world views.

The various contexts of the model attempt to describe the factors that shape the climate for diversity and student success outcomes. The sociohistorical context captures how social movements have directly impacted college campuses by raising awareness about societal inequities and shifting attitudes. The policy context takes into consideration ways in which federal and state policies shape higher education and campus climates. For example, federal and state financial aid policies have historically either created pathways or hindered postsecondary
participation for underrepresented students of color. In addition, affirmative action policies have significantly shaped admissions practices and national rhetoric on who and how individuals should gain access to postsecondary education. The community/external commitments context considers that campus community members and the institution have networks within the community influencing the overall climate for diversity and institution.

The institutional context captures the internal forces influencing the campus climate for diversity, which is shaped by curricular and cocurricular processes that center student identity. Curricular processes encompass instructor identity, pedagogy/teaching methods, and course content. Whereas, the cocurricular processes include practice, staff identity, and programming. The curricular and cocurricular processes thus influence student experiences and outcomes.

This context acknowledges the forces of institutional-level and individual-level dimensions that shape the overall climate for diversity, which in turn influences student outcomes. These dimensions include, historical legacy of inclusion, organizational, compositional, psychological, and behavioral dimension. The historical legacy of inclusion/exclusion dimension acknowledges that the institutional context is influenced by the history of segregation and resistance to desegregation, university mission, and policies that have historically excluded students of color. The organizational dimension captures aspects of institutional practices and policies, such as recruitment, hiring practices, and the tenure processes. The compositional diversity dimension encompasses the demographic representation of faculty, staff, and students. Individual-level dimensions include the psychological and behavioral dimensions. The psychological dimension considers perceptions of racial tensions, perceptions of discrimination, and attitudes and reduction of prejudice, and the behavioral
dimension encompasses social interaction across racial/ethnic groups, classroom diversity, and campus involvement and diversity (Hurtado et. al, 2012).

**Methodological Overview**

This study utilized a qualitative single instrumental case study design guided by the Multicontextual Model for Diverse Learning Environments (MMDLE) (Hurtado et al., 2012). Using this approach presented an opportunity to hone in on the campus climate for diversity at one HSI through an in-depth analysis of multiple data sources. Participants for this study included eight Latinx undergraduate students attending the University of Houston. The University of Houston is a recognized R1 – highest research activity – institution and Hispanic-Serving Institution in Houston, Texas. The university was recognized as an HSI in 2012 and has a current enrollment of 32.4% of Hispanic/Latinx student as of Fall 2019 (UH 2019 Fall Facts).

The research questions consider the primary elements of the institutional context of the MMDLE model (Hurtado et al., 2012). This context emphasizes the cocurricular and curricular processes that shape the climate for diversity with consideration of student identity. The unique institutional characteristics of the University of Houston contributed to a greater understanding of how the HSI context influences campus climate and student experiences. Thus, the research questions attempted to hone in on these experiences of students, while also considering the implications of the institution’s HSI designation. The research questions included:

1. How do Latinx students describe the campus climate of a four-year public Hispanic-Serving Institution within curricular and cocurricular settings?

2. What understanding do Latinx students have of the institution’s Hispanic-Serving Institution designation, and how does their understanding influence their expectations of institutional diversity and inclusion?
Significance of the Study

Identifying the factors that influence perceptions of the campus climate and student experiences is instrumental to student success outcomes and enacting campus environments that support a diverse campus community. Beyond matters of access and postsecondary enrollment are issues of student success and degree completion. Given the increased competition to reach a national attainment rate of 60% by 2025 (Lumina Foundation, 2018), university leaders must draw attention to student success efforts that lead students to degree completion. The need for a highly skilled and educated workforce as a result of shifts in labor markets toward a knowledge-based economy has inspired innovation and has driven global competition. To move closer to the national attainment goal, postsecondary institutions must commit to serving a growing diverse student body, be prepared to address campus diversity, and find appropriate accountability measures for assessing climate experiences of campus community members.

Thus, increased attention on student success outcomes at HSIs is critically important as HSIs play a significant role in advancing attainment rates for Latinx students. Understanding the aspects of diverse learning environments that influence cocurricular and curricular experiences of Latinx students attending HSIs can lead to positive retention and attainment outcomes (Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012). Therefore, this study contributes to the understanding of aspects of the campus climate for diversity at a public four-year, compositionally diverse HSI with a discussion on improving educational and social environments for Latinx students. The voices of Latinx students are critical in this study due to the intended goal of advancing Latinx education at HSIs. Lastly, although HSIs tend to lack a cohesive institutional identity due to unique characteristics of each respective institution, understanding how top tier research institutions, such as the
University of Houston, serve historically underserved students is significant as more top tier institutions gain the HSI designations.

**Definition of Terms**

The following section includes definitions of terminology commonly used throughout the dissertation:

*Campus climate* refers to the attitudes and behaviors of students, faculty, and staff, that shape the environment of inclusivity for all members of the campus community. Some aspects of the campus climate can include, academic validation in the classroom, general interpersonal validation, and sense of belonging (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999; Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012).

*Campus racial climate* refers to the attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of students, faculty, and staff regarding racial identity and race relations among members of the campus community, considering the assumption that students are education in racialized contexts on college and university campuses (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999).

*Compositional diversity* refers to the numerical representation of different groups of people within the campus environment, including student, staff, and faculty representation.

*Cocurricular* refers to activities, programs, and learning experiences that take place outside of the classroom and compliment learning in the classroom and academic curriculum (Hurtado et al., 2012).

*Diversity* “refers to all the ways in which people differ, including primary characteristics, such as age, race, gender, ethnicity, mental and physical abilities, and sexual orientation; and secondary characteristics, such as education, income, religion, work experience, language skills, geographic location, and family status” (Williams, 2012, p. 90).
Educational attainment refers to the highest level of education completed (e.g., a high school diploma or equivalency certificate, some college, or a bachelor’s degree), (NCES, 2018, p. 160).

Emerging Hispanic-Serving Institutions “are institutions that currently do not meet the federal threshold of 25 percent Latino enrollment to be classified as HSIs, but have Latino enrollments ranging between 12-24 percent” (Santiago & Andadre, 2010, p. 2).

First-generation College Student refers to “a) An individual both of whose parents did not complete a baccalaureate degree; or b) In the case of any individual who regularly resided with and received support from only one parent, an individual whose only such parent did not complete a baccalaureate degree” (Department of Education, 2011)

Latino/a/x refers to a person of Latin American origin or descent. Latinx is a recently adopted term that is gender-neutral and moves away from the masculine and feminine binary (Latino/Latina). Variations of the terms Hispanic, Latino/a, and Latinx are used in the literature.

Hispanic refers to individuals from Spanish-speaking countries, including Mexico but not including Brazil. It is important to note that Hispanic and Latinx identity are not considered racial categories but rather an ethnicity. Thus, persons of Hispanic and/or Latinx heritage may be of any race. The terms will be utilized interchangeably for this study to reflect language used in specific studies and reports.

Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) are defined by the U.S. Department of Education as non-profit institutions that are made up of 25% or more Hispanic/Latinx students. (Department of Education, 2019).
Inclusion refers to “when traditionally marginalized individuals and groups feel a sense of belonging and are empowered to participate in majority culture as full and valued members of the community, shaping and redefining that culture in different ways” (Williams, 2013, p. 90).

Institutional diversity “refers to as organizational change and systemic approaches by which higher education, governments, companies, and non-profits develop, execute, and assess best practices in order to embed and infuse equity, diversity and inclusion into the fabric and culture of the workplace” (Williams, 2013).

Minority Serving Institution (MSIs) are defined as institutions with full-time enrollment of at least 50 percent of minority students (U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) are defined as institutions with a student body that are majority and traditionally White/Caucasian students.

Retention refers to “a measure of the rate at which students persist in their educational program at an institution, expressed as a percentage. For four-year institutions, this is the percentage of first-time bachelors (or equivalent) degree-seeking undergraduates from the previous fall who are again enrolled in the current fall. For all other institutions, this is the percentage of first-time degree/certificate-seeking students from the previous fall who either re-enrolled or successfully completed their program by the current fall” (NCES, 2019).

Structural Diversity refers to the organizational contexts and structures that influence organizational practices and policies linked to diversity and equity among (Milem et al., 2005).

Student Success is defined in this chapter with consideration of the Multicontextual Model for Diverse Learning Model, which defines success in terms of habits of mind, skills for lifelong learning, competencies for a multicultural world, and retention and achievement (Hurtado et al., 2012). Tinto (1993) also suggests that students are successful when they meet
clearly defined goals over a period of time. Student success also encompasses retention and graduation of students.

*Students of Color* refers to individuals from historically underrepresented racial groups, including African American/Black, Hispanic/Latinx, Asian, Native Alaskan, Native American/American Indian, and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.

*White/Caucasian* refers to a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa (U.S. Census, 2018).
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides an overview of HSIs and will examine years of campus climate literature in attempt to understand the fundamental factors that influence diverse learning environments, in addition to understanding how these factors influence Latinx students. The chapter also outlines the guiding theoretical framework for this study.

Hispanic-Serving Institutions

In 1992, the federal government officially recognized HSIs after years of advocacy efforts led by leaders of the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) (Gasman et al., 2015; HACU, 2017; Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012; Santiago, 2006). Established in 1986, “HACU fulfills its mission by promoting the development of member colleges and universities; improving access to and the quality of post-secondary educational opportunities for Hispanic students; and meeting the needs of business, industry and government through the development and sharing of resources, information and expertise” (HACU, 2017). HACU was instrumental in seeking federal recognition of HSIs as well as federal appropriations to support institutional activities aligned with supporting Latinx students in higher education at designated and emerging HSIs (HACU, 2017; Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012). The increase in Latinx college student enrollment, shifts to Latinx population in the United States, and the high concentration of Latinx communities in particular areas of the United States has contributed to the expansion of the HSI sector (Benitez & DeAro, 2004).

According to the Department of Education (2017), HSIs are eligible institutions of higher education with at least 25% Hispanic undergraduate full-time equivalent students. Title V, the Developing Hispanic Serving Institutions Program of the Higher Education Act of 1965, states that eligible institutions are two-year or four-year non-profit, degree-awarding, accredited
institutions where at least 50% of students enrolled are receiving need-based assistance or a substantial percentage of students are receiving Federal Pell Grants. Due to the increasing Latinx population and changes in postsecondary enrollment trends, more institutions are seeking emerging HSI status. Santiago and Andrade (2010) stated that “emerging HSIs are institutions that currently do not meet the federal threshold of 25 percent Latino enrollment to be classified as HSIs, but have Latino enrollments ranging between 12-24 percent” (p. 2). Like HSIs, emerging HSIs are eligible to apply for federal grants in support of reaching the full HSI status (Dayton et al., 2004).

Due to the fast expansion of HSIs in the United States, maintaining records of all HSIs quickly became a priority. Prior to 2008, there were no official records of HSIs. In an effort to capture existing and emerging HSIs, HACU began tracking HSIs in 2008 and has since published annual records of all existing and emerging HSIs based on IPEDs data. The total number of HSIs reported in 2008-2009 was 281. In 2016-2017, HACU (2019) reported a total of 492 HSIs across 21 states and Puerto Rico. Of the HSIs reported, 215 were two-year public, 120 were four-year public, 22 were two-year private, and 135 were four-year private. This number has since increased. In 2017-2018 a total of 523 institutions were recognized as HSIs across 25 states, District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico (HACU, 2019) (see Table 1).
Table 1. Total Number of Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) in 2017 and 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution Type</th>
<th>HSIs 2016-2017</th>
<th>HSIs 2017-2018</th>
<th>Emerging HSIs 2016-2017</th>
<th>Emerging HSIs 2017-2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two-year public</td>
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<td>222</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>99</td>
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<tr>
<td>Four-year public</td>
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<td>492</td>
<td>523</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>328</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Hispanic Association of Colleges & Universities

In addition, HACU reports annual listings of all emerging institutions in the US. The total number of emerging HSIs reported in 2017-2018 was 333 in 36 states and the District of Columbia (see Table 1). Of the 333 emerging HSIs reported, 103 were two-year public, 74 were four-year public, 8 were two-year private, 148 were four-year private. The total number of emerging HSIs has increased since the initial reporting of 187 emerging HSIs in 2008-2009 to 328 in 2017-2018 (HACU, 2019).

**Funding HSIs**

The U.S. Department of Education allocated funding to HSIs beginning in 1995. The initial allocation totaled $12 million (HACU, 2017). In FY 2015, the total amount of federal appropriations allocated towards HSIs was $100,231,000 (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Although the amount of funding has increased over the years, HSI advocates express the need for increased federal resources, especially since the number of HSIs continues to grow (Vargas, 2018). According to Title V, “Relative to other institutions of higher education, Hispanic-Serving Institutions are underfunded. Such institutions receive significantly less in state and local
funding, per full-time equivalent student, than other institutions of higher education” (U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

Research has documented the increased benefits of federal appropriations in advancing student success, especially in lieu of increased tuition prices and state disinvestment. Increased funding can aid HSIs in producing outcomes. Despite challenges with limited resources, HSIs are succeeding at advancing Latinx educational attainment; however, Hurtado and Guillermo-Wann (2013) argued that “it is important for diverse broad access institutions to document how they are making a difference in terms of student talent development, particularly in the context of budget constraints and demands for accountability” (p. 4).

**HSI Institutional Identity**

The history of the HSIs is unique to the history of other Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs), such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Tribal Colleges and Universities. MSIs are identified as institutions that have student body with at least 50% representing underrepresented racial groups. There are currently six categories of MSIs based on definitions provided by the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA). These categories include, Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges and Universities, Predominantly Black Institutions, Alaska Native Serving Institutions, Native Hawaiian Serving Institutions, and Minority-Serving Institutions, (U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

Among MSIs in the U.S., HSIs are the fastest growing sector (Benitez & DeAro, 2004). Of the 4,360 degree-granting institutions in the United States in 2016-2017, 102 were historically Black colleges and universities, 290 were Hispanic-Serving Institutions, 35 were tribally controlled colleges and universities, and 113 were Asian American and Native American Pacific
Islander-serving institutions” NCES, 2019, p. 16). The number of HSIs reported in the United States surpasses other MSI sectors and continues to grow.

Due to the enrollment-driven designation, HSIs lack a clear and coordinated institutional identity (Benítez & DeAro, 2004; Dayton et al., 2004; Vargas, 2018). HSIs are not mission-driven like Historically Black College and Universities (HBCUs) and Tribal Colleges and Universities, which were established to serve a particular underrepresented racial group (Benítez & DeAro, 2004). In addition, HSIs are diverse the sector resulting in a lack of clear institutional identity and coordinated efforts to support Latinx students. HSIs are defined by Latinx enrollment and were not intentionally established with the purpose of serving Latinx students. Whereas, The Morrill Act of 1890 established Historically Black College & Universities (HBCUs) which provided increased access for African American/Black students in higher education. Historically, HBCUs have a mission to serve African American student success and have a well-documented history in this country.

Currently, there are only three HSIs, not including HSIs in Puerto Rico, that were established with the purpose and mission of advancing Latinx education, including two institutions in New York City, Hostos Community College and Boricua College, and the National Hispanic University in San Jose, California (Gasman et al., 2015). These institutions have a direct mission of advancing Latinx student success. Some scholars argue that not all HSIs have intentional efforts in place to advance Latinx education. For example, Gasman et al. (2015) argued that “being established for the purpose of educating Latinos, HSIs have important implications for these students. Basically, an institution can be designated an HSI but have no established commitment to educating Latinos” (p. 128).
Furthermore, HSIs range greatly in institutional type (two-year or four-year), sector (public, private, or for-profit), mission, and programs as there is no clear institutional identity across HSIs (Núñez et al., 2016). HSIs also vary greatly in the percentage of Latinx students served and percentage of other racial groups enrolled. Núñez et al. (2016) identified six HSI types based on a thorough analysis of all designated institutions in the United States. The classifications included, “(1) Urban Enclave Community Colleges, (2) Rural Dispersed Community Colleges, (3) Big Systems four-year Institutions, (4) Small Communities four-year Institutions, (5) Puerto Rican Institutions, and (6) Health Science Schools” (p. 57).

While HSIs strive to advance Latinx education, they also serve diverse student groups, especially considering that a majority of HSIs are broad access institutions which admit most students who apply (Benítez & DeAro, 2004). The diversity among students enrolled at HSIs presents opportunities and challenges for HSI leaders in efforts to identify student success strategies that support the advancement of Latinx students but that also prioritize student success for other minority student groups. For example, HSIs serve large proportions of students from various backgrounds including, non-traditional students, low-income students, first-generation students, non-native English speakers, immigrants, undocumented students, transfer students, and students with families (Espinosa et al., 2017). In addition, students from other underrepresented racial groups are more likely to enroll in HSIs than White students (Cuellar & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2016).

**The Study of Campus Climate**

Ongoing assessment and research to study “climate” has resulted in decades of literature; however, defining campus climate remains a challenge, and a consensus on what factors impact climate has not been met (Hart & Fellabaum, 2008). Hart and Fellabaum (2008) completed a
qualitative content analysis including 118 campus climate studies from clearinghouse database of faculty climate studies. The authors revealed inconsistency with definitions and goals across all campus climate studies. Despite this issue of consensus, scholars have attempted to define and give context to the climates that shape campus environments. For instance, Williams (2013) defined campus climate as the “degree to which various community members feel included or excluded in learning and professional environments” (p. 280). While this definition provides some insight as to how students, faculty, and staff may experience climate, other definitions capture aspects that recognize the impact of culture, institutional history, and external factors that influence perceptions and experiences with climate.

For example, Peterson and Spencer (1990) insisted on the importance of defining environment, culture, and climate to understand organizational culture and climate. They defined the term environment as the “the broadest concept, potentially including all internal and external, organizationally related phenomena” where “culture and climate are seen as concepts describing a subset of the internal environment of an institution” (Peterson & Spencer, 1990, p. 6). They went on to define culture as “deeply embedded patterns of organizational behavior and the shared values, assumptions, beliefs, or ideologies that members have about their organization or its work” (Peterson & Spencer, 1990, p. 6). Finally, climate is defined as “current common patterns of important dimensions of organizational life or its members’ perceptions of and attitudes toward those dimensions” (Peterson & Spencer, 1990, p. 7).

In addition, the authors distinguished three types of climates that exist in an organization, including objective climate, perceived climate, and psychological or felt climate. Objective climate is concerned with “patterns of behavior or formal activity in an institution that can be observed directly and objectively” (Peterson & Spencer, 1990, p. 12). Furthermore, “perceived
climate focuses on the cognitive images that participants have of how organizational life actually does function and how it should function” Finally, “psychological or felt climate is the motivational, rather than perceptual, dimension that focuses on how participants feel about their organization, and their work” (Peterson & Spencer, 1990, p. 12). The researchers expand on the definitions using the Conceptual Model of Organizational Culture to describe various aspects of environment with attention given to campus culture and campus climate. The conceptual model considers the implications of geospatial approaches, traditions, myths, and artifacts found within the organizations; behavioral patterns; and processes, values, and beliefs that the members share about their organization (Peterson & Spencer, 1990). The definitions and conceptual model presented by Peterson and Spencer (1990) capture the complexities of assessing aspects of the environment and the relationship among various factors contributing to experiences and perceptions with climate.

Other scholars have defined climate in the context of race/ethnicity. Definitions and models specific to campus racial climate are often in response to earlier models that fail to acknowledge the unique experiences of students of color while recognizing that students are educated in “racial” contexts (Hurtado et al. 1999). Solórzano et al. (2000) broadly defined campus racial climate as “the overall racial environment of the college campus” (p.62).

**Campus Diversity**

Colleges and universities are serving diverse student populations now more than ever. Maximizing efforts to advance diversity among students and faculty encompasses institutional commitments to increase access for racial minorities and strategies that foster supportive campus environments (Williams, 2013). Achieving institutional diversity is a matter of significance, as reports have indicated the increased social and economic benefits of educating a citizenry that is
prepared for a diversifying knowledge-based labor market (Ma et al., 2016). The well
documented benefits of educating a diverse citizenry are also evident at the institutional level.

According to Williams (2013), “Creating a diverse student, faculty, and staff community
helps create a context in which institutions can become multicultural and diverse in a number of
different ways” (p. 19). The ways in which diverse campus communities impact environments is
shown by increased interactions across diverse student groups and enhanced learning
environments that influence diversity educational outcomes (Densen & Chang, 2009; Hurtado,
2001). In addition, the role of a racially/ethnically diverse faculty in influencing educational
outcomes is noted in the literature, as African American and Latinx faculty and instructors are
more likely to incorporate diversity-related activities in academic courses (Hurtado, 2001;
Umbach, 2006). The importance of having a diverse and representative faculty at HSIs is also
noted as significant (Ballysingh, 2017; Banda et al., 2017).

Impact of Compositional Diversity

Historical federal and state policies have contributed to the changing landscape of
diversity in postsecondary institutions (Hurtado & Navia, 1997); however, the implications of
compositional diversity in postsecondary education remains a contested issue among
policymakers and university leaders. U.S. Supreme Court decisions centered on race-conscious
and race-neutral policies have prompted further investigation about the impact of race in
admissions processes (Yosso et al., 2004). Still, several states and institutions have prioritized
institutional diversity by implementing programs and policies that promote access and
completion for underrepresented racial groups. The desire to enhance the compositional diversity
of students remains a central focus for many scholars and policymakers, thus, studies have
analyzed the impacts of compositional diversity of institutions on outcomes, such as student
learning and interacting with individuals from different backgrounds.

Pike and Kuh (2008) and Densen and Chang (2009) found positive implications
associated with the structural diversity of college campuses, in which they defined structural
diversity as the demographics of the students, faculty, and staff. Pike and Kuh (2006)
investigated the relationship among institutional characteristics, structural diversity, informal
interactional diversity, and the perceptions of the campus environment. The authors found that
increased levels of interaction between diverse groups of students were associated with having a
diverse student population. However, more positive perceptions of the campus environment were
not associated with structural diversity (Pike and Kuh, 2008).

Moreover, using multilevel modeling strategies, Denson and Chang (2009) explored the
questions: “(a) Do different forms of campus racial diversity contribute uniquely to students’
learning and educational experiences when they are simultaneously tested utilizing multilevel
modeling? (b) Does a campus where students take greater advantage of those diversity
opportunities have independent positive effects on students’ learning?” (p. 328). The researchers
analyzed data using a sample of 20,178 students who completed The Student Information Form
and College Student Survey during their first year and fourth year, respectively. The researchers
investigated the relationship among diversity, cross-racial interaction (or CRI), and structural
diversity, in addition to self-efficacy, general academic skills, and racial-cultural engagement.
The authors found that simply being in a diverse environment has positive implications on
engagement with racial diversity, but “students’ own level of cross-racial interaction is even
more significant when there is a general absence of such interaction among the larger student
body” (Denson & Chang, 2009, p. 340). Educational benefits associated with diversity-related
workshops or classes and interactions across racial groups were also a significant finding (Denson & Chang, 2009). The authors concluded that “campuses where students are more engaged with racial diversity through related knowledge acquisition or cross-racial interaction have measurable positive effects on all students irrespective of a student’s own frequency of engagement with diversity” (Denson & Chang, 2009, p. 344).

These findings suggest that compositional diversity impacts diverse student interactions and educational experiences; however, efforts to improve positive perceptions of the campus environment should move beyond compositional diversity. While there are positive associations with compositional diversity and informal interactional diversity, university leaders and faculty must create conditions that foster diversity outcomes and cannot rely solely on compositional diversity to improve educational outcomes.

**Diverse Learning Environments and Faculty of Color**

Exposure to diversity in academic curriculum broadens students’ understanding of diversity and can lead to increased interactions with diverse peers (Densen & Chang, 2009). The structural diversity of faculty on college campuses is paramount to student learning and the overall campus environment. Umbach (2006) declared that “structural diversity of faculty is positively related to the use of diversity related activities on campus” (p. 337). Williams (2013) also argued that having a diverse faculty, staff, and student community enhances the potential to accomplish preparing students for a diverse and global world and for the increased production of domestic and international diversity research and scholarship. However, creating environments in which students interact across difference requires more than the presence of students from diverse backgrounds (Denson & Chang, 2009). The use of intentional teaching techniques that
“create certain conditions to maximize the potential for learning” are important in considering diverse learning environments (Hurtado, 2001, p. 189).

Empirical studies have found that Faculty of Color are more likely to utilize teaching techniques that emphasize diversity and diverse interactions in the classroom (Umbach, 2006; Hurtado, 2001; Nguyen et al., 2017). Hurtado (2001) found that African American and Hispanic/Latino faculty are more likely to utilize pedagogical strategies that focus on diversity related educational outcomes, such as cooperative learning and incorporating readings on race/ethnicity in the classroom, even when controlling for faculty in the social sciences. Faculty of Color tend to be concentrated in social science departments, which are the areas that typically include more focus on diversity. American Indian/Alaskan Native faculty were more likely to utilize experiential learning/field studies, while Asian/Asian American faculty were less likely than any other racial group to utilize teaching techniques that include diversity in curriculum. Similarly, Umbach (2006) found that Faculty of Color were more likely to incorporate diversity-related activities in the classroom and more likely to utilize pedagogical techniques that emphasized collaborative learning techniques, creating environments to increase diverse interactions and higher-order thinking activities. Like Hurtado (2001), Umbach (2006) found that Asian/Asian American faculty were less likely than White faculty to place any emphasis on diversity in the classroom. The authors emphasized that the academic discipline of faculty was also an indicator for the use of diversity in the classroom.

Faculty can also negatively influence the classroom experiences of students. Hurtado et al. (2011) found that validating classroom experiences were stronger for students of color when associated with empowerment from faculty. Whereas, experiences with prejudiced faculty and staff were associated with feelings of alienation and negative classroom experiences. Maestas et
al. (2007) also found faculty to be an important factor in a student’s sense of belonging for students attending the University of Mexico, a Hispanic-serving institution and Minority-serving institution. The authors emphasized that the university is not only concerned with the student success of Latinx students but students from all racial backgrounds, as the institution serves a high percentage of students from underrepresented racial groups. Findings from the survey revealed that faculty and instructors greatly influence a student’s overall sense of belonging and academic integration at the institution. Students felt a stronger sense of belonging when faculty took greater interest in them and their goals. These findings support other studies that indicate that faculty play a critical role in student success outcomes.

The role that faculty have in shaping student perspectives and classroom experiences is critical. Hurtado (2001) advocated for a shift in debate about objectivity of faculty and finding ways “to give faculty support and guidance in becoming aware of their biases and the effect of these biases on their student” (Hurtado et al., 1999, p. 293). Supportive environments should encompass diverse and unfamiliar perspectives in the classroom (Hurtado, 2001) and efforts to prepare faculty to engage in difficult conversations in the classroom is necessary (Sue & Constantine, 2007).

Research clearly demonstrates the benefits of compositional diversity among students and faculty. A diverse faculty in higher education is important for serving the needs of a diverse student population (Hurtado et al., 1999); however, the 2018 Condition of Education report confirmed that Faculty of Color percentages in postsecondary education remain disproportionate to White faculty (McFarland, 2018). The report stated that “of all full-time faculty in degree-granting postsecondary institutions in fall 2016, 41 percent were White males; 35 percent were White females; 6 percent were Asian/Pacific Islander males; 4 percent were Asian/Pacific
Islander females; 3 percent each were Black males, Black females, and Hispanic males; and 2 percent were Hispanic females” (McFarland, 2018, p. 185). American Indian/Alaska Native and faculty of two or more races represented one percent or less of the total full-time faculty (McFarland et al., 2018).

These numbers are also concerning given that a recent study revealed that several institutions lack transparency in sharing data about Faculty of Color and that data on demographics is not easily accessible (Banda et al. 2017). After an extensive document analysis of faculty at HSIs, the researchers used a 3-level analysis approach to examine data available through NCES (level 1), HACU (level 2), and on selected institutional websites (level 3). Banda et al. (2017) found a lack of transparent and accessible data and the limited availability of demographic information. The authors critiqued institutions for the lack of faculty information available, especially given the digital age. The researchers also concluded that HSIs generally lacked in faculty diversity, especially among tenured ranks. This finding is alarming given that HSIs serve students from diverse racial backgrounds. According to Hurtado and Ruiz (2012) “tenured faculty are employed by institutions for long periods of time, and are largely responsible for the approval of hires/promotions and the curriculum at many institutions” (p. 23). The lack of diverse faculty at HSIs is problematic, as the faculty does not reflect the students served by these institutions (Banda et al., 2017).

Thus, increased efforts to promote faculty diversity will require more systemic processes that capture such data and makes it more easily accessible to interested stakeholders. Attention to access issues such as promotion and tenure as well as salary disparities are also important considerations for Faculty of Color (Williams, 2013). Additionally, Faculty of Color may also experience chilly climates and experience issues related to access and equity, so it is equally
important to assess the campus climate attitudes and perceptions of faculty and staff on campus (Contreras, 2018; Williams, 2013).

**Racial Discrimination and Racial Attitudes**

While policies and initiatives to increase racial makeup in higher education have served as a benefit to enhancing campus diversity, racial conflict and harassment persists on American colleges and campuses for students of color (Hurtado, 1992; Hurtado & Alvarado, 2015). Marginalization on college campus is reinforced through forms of racial discrimination and harassment often experienced by students from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups. Suarez-Balcazar et al. (2003) described common harassment as “racial slurs, exclusion from activities, and physical violence” (p. 429). Racial discrimination can come in the form of overt targeted behaviors or subtle behaviors, such as microaggressions (Solórzano et al., 2000). Early studies reveal that issues of racial harassment disproportionately impact students from underrepresented racial/ethnic background.

Recent data collected by the Diverse Learning Environments (DLE) survey supports previous studies about student encounters with racial discrimination on campus. Hurtado and Alvarado (2015) analyzed responses to the DLE survey from 8,887 underrepresented minority (URM) students who attended 58 four-year campuses. The findings revealed that Latina/o students and Black students reported incidents of discrimination. The report stated that “62.3% of Latina/o students reported personally experiencing discriminatory verbal comments, 44.3% felt excluded from events and activities, and almost one-third (32.3%) reported visually offensive images on campuses with low URM representation” (p. 2). The findings emphasize the need to address issues of racial discrimination and bias on college campuses, especially for underrepresented racial groups who report more targeted incidents.
McCabe (2009) conducted a series of focus groups using Latino/a, Black, White, and Asian students at a predominantly white institution (PWI). They found that students often experienced racial and gender microaggressions. Students also expressed isolation on campus due to the lack in structural diversity. One theme revealed that Latina students often felt oversexualized. The racial and gender microaggressions experienced by Latina students resulted in negative experiences with the campus environment and feelings of discomfort in their academic and social environments.

Cuellar and Johnson-Ahorlu (2016) examined the campus racial climate experiences of students attending a two-year HSI among Latinx, Asian, and White students using a parallel mixed-method design. The survey data revealed stark differences with experiences of bias and discrimination among Asian, Latinx, and White student responses. Asian American students reported more incidents of bias and discrimination, in comparison to Latinx and White students. There were no significant differences among reports of bias and discrimination between Latinx and White students. The researchers also found that the quantitative findings did not align with qualitative findings. For example, Asian students in the focus groups did not discuss incident of bias and discrimination and described the campus as a welcoming environment. These sentiments were also shared by White students in the focus groups. Focus group responses revealed more negative climate experiences for Latinx students than revealed in the survey data. Some of the Latinx students described an overall sense of community on campus and fair treatment by faculty and staff, but other Latinx students described differential treatment by faculty and staff and expressed that Asian students were more favored than other students on campus. More research on experiences of bias and discrimination by students attending HSIs is needed.
Student racial attitudes and perceptions of campus climate are shown to be different across racial groups. Rankin and Reason (2005) examined the perceptions of students of colors and White students from 10 different institutions. The findings are by supported research indicating that White students do not experience racial tensions at the same rate as students of color (Hurtado, 2015). The study also indicated that White students were often unaware of issues faced by students of color, while students of color did not agree that the institution was actively seeking to address issues of racism (Rankin & Reason, 2005).

Moreover, limited research exists highlighting the experiences of students attending HSIs. One study examined the experience of non-traditional African American female students attending at an HSI located in an urban area in Texas (Bonner II et al., 2015). Among several findings, the researchers described specific experiences of the African American women and perceptions of the contextual environment. The authors elaborated on the tensions experienced with the participants' racial identities and the institution’s identity:

what had been the university’s mission of meeting the needs of a diverse, local, and underserved population was perceived by these women as morphing into something that was not reflective nor inclusive of their interests. In essence, many of the women intimated that what the institution was trying to become, namely a research-oriented enclave, was becoming ever distant in its capacity to nurture the type of students they were—female, nontraditional, and minority (p. 47).

One student in particular expressed challenges navigating the White and Hispanic binary on campus and within the community, which was especially a challenge as a student with former experience at an HBCU. While the student did not share negative racial attitudes toward other racial groups, she struggled with the institution's approach to diversity, as it seemed that the initiatives were catered specifically for Hispanic/Latino students. The findings illustrate the challenges that face HSI when supporting initiatives that advance Hispanic/Latino education and diversity but also balance support systems for other racial minority groups.
Furthermore, although a majority of the campus climate studies focus primarily on the undergraduate student experience, an emerging body of literature focuses on perceptions and experiences of graduate students. A recent study measured the perceptions of diversity and the campus racial climate of underrepresented minorities (URM) and non-underrepresented minorities (Non-URM) graduate students (Ward & Zarate, 2015). The researchers found significant differences between the perceptions of diversity and climate between URM and non-URM graduate students. The researchers contend that “demographic characteristics, such as race and gender, and predispositions to certain beliefs or ideals mediate the degree to which higher education can have an effect on student attitudes about diversity” (Ward & Zarate, 2015, p. 193). Furthermore, “for non-URM students, their beliefs about the productivity of students of color and their concerns about reverse discrimination significantly predicted the degree to which they have favorable attitudes about diversity as beneficial to scholarship and to the campus in general” (Ward & Zarate, 2015, p. 607). Other differences were associated with the academic schools in which students enrolled. For example, they found that non-URM had more positive perceptions of the benefits of diversity and campus climate when enrolled with schools with more URM students. These findings suggest that increased diversity in graduate education can positively impact perceptions about the benefits of diversity. However, graduate education is increasing in diversity, which is why some scholars have voiced the need for graduate diversity officers who lead strategic efforts to focus on issues of access and equity the graduate school (Griffin et al., 2012).

Experiences of isolation and discrimination by peers and faculty can negatively impact student learning, socialization, and can lead to academic stress (Cabrera et al., 1999; Johnson et al., 2014; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Solórzano et al., 2000). According to a recent study,
“observations of and encounters with racism on campus increased their academic environment stress and diminished their feelings about the campus environment, affecting commitment to the institution, and ultimately their persistence decisions” (Johnson, 2014, p. 92). Students who thrive in their academic environments and have positive interactions with peers and faculty are more likely to be successful (Morrow & Ackermann, 2012; Wolf et al., 2017). Whereas, academic environment stress and campus racial climate indirectly and directly impact persistence decisions of students of color at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) (Johnson et al., 2014). These finding support years of scholarship that suggest that developing meaningful relationships with peers is significant to a students’ sense of belonging on campus (Bean & Eaton, 2000; Morrow & Ackermann, 2012; Wolf et al., 2017).

**Sense of Belonging**

Feelings of exclusion and discrimination are noted as a factor in negative perceptions of campus climate that can impact student success; however, researchers have also investigated students’ feeling of belonging on campus and how sense of belonging leads to more positive academic and social outcomes (Museus et al., 2017; Strayhorn; 2018; Wolf et al., 2017). Social belonging is fostered through positive interactions with peers, faculty, and staff and a welcoming campus environment (Strayhorn; 2018; Wolf et al., 2017). According to research, prejudicial treatment experienced by students of color at PWIs can negatively impact sense of belonging (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Solórzano et al., 2000). Institutions must foster environments that promote sense of belonging and validate the experiences of students who are often subject to racial discrimination. The increased visibility of special populations requires attention to the unique needs of diverse student groups and identifying how various students group feel valued.
and welcomed on campus to contribute to the understanding of diverse learning environments at different institutional types.

The Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) Model suggests that students who interact with a culturally engaging campus environment are more likely to “(1) exhibit a greater sense of belonging, more positive academic dispositions, and higher levels of academic performance and ultimately (2) be more likely to persist to graduation” (Museus, 2014, p. 210).

A culturally engaging campus environment encompasses nine components: Cultural Familiarity, Culturally Relevant Knowledge, Cultural Community Service, Opportunities for Meaningful Cross-Cultural Engagement, Collectivist Cultural Orientations, Culturally Validating Environments, Humanized Educational Environments, Proactive Philosophies, Availability of Holistic Support. The CECE model, “(1) takes the four main critiques of Tinto’s theory and other traditional perspectives into account, (2) incorporates the actual voices of diverse populations into its explanation of success in college, and (3) offers a theoretical model that can be quantified and tested for its applicability to racially diverse college student populations, examined for its power to explain college success, and (in)validated” (Museus, 2014, pp. 206-207). Museus et al. (2017) used the CECE model to test culturally engaging environments on sense of belonging and found significant results associated with cultural orientations, cultural validation, cultural familiarity, proactive philosophies, and holistic support. Ensuring that students feel culturally accepted with support from peers, faculty, and the institution are important aspects of social belonging and culturally engaging environments.

Soto and Deemer (2018) found that Latino/a students establish communal goals to establish a sense of belonging on campus. The authors stated that “communal goals are consistent with notions of collectivism and familismo because they afford individuals the
opportunity to assume social roles that help to maintain the integrity of the family and/or community unit” (Soto & Deemer 2018, p. 37). The researchers found no significant difference in perceptions of the campus climate among Latino and White students, yet the study did reveal the positive perceptions of the campus climate by Latino students were associated with the significance placed on communal goals and academic satisfaction.

The intersections of race, ethnicity, and immigration status has prompted further investigation into the experiences of undocumented students (Stebleton et al., 2014). Undocumented students are likely to experience aspects of the campus environment differently than U.S. born college students (Stebleton et al., 2014). Muñoz & Vigil (2018) found that undocumented and DACA students experience institutional ignorance, the reproduction of pervasive visibility, and hidden/nonpresent communities of support; however, Stebleton et al. (2014) found that strong peer relations and faculty interactions contributed to stronger sense of belonging for Wave One and Wave Two immigrants. These two studies illustrate that undocumented students also experience negative encounters on campus, but findings ways to support positive peer and faculty interactions for undocumented students could lead to stronger sense of belonging and greater awareness of how to best serve these students attending HSIs.

How students develop relationships and feel valued by the campus community can have positive implications on student success outcomes (Bean & Eaton, 2000; Morrow & Ackermann, 2012; Wolf et al., 2017). Therefore, examining the relationship between sense of belonging and the campus climate can aid in the development of culturally responsive practices that enhance campus environments (Museus et al., 2017). Examining these issues at a Hispanic-Serving Institution can assist campus faculty and staff in developing academic and social programs that will contribute to more positive campus experiences for underrepresented racial groups.
Theoretical Framework

The Multicontextual Model for Diverse Learning Environment (MMDLE) will guide this study (Hurtado et al., 2012). “The MMDLE model posits that various dimensions at the organizational level (including historical legacies, composition of faculty, staff, and students, and organizational structure) and individual level (psychological and behavioral) affect the overall campus climate for diversity” (Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012, p. 20). The MMDLE model builds on an earlier model, the Campus Racial Climate Model (CRC) (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999).

The Campus Racial Climate Model (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999) held the assumption that students are educated in racial contexts that are influenced by external and internal forces. External contexts are influenced by governmental policies and programs as well as sociohistorical forces. The institutional context considers internal forces of racialized contexts. The areas include, “an institution's historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion of various racial/ethnic groups, its structural diversity in terms of numerical representation of various racial/ethnic groups, the psychological climate of perceptions and attitudes between and among groups, and the behavioral climate dimension, characterized by intergroup relations on campus” (Hurtado et al. 1999, p. 281). The Campus Racial Climate Model assumed that the internal and external forces do not work in isolation. Rather, the various domains within each context all work to shape the experiences and outcomes for students, especially students from underrepresented racial backgrounds.

A later revision of the model added a fifth dimension and redefined the structural dimension of diversity. The earlier CRC model defined structural diversity in terms of the demographic representation of students, faculty, and staff. Milem et al. (2005) critiqued the CRC model for not emphasizing aspects of the organization that influence critical processes impacting
policy and process. The new dimension redefined structural diversity to capture aspects of the organizational contexts influencing campus climate and introduced compositional diversity to represent the diversity among the campus community. These processes can include diversity in the curriculum, hiring practices, tenure processes, budget allocation, and organizational decision-making (Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012; Milem et al., 2005).

Taking into consideration the critiques of the initial Campus Climate Racial Model, Hurtado et al (2012) introduced the MMDLE. The model described five contexts that influence the campus climate for diversity and student outcomes (see Figure 1) (Hurtado et al. 2012). The five contexts include the socio-historical context, the larger policy environment, the community context and students’ commitments external to the institution, the institutional context, and the classroom and cocurricular learning environments (Hurtado et al., 2012; Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012).

The government/policy context takes into consideration ways in which federal and state policies shape higher education and campus racial climates, such as federal and state financial aid policies which have historically either created pathways or hindered postsecondary participation for students of color (Hurtado, et al. 2012). The sociohistorical context captures how social movements have directly impacted college campuses by raising awareness about societal inequities and by shifting attitudes. Community contexts and external commitments builds on what Bronfenbrenner (1976, 1977) refers to as the exosystem (Hurtado et al., 2012). Campus community members and the institution have networks within the community influencing the overall climate for diversity and institution. These networks can include, “disciplinary networks, alumni networks, parents, religious affiliations, etc.” (Hurtado et al., 2012, p. 88).
In the earlier Campus Racial Climate model, the student’s racial identity was at the center, as the model assumed that students are educated and interact in racialized context; however, the new model takes into consideration how multiple identities shape the experiences and lives students. The authors asserted that racial identity still remains central to student experiences and the campus climate, but the new model considers the multiplicity and intersections of student identity. These identities do not operate in isolation, thus shaping the holistic student. Beyond racial identity, students’ lives are shaped by the intersections of identities such as, race, sex, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and immigration status.

In addition, faculty and staff are considered essential actors in shaping diverse learning environments and campus climate experiences. The identities of faculty and staff are also central components that shape diverse learning environment, in addition to their role in shaping the
curricular and cocurricular experiences of students. The curricular aspect is influenced by faculty identity, pedagogy and teaching practices, and course content. The cocurricular aspect of the model is shaped by the identities of staff, practices, and programs. These dimensions all interact and shape student experiences and overall climate for diversity.

The climate of diversity encompasses these cocurricular and curricular elements, which are influenced by historical, organizational, compositional, psychological, and behavioral dimensions. The model focuses on three areas of student outcomes, including habits of mind for lifelong learning, competences for a diverse and global world, and retention and achievement (Hurtado, et al. 2012). These outcomes are intended to fulfill social equity, democratic, and economic outcomes.

**Discussion**

The scope of literature on campus climate addresses issues related to compositional diversity, experiences with racial discrimination, climate experiences linked to curricular and cocurricular settings, students’ sense of belonging, and racial attitudes and perceptions. Research demonstrates the positive associations of compositional diversity on increasing interactions among diverse peers (Denson & Chang, 2009; Pike & Kuh, 2007). Institutions with increased compositional diversity were more likely to offer diversity-related activities (Densen & Change, 2008). Diversity-related activities within the classroom were more likely to occur in classrooms with African American/Black, Latino/a, and American Indian/Alaskan Native faculty (Hurtado, 2001; Umbach, 2006). In addition, several studies analyzed how experiences with campus climate impact educational and social outcomes for students of color (Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Reason & Rankin, 2005). Racial microaggressions experienced in and out of the classroom can threaten a student’s sense of belonging. Research has yet to thoroughly investigate these issues in
an HSI setting, although there are a few studies that have recently emerged on the topic (Banda et al., 2017; Bonner II et al., 2015).

Moreover, Lascher and Offenstein (2012) distinguished two themes that emerged from campus climate literature. They found campus climate is a multifaceted phenomenon that is experienced at the institutional level and individual level. The authors argue that researchers should attempt to understand campus climate at the institutional level since campus climate literature primarily focuses on individual experiences that capture the behavioral and psychological aspects of climate (Hurtado et al., 1999). Lascher and Offenstein (2012) also cautioned researchers to avoid mistaking institutional and individual differences in perceptions about campus climate when interpreting data. Interpreting findings should be done carefully because “differences in perceived racial climate observed among groups of students could stem from differences among schools” (p. 269).

The extensive literature delivered valuable insight as to what institutions might encounter on respective campuses and include implications for policies that promote diversity and supportive climates. However, it is clear that there is lack of campus climate research on the experiences of students attending Hispanic-Serving Institutions. The expansion of HSIs in the United States presents an opportunity for researchers to closely examine the experiences of students in and outside of the classroom and their expectations of diversity given the HSI designation.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized qualitative case study research design in an attempt to capture the Latinx student perceptions of the campus climate for diversity at University of Houston. This chapter provides an explanation of the research design, an overview of the research setting, criteria for participant selection, and data collection and analysis procedures.

**Research Design**

**Qualitative Research**

The goal of qualitative research is to understand social phenomenon within the natural setting (Creswell 2014). Yilmaz (2014) defined qualitative research as “an emergent, inductive, interpretive and naturalistic approach to the study of people, cases, phenomena, social situations, and processes in their natural settings in order to reveal in descriptive terms the meanings that people attach to their experiences of the world” (p. 312). Furthermore, “qualitative studies are concerned with process, context, interpretation, meaning, or understanding through inductive reasoning” (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 313). Although Yilmaz (2013) stated that qualitative research uses inductive approaches, some scholars note that this inquiry process can use both deductive and inductive reasoning (Creswell, 2014; Onwuegbuzie & Leech 2005).

Examples of qualitative methodological approaches include historical analysis, content analysis, case study, discourse analysis, phenomenology, grounded theory, and ethnography. The methodology selected by the research is shaped by the research question, the role of the researcher, and the philosophical underpinnings. Researchers select the most appropriate methodology to answer questions and should present a thorough argument explaining the methodology of choice (Creswell, 2014; Jackson, 2013).
The researcher's role is especially important in qualitative research. In qualitative research, the researcher acts as the instrument and collects data in the natural settings. The role of the researcher invites reflexivity in which “inquirers explicitly identify reflexively their biases, values, and personal background, such as gender, history, culture, and socioeconomic status (SES) that shape their interpretations formed during the study” (Creswell, 2014, p. 187). As related to the case study methodological approach, Stake (1995) addressed the role of the researcher, which determines how research design, analysis, and interpretation are approached. For example, the role of the researcher as a teacher implies that “the intention of research is to inform, to sophisticate, to assist the increase on competence and maturity, to socialize, and to liberate” (p. 91-92). Whereas, the interpreter “has recognized a problem, a puzzlement, and studies it, hoping to connect it better with the known things” (Stake, 1995, p. 97).

**Epistemological Stance**

Acknowledging the philosophical underpinnings that guide inquiry and research practice is fundamental to the research process (Carter & Little, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Yilmaz, 2013). Philosophical underpinnings are rooted in epistemological, ontological, and axiological assumptions that are foundational to the pursuit of knowledge in research. A particular stance on these areas leads the investigator to the appropriate methodology for addressing research problems and influences the nature and positionality of researcher in the study (Carter & Little, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Cater and Little (2007) asserted that “decisions about epistemology matter because they will influence choice of methodology, as some epistemologies and methodologies are incommensurable, and different variants of individual methodologies are linked to specific epistemic positions, mostly via those methodologies’ theoretical and disciplinary roots” (p.
A necessary process for any researcher is to “locate” research within a particular research paradigm (Ponterotto, 2005). Accordingly, to “locate” research within a paradigm aids researchers in understanding the purpose and goals of a study, identifying questions and strategies for analysis, and the processes that lead to findings and conclusions (Jackson, 2013; Ponterotto, 2005). Furthermore, it positions the researcher to think deeply about the ways in which truth, reality, and values are understood and interpreted in research practice. Given my understanding of the process of inquiry, my research will be grounded in epistemological, axiological, and ontological perspectives rooted in the constructivist tradition.

The constructivist perspective posits that reality is subjective and understood and constructed differently by individuals (Scotland, 2012). In this instance, the researcher acts as the instrument through interactions and observations, sifting through interview transcripts, field notes, and artifacts to obtain knowledge about a particular phenomenon in a specific context and time (Creswell, 2014; Scotland, 2012). Thus, the position on objectivity and subjectivity of knowledge will determine how researchers investigate phenomenon and influence their stance on generalizability. Interpretive researchers also recognize and acknowledge how their personal background shape their interpretations of what is being researched. Creswell (2014) asserted that “they position themselves in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their personal, cultural, and historical experiences” (p.8). Because of the value-bond nature of interpretive research, it is common for interpretivists to discuss their axiological position in the research study. By using a qualitative approach grounded in constructivism, I will gain a clearer understanding of how aspects of the campus environment and climate shape student experiences.
Case Study Approach

This study used a single instrumental case study approach to understand the perceptions of the campus climate for diversity of Latinx students attending an HSI. A case study design was appropriate for honing in on this particular context to understand the issue through an in-depth analysis of multiple sources and close attention to details of the case. According to Stake (1995), “in qualitative case study research, we seek greater understanding of the case. We want to appreciate the complexity and uniqueness of the case, its embeddedness and interaction with its contexts” (p. 4). Meriam (1988) asserted that qualitative case study design is a useful approach for understanding “critical problems of practice and extending the knowledge base of various aspects of education” (p. xiii). Yin (2017) described case studies as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13).

Each approach is guided by philosophical assumptions and processes for data collection. Whereas Yin’s (2003) approach to a case study operates from a postpositivist paradigm, Stake’s (1995) approach aligns with the constructivist paradigm (Boblin et. al, 2013). Yin (2003) is concerned with construct, validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability, which are often associated with the positivist and postpositivist traditions; however, Stakian case studies are rooted in constructivist traditions in which the researcher gathers and interprets socially constructed reality and knowledge.

The type of case study selected as the basis for inquiry is dependent on a number of factors. For instance, Stake identified two single case study approaches: instrumental case studies and intrinsic case studies. The primary difference among intrinsic and instrumental case is the greater emphasis on either the case or the issue. “For intrinsic case study, case is dominant; the
case is of highest importance. For instrumental case study, issue is dominant; we start and end with issues dominant” (Stake, 1995, p. 16). Essentially, intrinsic cases are concerned with the particular case being examined, whereas instrumental cases are concerned with a particular issue. The bounded nature of a case study is critically important for this methodological approach. Baxter and Jack (2008) argued that “binding the case will ensure that your study remains reasonable in scope” (pp. 546-547). This study is bounded by the particular institutional context of the HSI used for data collection. In addition, the scope of the context and time period was considered in the case study.

There are several critiques of case study research. Case study research generates substantial amounts of data that requires analysis and interpretation. Triangulating all data sources can prove to be cumbersome and time consuming (Yin, 2017). In addition, some argue that case study research is limited in its generalizability. Due to the small sample size and bounded nature of a case study, the findings are not easily generalizable. Stake (1995) argued, “Case study research is not sampling research. We do not study a case primarily to understand other cases” (p. 4). Yin (2017) posed the following question “How can you generalize from a single experiment?” to emphasize that generalizing findings can be a challenge across all research designs, (p. 8). The case study design may limit how the findings are broadly applied, however, with special consideration of the case setting and participants, similar cases can learn from the study (Stake, 1995).

Setting

According to Creswell (2014), data collection involves identifying “purposefully selected sites or individuals” in a research study. The University of Houston, located in Houston, Texas, was purposefully selected as the site for this study because of its designation as an HSI. UH is a
four-year public Hispanic-Serving Institution in one of the most racially and ethnically diverse cities in the United States. The university was established in 1927 and has a mission “to offer nationally competitive and internationally recognized opportunities for learning, discovery and engagement to a diverse population of students in a real-world setting” (University of Houston [UH], 2020c). The goals of the university focus on national competitiveness, student success, community advancement, athletic competitiveness, local and national recognition, and competitive resources.

UH is a recognized R1 – highest research activity – institution, Carnegie’s top classification. The university consists of 15 academic colleges and an Honors College, offering bachelors, doctoral, certificate programs, distance, and continuing education programs. There are a total of 108 undergraduate majors and minors, 104 Master’s degree program, and 46 doctoral degree programs. All students are required to complete the state-mandated Texas Common Core., a 42-semester credit hour curriculum. Students have the option of selecting among a list of approved core courses including Latinx-based courses, such as Latin American History Through Film, Environment in Latin America, United States Hispanic Culture and Civilization, and Introduction in Latino Cultural Studies.

The university provides many services that support and offer resources to students. For instance, the Undergraduate Student Success Center and the Center for Diversity & Inclusion are among the over 40 centers at UH’s campus. In addition, over 400 registered student organizations are available for students including several Latinx-based organizations. Some of the Hispanic and Latinx based organizations include Hispanic Business Association, Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, Association of Latinx/Hispanic Advocates and Allies, and Society of Afro Latino Students in America. The university also has support and development
opportunities for faculty. The Latino Faculty Council is an organization available to faculty from a variety of disciplines. The council “consists of Latino faculty who are engaged in advocating the interests of the Latino Community on campus.”

**Student and Faculty Diversity**

UH has a diverse student population with over 46,000 students and 2,700 faculty. A large percentage of students enrolled at UH are from regional counties, and the top three counties include Harris County, Fort Bend, and Brazoria County. In Fall 2019, students from Harris County alone accounted for 53.6% of enrollment and an additional 25.9% of students are from adjacent counties (UH, 2020e). Thus, the university has a high concentration of commuter who actively travel to campus for all classes and campus activities.

In 2012, the University of Houston was officially recognized as a Hispanic-Serving Institution after meeting 25% Hispanic student enrollment. Since, UH has surpassed the 25% of Hispanic enrollment. In the fall of 2012, the university reported a total of 10,133 students. Whereas, in the fall of 2019, the number of Hispanic student enrollment totaled 14,963 (32.4%) of the 46,148 students enrolled (see Table 2) (UH, 2020e). While Latinx students represent the largest percentage of students enrolled at UH, Latinx faculty make up 8.3% of ranked faculty (see Table 3). In comparison, White faculty make up the majority of ranked faculty at 58.2% (UH, 2020e).
Table 2. Student Distribution by Race and Gender in Fall 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity/Race</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>2,600</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>1,962</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>4,562</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>4,840</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>4,902</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>9,742</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaiian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>7,955</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>7,008</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>14,963</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>1,492</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>1,972</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>3,464</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>701</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>665</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1,366</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>554</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1,024</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>5,268</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>5,656</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>10,924</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>23,465</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>22,683</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>46,148</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: University of Houston Statistical Handbook*

Table 3. Ranked Faculty by Race and Gender in Fall 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity/Race</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>55.3</td>
<td>423</td>
<td>59.7</td>
<td>627</td>
<td>58.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>369</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>709</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>1078</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: University of Houston Statistical Handbook*

**Recruitment and Selection of Participants**

I recruited a total of eight Latinx students to participate in semi-structured interviews using purposeful sampling to identify participants for this study (Creswell, 2014; Palinkas et al.,
Purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research, and criterion-i and snowball sampling are popular purposeful sampling approaches (Palinkas et al., 2015). First, I used criterion-i sampling to recruit students between the months of September 2019 and December 2019. The purpose of criterion-i sampling is “to identify and select all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance” (Palinkas et al., 2015, p. 535). Students had to meet the following criteria to participate in the study: (1) full-time undergraduate student attending the University of Houston; (2) completed at least two full academic terms at the University of Houston; and (3) identifies as Hispanic/Latinx.

Recruiting participants for this study involved intentional outreach to UH academic departments, faculty, student service departments, and student organizations. I utilized the UH website as a starting point to seek out contact information for different departments and organizations. Examples of departments and organization contacted include the Center for Diversity & Inclusion, Center for Student Involvement, Honors College, and several Latinx-based student organizations. Faculty from the Latino Faculty Council also assisted in sharing information about the study. Initial contact to each to students included an email describing the purpose of the study, the criteria for participation, the $10 incentive for participation, and a link to a brief survey to collect background information (See Appendix B). By completing the survey, prospective participants confirmed their interest in the study and answered background questions, which helped determine eligibility for participation (see Appendix C).

In addition to criterion-i sampling, snowball sampling was used to identify additional students for the study. The purpose of snowball sampling is “to identify cases of interest from sampling people who know people that generally have similar characteristics who, in turn know people, also with similar characteristics” (Palinkas et al., 2015, p. 13). I asked eligible
participants to share information about the study to peers who met the criteria to assist with identifying additional participants.

**Data Collection**

Case study research involves multiple forms of data collection to strengthen findings (Stake 1995; Yin, 2017). Sources of data for this study included a background survey completed by each participant, interview transcripts, documents, and an observation. Data collection began following approval from the LSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix A). First, students completed a background survey prior to each interview. The survey collection information on demographics, educational background that was used to generate participants profiles (see Appendix C). The second source of data included transcripts from semi-structured interviews completed with each student. Eligible students received a follow-up email to schedule a time for an interview. Prior to the interviews, each student reviewed and signed a Participant Consent form that was approved by the LSU Institutional Review Board (see Appendix D). The Participant Consent form detailed the purpose of the interview and ethical considerations of the study, such as participant anonymity and the right to withdrawal from the study at any time. The consent form also informed participants that their files are personal are kept confidential and safely secured in password-protected folders.

Although in-person interviews were an option, the interviews took place via video chat platforms (i.e. FaceTime and Google Hangout). Students were unavailable for in-person interviews due to scheduling conflicts. An interview protocol was used to guide the semi-structured interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018) (see Appendix E). The interview questions were purposefully designed to understand their experiences in curricular and cocurricular experiences. I asked permission to record all interviews using an audio recorder. I also took notes during each
interview to outline details of the interview and to capture reflexive notes. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes, and all audio recordings were uploaded and safely stored in a password-protected folder.

I also examined university documents and online university resources to understand diversity and inclusion initiatives taking place on campus. These data sources illustrate measures taken by the university to advance diversity and student success for Latinx students. University documents provided an historical overview of diversity at the University of Houston. I utilized the university website to find documents and locate institutional resources.

Lastly, I referenced data collected during an observation at the University of Houston in September 2019. The observation took place in September 2019. This observation gave me an opportunity to examine the environment in which the students learn, interact with others, attend activities, and essentially, spend a significant amount of time on weekly basis. I visited the different areas of the campus, such as the University Welcome Center, and Student Center North, Student Center South. I also attended an admissions presentation for prospective students and collected documents given to all prospective students attending the session. Field notes and reflective memos were recorded during the observation to capture details of the visit. Field notes included detailed accounts that occurred within the setting. The field notes described the physical setting, activities, interactions between individuals, non-verbal communication, and observed behaviors. and I recorded reflective notes to capture questions and reactions that surfaced during the observation.

**Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Transcribed interview data, documents, and observation notes were analyzed extensively during the data analysis phase. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), data analysis
emphasizes reflexive and systemic practices. Data interpreted in a systemic process incorporates
the use of margin notes to expound upon field notes and reflective memos capture the
researcher’s thoughts and observations, noting patterns and themes, and contrasting and
comparing notes. Categorical aggregation and direct interpretation are data analysis techniques in
instrumental case study research (Stake, 1995). “Each researcher needs, through experience and
reflection, to find the forms of analysis that work for him or her” (Stake, 1995, p. 77).

The data analysis of interview transcripts occurred in several phases. First, all eight
interviews were coded using an online transcription service. I manually reviewed and edited each
interview for accuracy, and all participants received a copy of their interview via email to review
the final transcript for accuracy and for the purpose of member checking. Member checking
provides the participants with a sense of security in knowing the positive intentions of the
research in delivering findings consistent with the research questions and overall study (Stake,
1995; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Next, each transcript was uploaded to the qualitative analysis software, Atlas.ti. Atlas.ti is
a data analysis tool that can be used for coding, documenting memos, and creating concept maps
to illustrate relationship among codes and themes. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), “data
analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data for analysis; then
reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing codes; and finally
representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion” (p. 183).

After uploading all transcripts to Atlas.ti, the transcripts were coded and analyzed using
open coding and axial coding techniques. The first level of analysis used an open coding, or
initial coding, approach. After the initial reading of the transcripts, I began to assign labels or
codes to different segments of the data (Saldaña, 2015). I created a codebook to list all the codes
generated in the initial coding stage. The codebook included the name of the code, the
description of the code, and an overview of when to apply the code (Saldaña, 2015).

The codes were constantly refined in subsequent reviews of each transcripts through the
comparison of data and patterns. I then applied code mapping strategies to start organizing the
codes into categories and subcategories using the code groups in Atlas.ti. Next, I reanalyzed the
data using axial coding techniques and the categories during the code mapping process were
analyzed and refined further. During this process, I began to reduce the number of codes and
relabel categories into “conceptual categories” (Saldaña, 2015). I referenced the classification
schemes to develop an initial set of themes (Saldaña, 2015). Those themes were then reviewed
and reorganized to generate the final five themes with consideration of all data sources.
Establishing credibility in this study involved triangulation of data sources to check for
consistency of the analysis from interviewees, documents, and observations (Stake, 1995).
Triangulation of all data sources ensured a thorough analysis of the data.

**Research Position**

The years that I have spent working in higher education have prompted my interest in
campus diversity, campus climate, and student success. The desire to investigate these areas is
rooted in my belief that experiences with diversity and campus climate impact student success
outcomes. In addition, my identity as a woman of color of Puerto Rican and Dominican heritage
has shaped my own experiences and understanding of diversity. Since working in student affairs
and diversity-related functional areas within higher education, I have developed an even stronger
awareness of my identities and how they shape my worldviews. Understanding the saliency of
identity among students that I work with remains an important aspect of my work in higher
education.
Furthermore, attending a PWI that was designated as an HSI in my final years at the university exposed me to the purpose of HSIs. As a former student senator at the time, I participated in activities and student legislation that promoted the HSI designation. In hindsight, my understanding of the purpose of the HSI designation on a broader scale was very limited. The importance of compositional diversity in advancing educational outcomes is one avenue for supporting racial minorities; however, my own experiences with bias and discrimination at a racially diverse institution and increased understanding of campus climate experiences of racially diverse students drives my interest in understanding how other students experience climate at HSIs.

As a researcher, my goal is to understand the lived experiences of individuals and understand how their environments and interactions with others shape their experiences within the context of higher education. Qualitative methods provide a richer understanding to the lived experiences of the participants within the research study and a deeper understanding of the critical moments that influence their individual perspectives. Moreover, as a researcher with a strong connection to issues being investigated in the study, I had to examine my own subjectivity throughout the study in an attempt to capture my reflective experiences while not inserting my own experiences in ways that take away from the experiences expressed by the participants in the study.

**Conclusion**

The findings of this case may be of interest to internal and external stakeholders, such as university administrators, faculty, staff, university leadership, and policymakers with an interest in campus diversity and student success. This study contributes to a greater understanding of campus climate at HSIs. Institutions with similar characteristics may find this study to be
particularly useful for approaching diversity-related initiatives and student success strategies for Latinx students.
CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate how Latinx students perceive the campus climate at the University of Houston. Specifically, the study explored elements of the climate for diversity, as related to the Multicontextual Model for Diverse Learning Environments (Hurtado et al., 2012), including classroom experiences, cocurricular experiences, and relationships with faculty, staff, and peers. Students were asked various questions about their perceptions related to these aspects of the campus, in addition to questions that draw on aspects that influence the climate for diversity. These aspects include historical, organizational, compositional, psychological, and behavioral dimensions of the climate of diversity.

In addition to understanding student perceptions of the campus climate, another goal of this study was to delve into the University of Houston’s designation as a Hispanic-Serving Institution and the students’ understanding of this status. Interview questions explored students’ knowledge and awareness of the HSI designation, in addition to Latinx student expectations for institutional diversity and inclusion efforts and support for Latinx students given the university’s HSI status.

This chapter includes a discussion on major findings that emerged following an analysis of eight interviews with Latinx students. The findings answer the following research questions:

1. How do Latinx students describe the campus climate of a four-year public Hispanic-Serving Institution within curricular and cocurricular settings?
2. What understanding do Latinx students have of the institution’s Hispanic-Serving Institution designation, and how does their understanding influence their expectations of institutional diversity and inclusion?
Participant Profiles

A total of eight Latinx students participated in semi-structured interviews for this study (see Table 4). Each student completed a brief survey prior to participating in an interview. The survey collected information about demographic characteristics and college-related experiences, such as academic major, first-generation college student status, transfer status, and commuter status. The names of each participant were replaced with pseudonyms to protect their identities. Students were given the option to select their own pseudonyms for this study or were assigned pseudonyms if they did not have a preference. A brief description of each participant is included below.
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<th>Name</th>
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<th>Hometown</th>
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<td>Senior</td>
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<td>Senior</td>
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<td>Junior</td>
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<td>Human Resource Development</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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Blast

Blast is a junior and first-generation college student studying Construction Management. His family is of Salvadoran heritage. Originally from New York, his family moved to Houston, Texas after 9/11. Blast was motivated to attend college by his passion for sports and the hopes of obtaining an athletic scholarship to play soccer. The scholarship offers did not meet his expectations, so he decided to attend the University of Houston, which was more affordable, had good academic programs, and a was good market for prospective opportunities. Additionally, the proximity to his family was a driving factor to attending the University of Houston. Like many students at UH, Blast commutes to campus to attend classes and to participate in campus activities.

Fred

Fred is a senior and first-generation college student studying Human Resource Development at the University of Houston after transferring from a nearby community college. Fred is a Baytown, Texas native who comes from a Mexican-American background. He has close ties with his family, which consists of his father, mother, two brothers, and a sister. His decision to attend the University of Houston was primarily due to proximity to home because of his close relationship with his family. He described having “pride of being close to them.” As a first-generation college student, he did not have a preference in his college-choice decision but was drawn to the City of Houston: a large city to explore and one that offers different opportunities for growth. Fred has never lived on campus and commutes to campus.
Gloria

Gloria is a senior studying Political Science at the University of Houston. She was raised in Brownsville, Texas and comes from a Mexican-American background. She was a high-achieving student in high school and had her goals set on leaving Brownsville to attend college. Although her mother attended college, much of her motivation to attend the University of Houston was influenced by her sophomore English teacher. As a high-achieving student, she was admitted into the university’s program for future law students although she has since decided not to attend law school. She has been exposed to many opportunities as a student in the Honors College and is a recognized Mellon Scholar and Fulbright Scholar. Since starting at the university, Gloria has lived on-campus.

Jacob

Jacob is a senior studying Supply Chain and Logistics Technology at the University of Houston. Jacob is a first-generation college student from Houston, Texas. Jacob is a Latino whose mother is from Mexico and whose dad is from El Salvador. He considered attending an out-of-state college, but the University of Houston was a more affordable option and closer to home. The growing reputation of the university was appealing to Jacob, in addition to the institution’s ranking as the second most diverse college campus in the United States. The diversity of the university was similar to his experience in high school, which also reflected a lot of racial and ethnic diversity. Jacob lives on-campus and serves as a Resident Advisor in a residence hall.

Lizzette

Lizzette is a sophomore and first-generation college student from Sharpstown, Texas who is studying English. Her parents immigrated to the United States from El Salvador because
guerilla warfare occurring in the country. Lizzette was a high-achieving student in elementary and middle school and eventually attended a high school that allowed her to complete her Associates of Arts degree from Houston Community College while earning her high school diploma. Lizzette grew up with three older brothers, one of which graduated from college. Although her brother graduated from college, she mainly learned about the college process through the guidance of her high school due to the large age gap between her and her brother. She considered herself “privileged or at least blessed” for the opportunity to have a better education. Lizzette is a commuter student who has never lived on campus.

**Pablo**

Pablo is a sophomore and first-generation college student studying Public Relations. Pablo is a Mexican-American from a small town in east Texas known as Center, Texas. Although Pablo has a strong tie to his family, he decided to attend the University of Houston to move away from his rural town and intentionally sought out a major city to pursue his college degree. As a huge sports fanatic, he was also drawn to the City of Houston for its major sports team. In addition, the academic programs offered at the University of Houston influenced him to attend the university. He currently lives off campus but has previously lived on campus.

**Tony**

Tony is a junior studying Sports Administration at the University of Houston. Tony is a first-generation college student who comes from a low-income background. He grew up in the inner-city of Houston, Texas after moving from El Paso when he was younger. He decided to attend the University of Houston because of the proximity to home and commitment to supporting his family. He also felt that the City of Houston has a lot to offer in terms of job opportunities and that the university “puts people in positions to succeed.” He was also inspired
to attend the University of Houston because one of his mentors attended the university while he was a member of an outreach program for low-income, inner-city, students of color during high school. He aspires to go to law school after completing his bachelor's degree. Tony has previously lived on campus in a residence hall but now lives off-campus.

**Victoria**

Victoria is a senior and first-generation college student studying Human Resource Development at the University of Houston. Victoria was born in Mexico and moved to Houston, Texas when she was a toddler and has lived in Houston ever since. She currently lives with her parents and two siblings while she attends college. Prior to attending the University of Houston, Victoria attended a local community college. She initially planned on majoring in pre-med and the City of Houston was a perfect location due to the large medical centers, which influenced her decision to attend the University of Houston. Her decision to attend the University of Houston was also rooted in the proximity to her family and comfort knowing her parents were close by. Victoria is a commuter student who has never lived on campus.

**Findings**

A total of eight students participated in semi-structured interviews for this study. Each interview was transcribed using an online transcription service and then manually reviewed and edited for accuracy. Transcripts were uploaded to a qualitative analysis computer software program, Atlas.ti, and then analyzed using two levels of analysis, including open coding and axial coding techniques. Transcripts were coded manually during the first level of analysis using an open coding approach. Opening coding or initial coding techniques involve reading through the data multiple times to assign labels to segments of the data (Saldaña, 2015). Descriptions were created for each label or code using a codebook, and memos aided in identifying
descriptions. Codes were constantly refined in subsequent reviews of each transcripts through the comparison of data and patterns.

Following the first cycle of analysis, code mapping strategies were used to organize codes into categories and sub-categories based on patterns (Saldaña, 2015). Codes were placed into “code groups” color-coded and defined using Atlas.ti. Next, the data and codes were reanalyzed using axial coding techniques. The groups that were created during the code mapping process were analyzed further. According to Saldana (2015), “grouping similar coded data reduces the number of initial codes you developed while sorting and relabeling them into conceptual categories” (p. 245). The author also stated that the one of the goals of axial coding is to “achieve saturation” (Saldaña, 2015, p. 248).

The last phase of analyzing the data concentrated on further analysis of relationships between codes and categories. The analysis of relationships between codes and categories aided in identifying five major themes that emerged from the data. These themes included:

1. The Good and the Bad: Perceptions of the Campus Climate, Diversity, and Inclusion
2. Saliency of Identities Shape College Experience
3. Interpersonal Relationships Help Students Build Community
4. Classroom Diversity Shapes Learning Experiences
5. Awareness of HSI Designation and Supporting Latinx Students

The following section includes a discussion of the five themes that emerged from the data and concluded with a summary of the findings.

**Theme 1: The Good and the Bad: Perceptions of the Campus Climate, Diversity, and Inclusion**

The first theme that emerged from interviews focuses on student perceptions of the campus climate at the University of Houston (UH). This finding revealed both positive and
negative perceptions about the campus climate. While the students expressed that their overall experience at UH was generally positive, some of the students described areas of the campus climate that merit attention, including institutional efforts related to diversity and inclusion. In addition, while a majority of the students in the study described never experiencing incidents of discrimination, there were some discussions of exclusionary experiences by students. This section discusses sub-themes related to this finding, including a) overall welcoming environment and positive experience; b) institutional diversity and inclusion and; b) experiences with discrimination and hostility.

**Overall Welcoming Environment and Positive Experience**

The students in the study expressed that their experience at the University of Houston was overall positive. The students shared a strong sense of pride in their experiences at UH and confidence in their decisions to pursue their degrees at the university. Pablo shared, “It's been amazing. It's probably the best thing of my life. Best decision in my life.” Similarly, Tony said, “It's been amazing. I've had the time of my life. I love the little I'm involved in.” He also shared that “University of Houston, they do a great job of making sure they're trying to meet their students' needs.” Jacob was another student who highlighted that his experience has been “extremely positive” and that he did not “have a lot of negative things to say about the University of Houston.”

Two of the students referenced the opportunities available at the university because of the top tier status. Gloria stated, “I've had like a lot of opportunities open up because the university is big, and it’s a Tier One Research Institution.” Throughout the interview, Gloria discussed opportunities for conducting research with her faculty as a positive experience. Similarly, Pablo said, “[The] opportunities I can reach as being a student from the University of Houston. You
know, I can go out into the field and [someone say], oh he went to UH. We’re steadily getting recognition as a top tier university in the nation.” The growing reputation of the university and potential opportunities for networking as a student and career potential post-graduation resonated with several students.

The students also referenced their appreciation for the compositional diversity of the student body. Jacob noted aspects of the campus environment that made him feel culturally connected. He said, “you know, walking down, walking to campus and I see someone selling horchata or selling tacos and be like, ‘Hey, that's live like give me some!’” He also explained that, “just being such a diverse university has helped with the social needs as you know, just find those people that you connect with is extremely beneficial.” Victoria also referenced her appreciation for the campus diversity when noting her positive experiences on campus. She felt as though the campus is welcoming of all nationalities. She stated, “I love it. Honestly. I don't think I would [have] enjoyed so much. Even if I went to another university, I loved how diverse UH is, especially because I find people under my same culture but also different cultures. And you just see all that around.” Blast also shared similar sentiments when he stated, “there are very nice people here at UH, very friendly people, and then it is very culturally diverse.” He also shared that that he feels “well-respected” and that UH “takes us into consideration”.

Pablo emphasized physical aspects of the campus that help make it a welcoming campus. He stated:

Um, the modern, like the modern look of the campus. When I, when I went on a couple of tours of other campuses, there was something about UH that just like attracted me to, you know, it's undergoing a lot of modernization…You go around and you get to see a lot of things. One minute you're walking, you're seeing like beautiful greenery and fountain, and the next minute you're seeing a glass structure. I dunno, it's just a beautiful campus and I really liked it.
Pablo also highlighted the institution’s investment in new technologies that enhanced his experience on campus. The appeal of the physical campus environment was one of the factors that influenced his decision to attend the university. In addition to his appreciation for the physical campus environment, his positive experiences are rooted in his individual growth. He shared that, “I've emotionally matured. And then I've also, just gotten better, you know, physically and more.

Institutional Diversity and Inclusion

As a university that serves a majority of traditionally underserved racial groups, efforts to support and enhance campus diversity and inclusion at UH was important for the students. The opinions about the university’s efforts related to diversity and inclusion varied based per student, but most of the students agreed that the institution placed a strong emphasis on diversity. The students were asked to describe these efforts at UH and provide their opinions on the effectiveness of these efforts. Pablo shared that he believes that the university takes diversity and inclusion “very serious.” Blast described the efforts as “satisfactory to very competent” while Fred described them as “average.” Victoria said that UH “really pushed for that diversity.” Jacob mentioned that he feels like he has never felt excluded, but the university also does not do much. He expressed that he felt that most efforts are actually led by student organizations and not the university.

Gloria highlighted that the university is “outwardly” doing a good job and pushes for diversity and inclusion, including workshops that allow students to present for diverse perspectives. However, she also stated that, “I feel like the efforts are there, but they're definitely not anything to be super proud of. I also feel like there's still a kind of a long ways to go with certain things.” She also shared that when it comes to diversity and funding there is a hierarchy that prioritizes STEM. She said:
I feel like sometimes [it is] for a show, and there's definitely a hierarchy to it. So like STEM always takes priority over humanities studies. Even when there's a committee about inclusion of different students in different fields. It’s always like everything kind of goes to STEM and then it trickles down to whatever's left to humanities.

Fred voiced that he would like to see more initiatives in place for Latinx students. He conveyed this by saying, “They actually do have a ton of newsletters where they're trying to promote more diversity but not necessarily Latinx/Hispanic, but more along the greater confines of diversity like LGBTQ and other diverse groups.” By focusing on other underserved groups, it is clear that UH is making an effort to support students from various backgrounds; however, Fred would like to see more of these efforts for the Latinx student community.

**College Diversity Ranking.** The compositional diversity of UH was an appealing factor for many of the students. They appreciated that the university has a large percentage of students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Many of the students mentioned the institution’s ranking as the second most diverse institution in the United States. The ranking is something that the university regularly publicizes. For some of the students, the need to move beyond the diversity ranking was important, and they would like for there to be a stronger focus on inclusivity.

As an orientation leader, Pablo was very familiar with the university’s push for diversity. He explained:

It's one of the biggest things that they push, especially when they were training us as orientation leaders. They know that in their heads that we're the second most diverse university in the nation. I don't know [if] that's still up to date. but I'm pretty sure it is. But yeah, it's something they drilled in our heads and something that we drill in the heads of thousands of students that came in.

Lizzette also discussed how the university pushes the diversity ranking. She shared that the institution “boasts” about being the “number two most diverse school in the nation. She
believes that the university “actually keeps track of the ethnicities because they want to stay as like one of the most diverse universities in the nation.”

Two students mentioned that the while the university promotes the university diversity, more can be done to ensure the inclusivity of the campus. For instance, Gloria said, “I just kind of feel the institution itself fails its students, especially by touting that it's like the second most diverse university in the United States.” She continued, “So I feel like there are efforts, but I don't think that it's enough, especially if it's Houston and you pride yourself on being the second most diverse university in the United States.”

Fred shared similar sentiments with Gloria about how the university promotes diversity. He stated, “I think one thing is to be diverse, but if, if you don't feel a part of the university as a whole, then, then it just feels like you're just being used as the metric and that, Oh, you know, you're diverse, we're going to have you here and it makes us look, look better in the eyes of those that grant us funds.”

Jacob expressed that the university is known for its diversity ranking, but many of the efforts are executed by students rather than the institution itself. He shared, “It is the second most diverse university, so I feel like they just let their peers do it. They just let their students do it cause I don't need anything.” He also said “The University of Houston does great in stating that their the second most diverse university in the nation, but they don't really show it. You know, they don't show that.” He passionately stated, “You, you claim this name so much, you claim this title, but like there's nothing to show for it. You have a whole bunch of organizations doing pretty much what they're supposed to be doing.”

**Importance of Inclusion.** The students referenced that the university has already emphasized its focus on diversity by actively sharing the institution’s ranking as the second most
diverse college in the United States. While the students appreciate the compositional diversity of the student body, they emphasized that there is a greater need to focus on inclusion. The students expressed the importance of highlight inclusion versus diversity was an important as an HSI and institution that serves Latinx students from multiple ethnic backgrounds.

When discussing better ways to serve students, Lizzette said, “The most important is the university working on inclusion because they've already established that their diverse. They already gained a Hispanic-Serving Institution title.” She also shared, “In terms of inclusion, I feel like there can be more. Instead of just being like, ‘Hey, we have a lot of resources,’ actually trying to like remind them and saying, this isn't just if you're falling behind or if you feel like an outcast, like these are resources for everyone. You don't have to feel like left out.”

Students expressed that concentrating efforts on inclusion is an area of need, but there is also an importance on increasing inclusion efforts among the Latinx community. Gloria discussed a need to increase course offerings for Latinx students. She agreed that there is a strong Mexican American Studies program, but there are limited course offerings. She discussed that she has exhausted all of the course offerings and that there should be more available, which means that the university should also financially invest in the program. In addition, the available courses should also cater to students who are not Mexican or Mexican-American. She stated, “I don't always think that they have the most…they're still very limited array of classes, which is something that I've heard from my friend who's Salvadorian.” She also expressed:

And it's also with my political science courses. Like you have these broad Latin American politics or Eastern Europe politics, but you just kind of have these broad umbrella ones. It’s not quite enough for somebody for like a school that has so many like international students too.

Gloria expects that the university do more to “broaden the horizon” for students.
For Pablo, inclusion was an important aspect of sense of belonging and feeling included. He noted the importance of the university also focusing on students who are not from Mexican descent and celebrating “Hispanics as a whole.” He emphasized:

If I weren’t Mexican descent, if I were someone else descent, and I didn't feel like I was being included, I would feel alienated. I wouldn't feel like my voice didn't matter. So I think inclusion is what matters most to me just because with inclusion that I could feel like I'm a part of something and I'm doing something.

Meeting the needs of all students is recognizing the diversity within the Latinx culture on campus and the various nationalities that are included within that student population. This is one of the reasons why Pablo created his student organization; to invite all Latinx students to join together to celebrate their diverse backgrounds and so they could feel more included on campus. He elaborated on the importance of including all Latinx students who are not of Mexican American descent:

I guess just celebrate, you know, more celebration of events within our different nationalities. Cause we don't...though I am of Mexican American descent, I do know people were often upset that their culture isn't as celebrated. They feel left out. But you know, we get all the recognition, but they don't. And they believe their culture is just as beautiful as ours and they don't get much recognition. So, I guess my expectation for that would be to recognize them, those other cultures as well.

Fred also referenced inclusion as an important aspect of his experience and wanting the university to push for more inclusion, primarily as it pertains to events that “promote that inclusivity” for Latinx and Hispanic students. He stated, “I think that there needs to be more visibility and more events that celebrate the Hispanic or Latinx heritage in order for there to be a greater sense of inclusivity.” He also shared, “And that's what I hope that they start putting more efforts into making people want to be involved and included in the University of Houston.” This was particularly important for Fred as a transfer student who initially felt disconnected until he got involved in a student organization.
Victoria also highlighted the importance of inclusion when discussing important aspects of the campus, “it would definitely be the inclusion of the Hispanic culture and being able to, not just for the people right now in college, but those soon to be college like for freshmen in college.” She also stated, “And also to show that some people might look down on other cultures but show them that we are willing to come to the space or like to be here to make a difference in the world.”

Jacob also recognized the importance of inclusion and wanting his peers to feel included on campus:

The most important thing I feel is the, of course, the welcoming of people with different backgrounds. Cause I'm very welcoming and so I would want all my peers to be very welcoming. So, I feel like that's the most important thing to have here on campus is just have that strong welcoming feeling. Cause you want everybody coming in [to] feel like they belong. You don't want people coming in here and then thinking that, oh they don't want me.

Jacob also shared that he’s never felt like the university has gone out of their way not to include him and that he expects the university to be inclusive regardless of race and ethnicity.

Experiences with Discrimination and Hostility

Four of the eight students referenced that they had never experienced any form of racism or discrimination. The students described that they have never been targets of discrimination and perceive that there is fair treatment on campus. Blast said, “I've never met anybody who's like racist or is mean to people of my kind or have been mean to me.” Fred mentioned, “I wouldn't say I didn't feel offended or discriminated against, um, gracious for that.” Lizzette stated, “And it's always like, I don't feel discrimination in any sort of setting whenever involved on campus. Like there's nothing.” Jacob also mentioned a lack of discrimination and racism on campus three times during his interview. He mentioned, “there's not a lot of, racism or anything like discrimination towards the Latin community.”
Students mentioned terms, such as “fairly” and “equally” to describe aspects of the campus climate. When discussing his experience as a Latinx student on campus, Pablo mentioned that, “I mean as a Latinx and Hispanic student, there hasn't been much just cause they treat everyone pretty fairly and equally.” When referencing access to resources, Lizzette mentioned that “the resources are very equal based for everyone that needs them or wants them. They all have access to them equally.” She also shared:

I feel like I got lucky in the sense that the system is built to where they're trying to make everyone stand on equal footing at least. So, it's been…it hasn't been more difficult or less difficult in my opinion. I'm going through it just like any other individual from any other background, which is what I appreciate because the campus is built that way to be diverse and to be like catering to everyone, not just a specific like race.

Victoria made a point to discuss the national political climate about “looking down on minorities” but she has not experienced any negative treatment because of her Latinx identity. She cited that the campus leadership is open about sharing their stance on issues. “The chancellor and the president has sent out emails regarding the amount of support they're providing all these students if they're international and they're with a special status, whatever it might be.” She appreciates that the campus leadership sends communications about their stance on particular issues, which makes her feel that the university is a “safe zone.” She discussed, “So it makes it feel like it's a safe zone that you can go to and you're not in danger that maybe your school would be taken away or something…It's just a very safe space that you'll be able to rely on.”

Although some of the students shared sentiments that they have not experienced discrimination or any forms of exclusion, three students highlighted some negative aspects of the campus climate. For Tony, his concern was rooted in his experience with the Black community. He felt that the university treats predominately Black programming differently than other programs. He shared an example of his fraternity’s events needing more security than other
events on campus, whereas other groups do not experience that same treatment. This was especially important to Tony who has found greater community with the Black community than the Latinx community. The majority of his involvement experiences include active membership in organizations that are predominantly Black.

Gloria explained some of her experiences as a student in the Honors College. She referenced that the overall campus climate was welcoming, but instances in Honors College have given her different perceptions about the campus climate in certain niches of campus. As a student worker in the Honors College, she also acknowledged that she has insight to information that other students may not know because she has seen “behind the curtain.” In reference to her experience in the Honors College, she shared, “When it comes to like the smaller pockets, especially like the Honors College and more niche sections, it's still very old school, like elitist, like classist. Like things in place where you clearly like don't feel super welcome all the time.”

Gloria also explained an educational trip to Virginia where she was one of two students of Color on the trip. She said they visited the “heartland of Jefferson and Madison and Monroe” and that there was no time dedicated for discussing issues of slavery that were closely tied to the history of the places they were visiting. In response to the incident, she stated, “In instances like that, even though it's not like an attack on my personal community, I feel like it's just kind of hostile for students of Color, even if they're not calling you names or doing things to you.”

Gloria also described instances outside of the classroom that she feels contribute to hostile situations on campus. In particular, she talked about individuals who utilize designated free speech zones but sometimes cross the line because of the topics addressed. She stated:
I would say outside of the classroom… Houston isn’t as blue as a ton of people [think]. A lot of people see Houston as super liberal even over Austin, which is sometimes the case. But there's still a ton of people who will show up on campus and will be like… [they’ll] have signs up. You see this also at the UT campus and it doesn't happen as often at UH, but they'll have signs that will say something like ‘Abortion is murder. Change my mind.’ And they want people to come up to them and be hostile or you'll have people who would do things like that. And sometimes it kind of crosses the territory into things about like immigration. And so, it gets kind of hostile at times because they're clearly looking to pick a fight and the university… I know that they have to…I mean I don't know if they have to, but they allow anybody to just kind of rent out spaces in the campus.

Lastly, both Tony and Lizzette made references to segregation on campus mainly linked to the compositional diversity on campus and the impacts of the size of the campus and individuals from similar backgrounds coming together. Lizzette said, “It’s because it's so huge, it allows for clicks to form. So, you have access to different cultures, but they're also very… they gravitate towards their own people type of thing.” Tony expressed that he does not like the segregation on campus, especially within organizations. When discussing his negative experience on campus, he said, “As for the cons, I'll say, I don't like how segregated it is.” He continued, “You know, I understand people like to go with their own race and X, Y, Z. But it's just like outside of your friend groups in terms of organizational purposes, it's very segregated, and I don't like that.” Although they mentioned some forms of segregation on campus, they did not discuss the impact of segregation on their own personal and social experiences as students.

Summary

Overall, the students in the study described their experience at UH as positive and perceive the campus environment to be welcoming. All of the students expressed pride in their decisions to attend UH and appreciate the compositional diversity of the student body. Several of the students commented on University of Houston’s ranking as the second most diverse college campus in the United States. They discussed that the university places a strong emphasis on the campus diversity and frequently publicizes this ranking; however, they would like for university
to do more in terms of inclusion and move beyond simply stating the diversity of the campus. In addition, while most of the students described not experiencing discrimination on campus, instances of exclusion, hostility, and segregation were mentioned by three students.

**Theme 2: Saliency of Identities Shapes College Experience**

The second theme that emerged from the student interviews focuses on salient identities that students discussed as central to their experiences as a college student. The interviews revealed that in addition to the importance of Latinx identity, understanding the experiences of first-generation college students and commuter students is an importance aspect to how students perceive the climate for diversity and their ability to navigate the campus. This section expounds on the following student identities and experiences: a) Latinx Experience; b) First-Generation College Student Experience and; c) Commuter Experience.

**Latinx Experience**

Students were asked about their experience as a Latinx student attending UH. While Latinx identity was a salient part of the students’ identity, not all of the students thought about their experience from their cultural lens. When asked about their experiences, some of the students paused to think more deeply about their experiences that they had not reflected on before. Most of these responses were in part that the students felt that the university was not actively doing anything to serve Latinx students.

Regarding questions about their experience as Latinx student at the university, there were several mixed responses about how the institution has catered to their Latinx identity. Pablo explained, “I'm trying to think of…cause they haven't done anything [in] my opinion that's very proactive and engaging Latinx or Hispanic students, but not in a negative way.” Fred spoke about Hispanic pride of campus, “I was a little disheartened that I didn't feel a greater sense of
Hispanic pride in the University of Houston.” He also expressed, “I guess I want to see more groups that were Hispanic-serving or not necessarily Hispanic-serving more or less. I feel more involved as being a part of a Hispanic, uh, protected minority group.”

Jacob shared similar comments when he discussed that his overall experience as a Latinx student was positive, but he did not sense that the university was going out of their way for Latinx students. He stated, “There's nothing necessarily that calls out to me. You know, there's nothing that says, ‘oh, hey, you're a Latinx student, and you should appreciate this.” He continued by sharing, “There’s also not a lot of stuff that tells you, ‘hey, we support the Latin community… and so it's…it's kind of neutral.” Overall, he did not feel that the university did anything to “call out to the Hispanic community.” Even with these statements, the need for the institution to serve Latinx students was not as much of a concern for Jacob as much as the want to feel respected for who he is as an individual regardless of his background. As someone who prides himself on having diverse networks, he wants to be treated fairly and will do the same for others. However, the responsibility of leading diversity and inclusion efforts is an area that most students felt should come from the institution at large, Jacob felt that it was not the responsibility of faculty and staff. He stated, “I mean cause when it comes to faculty and staff, I just feel like they're here to do their job. I don't feel like they're here to make sure they’re including Latinos or Hispanics.” He also said, “I don't need some big event or some big social event that says, hey Latin students come over and have some fun.”

While some of the students noted experiences in which they expressed that the university did not “call out” to their cultural experiences, they did share that the university hosts many events that appeal to Latinx culture. The university recognizes Hispanic Heritage Month annually and hosts a number of events throughout the month highlighting Latinx cultures, many
of which are hosted by students. There are also smaller events hosted throughout the year. Lizzette mentioned a few of these events, “There's bachata night. Sometimes as fundraisers, a lot of organizations also have hot chips with nacho cheese on there, a corn in a cup, stuff like that. So, like little munchies that are related to my culture. They also have them pretty frequently on campus.” Fred stated, “What I like that UH is trying to do is that they've tried to incorporate more Latinx and Hispanic type events across the university” although he does feel like there should be more targeted events for Latinx students since they are “far and few in between.”

The students also referenced that in addition to Latinx focused events, there are many other events that recognize diverse cultural groups. Pablo explained, “We have diversity weeks, inclusion weeks, events to celebrate the different types of cultures and nationalities and religious affiliations that are here on campus.” Jacob emphasized his appreciation for the cultural events on campus, “It's like the little things that people do that people host is just really awesome.”

The inclusion of cultural events has influenced some of the students to interact with others across difference. Tony emphasized, “I feel like the university does a great job of trying to get students out to diversity and inclusion events.” Fred explained, “That actually helped me spend awareness on other things. And if I was interested in a topic, I go to that event because it helped me learn more about another group of people that were diverse or different from me.” Blast stated, “I think in some scenarios we're interested by things some cultures have or hone or display. And that makes us curious and push us to participate in these events.” Whether students decide to attend the events because the university pushes them via email or newsletters or because of their own interest, students agreed that the cultural events are a positive aspect of the campus.
Finally, Fred shared that he would like to see more opportunities to engage with Latinx faculty and staff in a town hall setting. He stated, “As far as administrators, I think there needs to be a forum where they can… or some kind of a way where people can talk. I know at work they call them, uh, town halls. There needs to be more events where administrators and faculty can speak to, uh, to, uh, students of Hispanic or Latinx origin.”

Two students also referenced services that assist with international students with advising, paperwork, and issues related to DACA. When asked about what helpful and necessary services or programs needed to support Latinx student matriculation through college and success after college, Pablo suggested:

- It's a program that helps with the ones…Not maybe not my case necessarily, but the ones that who aren't really American born citizens. You know, the offices that offer those services, legal services. Um, yeah. I would say maybe legal service would be something good that they could offer just cause I don't know about a lot of them, but I would want to know more about how I could better protect myself as a citizen and how to protect my parents. You know, people who aren't citizens here, immigrants.

- This is an indicator that in addition to feeling a strong sense of belonging on campus, students also want to know that there are services in place that will help with their overall academic success and social needs as Latinx students.

**Speaking Spanish.** Three students referenced experiences related to speaking Spanish on campus. The responses from the students highlight how speaking Spanish can foster a stronger sense of belonging but can also inhibit relationships among the Latinx community. Victoria expressed that she appreciates being able to speak Spanish in the classroom and how it has allowed her to build a relationship with one her professors who has shown interest in her identity as a Latina. “She loves when I speak Spanish. She finds it fascinating, and we just kind of bond over that.” The appreciation for her language and background expressed by her professor is
something that stood out to Victoria, especially because her professor does not come from a Latinx background.

Jacob also shared that he appreciates that he can speak Spanish on campus with no judgement. He interacts with others who understand the language both in and outside of the classroom, including peers and co-workers. He commented on speaking Spanish in the classroom, “I love the fact that I can try to say something in Spanish and then someone understands me and that's amazing.” He also explained, “I just make friends just speaking Spanish, comments in Spanish, or just repping my Mexico jersey. It's just like I make friends like that.” This is something that he values because he explained that his friends who attend other universities do not always have the same experience or positive reactions to speaking Spanish.

As resident assistant in who oversees a group of 32 residents, Jacob has used his ability to speak Spanish to connect with students in his residence hall. Speaking Spanish to some of his residents has helped them get out of their shells and form friendships. He said:

I have a couple of residents that only speak Spanish. And so, me being able to just go out to them and speak Spanish to them is just like you can tell that they were in a shell but now that they know that I speak Spanish. It's just like they come talk to me and they… I guess you could say they have that one friend that they know for sure know that they can come to.

Jacob feels respected by the campus community because no one has ever negatively commented on him speaking Spanish. This is something that he appreciates and acknowledged, “They know their place, and so I appreciate that.” Even though he has a diverse group of friends, he values that some of them are able to speak Spanish. He also referenced how his mother would be pleased that he speaks Spanish while at college. This was particularly important to Jacob who values relationships with others who respect his Latinx identity but also important because of his strong relationship with his mother and wants to make her proud. He commented:
Not all my peers that I talk to share [the same] cultural background with me, but the fact that a handful of them that speak Spanish...there's a handful of them that know what I mean when I'm talking, when I'm speaking Spanish slang. It's great to have cause it's just because I know that my mom appreciates the fact that I'm still speaking Spanish here on campus even though she thinks I'm not.

While Victoria and Jacob referenced positive experiences with speaking Spanish, Tony commented on negative experiences related to speaking Spanish. Tony felt “outcasted” by the Latinx community because he does not speak Spanish fluently. He shared, “My general experience [has] been great, but it hasn't been with necessarily the Latino community.” He mentioned, “I feel like I'm outcasted cause like ever since I moved to Houston, I really just haven't learned Spanish.” He expressed that, “If you don't know Spanish you're not…I feel like I'm not accepted by Latino community. They're like, damn, you don't know Spanish? That's terrible. That's shady.”

Tony also added, “You know, they just talk down on me. Like, damn, I be feeling bad. So, I just really… I just separate myself from.” He often felt excluded from Latinx groups and decided to remove himself from situations that would make him feel outcast and instead hang around other cultural groups. For instance, he had considered joining the Hispanic Business Student Association. He decided not to move forward with membership because he felt like he would not be accepted because he could not speak Spanish. Instead, Tony found community within with the Black community, particularly a Historically Black Greek fraternity. This is the fraternity where one of his high school mentors who attended UH was also a member. Tony stated:

I was at my freshman year. I was actually a business…pre-business student, and there's this organization I wanted to join. It's called the His, Hispanic Business Student Association. But then I was like, nah, cause like one I didn't want to pay, but that's besides the point. One I did not want to pay and, um, I didn't know Spanish, so I felt like if I didn't know Spanish, like I wouldn't be accepted.
Tony moved on to share, “It's my fault for not trying that. But I feel like they haven't been as cultural...I feel like I haven't been as culturally connected as I should be or I'm not putting my best effort to be culturally connected with my Latino race.”

Based on these responses, it is apparent that language is an important aspect of Latinx culture, however, experiences with the language can be both negative and positive depending on interactions with others. The ability to speak Spanish may strengthen some interpersonal relationships, whereas, in Tony’s case, it can impose feelings of exclusion with Latinx groups; whether it is perceived that Latinx groups do not accept non-Spanish speakers or the experience of self-isolating from groups due to internal conflicts with not knowing the language and perceiving the group as not being accepting.

*First-Generation College Student Experience*

A supportive campus climate is one that takes into consideration the unique identities that shape a student’s life. The students’ Latinx identity was the primary focus for this study, but the interviews revealed that all but one of the students identify as first-generation college students. The students were either the first person in their family to attend college or had another sibling attend college at some point. Even with one of their siblings attending college, they still felt like they needed more support as a first-generation college student. The intersections of being a Latinx student and first-generation college students shaped their experiences as a student and perceptions of campus support systems in place for first-generation college students.

Being the first student in their family to attend college made the process of navigating more challenging for the students. Even for students like Victoria whose parents have some college education, navigating the college system proved to be difficult. Her parents did not study in the United States, and her mother only took a few community college courses, “but it was
nothing compared to the university.” Jacob also acknowledged that many students have parents that did not attend college. He said, “My parents didn't know. They just said, you need to go to college, get a degree, get a job cause. I was like okay, thanks.” He perceived the campus to be supportive with his transition to college, “whenever I went into college, the University of Houston was very helpful with showing me what to do, telling me what I needed to do cause I have no idea what I'm doing.” Now that he is able to navigate the university, he is able to support his sister during her time in college.

For Victoria, who transferred to UH, she sometimes relied on her brother for support. He went straight from high school to UH and senses that the university was supportive of his transition, but he also struggled at times. She said:

I know some of these students might not have family members that attended college like myself, but just kinda being able to provide those resources and really show that UH is one of those schools that are willing to help you, um, no matter what background you come from. So, it was kind of difficult for both of us as we both kind of were struggling. He would find out something, I will find out something. We'd kind of come together and be like, okay, this will be needed.

Similarly, Lizzette mentioned, “They should be more mindful of the fact that a lot of us are first generation, so we may need additional assistance with figuring out how college works.” She specifically referenced assistance with applying for scholarships. Most of her support came from her high school, which helped her prepare for college. Without that assistance, she says she would have been “completely lost.” Even with the assistance of academic advisors, she feels like she is still unsure where to turn. They may provide an overview of her earned credits and the courses that she needs, but she would like additional guidance, otherwise, she would be “lost after that.” She suggested a “group catering to first-gen, not just Latinx, but like any first-generation like ethnicity type of thing. It would be helpful for it to be like one of those automatic
things, like you're going to be put into this program unless you opt out.” She believes this type of assistance for many students who are unsure where to look for information.

I think that would be really helpful because sometimes it's like the person may feel like they aren't proactive enough to look… search for something even though they need it. So maybe something like that… that you’re opt into it unless you opt out. Also, with information that may help the parents understand the process. So, with younger, like their younger siblings or things…[so] they aren't completely in the dark, like the first kid is. And then sometimes you're the oldest, so that's like a whole different hardship I think. Like just information and things that will help people not just, Hey, it's on the list of things online. Like it's actually presented as an option for you up front.

She emphasized that implementing more support systems and making sure that students have access to information would benefit Latinx and first-generation college students.

For some students, there are added pressures linked to their first-generation college student identity. Pablo described the pressure of wanting to be successful as a Latinx student and to make his family proud. Success is more than just completing the degree but working hard to make sure that all of his parent’s hard work pays off. Pablo expressed that:

Being here opened my eyes, and then as a student…that responsibility of just being like a first-generation college student. It's like that pressure builds onto you to like succeed and I want to succeed. It’s like I want to prove that us Latinos can be the change makers. We can strive to be successful and what not.

He also commented the responsibility of being a first-generation student, “Just holding that responsibility of being that title of being first-gen…having to work towards bettering my life and working towards the life. You know, one goal of mine is to like improve the life of my parents who worked so hard.” He said that he does not want to “waste their efforts.” He also talked about wanting to give up sometimes, but then he thinks about his parents’ efforts, “I sometimes just think of my parents and what they've done. So, my experiences have been pretty positive. Just cause I think as Latinx students having the background of not having equal opportunity just makes me, makes us want to succeed more.”
The mounting pressures of being a first-generation college student was something that Tony has experienced first-hand. He is trying to do his best as a college student while also trying to support his family as much as possible. He talked about sometimes “drowning” in his situation. He said:

As far as my knowledge is, most Latinx students are first-generation students. So, we don't have the luxury of having to go to our parents for advice or going to our parents for…oh, can I get $20 for this or that? Cause they have to take care of your brothers and sisters at home. So, I feel mostly all, speaking on my experience, I feel that most of the time I find myself doing more for them then doing for myself. I feel myself sometimes drowning because I'm always having to take, in my situation personally, I'm always having to take care of them more than I have myself. So, it's just been…it gets hard.

The overwhelming burden of carrying the first-generation college student title has not stopped Tony, but it has raised conversations about seeking help when needed. He says that he “wasn’t raised to like quit” but he also “wasn’t raised to get help if need be.” He described this by saying, “[The] perception these days is you’re weak if you go get help…like my mom would be like. you don't need that. Like you don't need to go get mental help or, you know what I mean?” The mounting pressure of being a first-generation college student, supporting family, and seeking support when needed was a true reality for Tony. Although he stated that he was not raised to seek help, he did point out that the university offers counseling services for students who need assistance with mental health related issues.

The common thread shared by the first-generation college students in this study is that the campus can be challenging to navigate due to lack of knowing “how college works.” Access to resources that support first-generation college students are necessary for enacting a climate that is supportive of students who need more support. Regardless if the university has these systems in place, the institution can seek ways to be more proactive in sharing these resources with students, especially if they are unaware of how to locate the information. In addition, assisting
students to be self-advocates in expressing that they need to be successful is also necessary as students learn to navigate a large campus on their own. Finally, helping students get connected and involved can help students build a network of support for their academic and social needs.

**Commuter Experience**

Five of the eight students in this study commute to campus. Four out of the five students have never lived on campus and mentioned some experiences related to their status as a commuter. The experience of being a commuter student has presented some challenges for the students. For some students like Fred and many of whom are Latinx students, the commute to campus can take up to two hours depending on the amount of traffic in Houston. The time spent getting to campus and finding parking takes away from the experiences that the students can have actually enjoying what the campus has to offer.

Blast mentioned that as a first-generation college student, he did not know what to expect and that commuting to campus has been his most negative experience with the university. The proximity of a park and ride has eased up the burden of commuting to campus, but he stated that, “I felt like being first-generation and the commute…there are things that you forget to enjoy and that's my negative experience… My first two years, it was just a lot of time wasted on commuting and not enough time enjoying my first year and second year college experience.”

Lizzette shared a similar sentiment, “Especially as a commuter, you just get off that shuttle bus, go to class, get back on the shuttle bus, go home. So, I definitely needed something to ground me to school to associate something positive to it other than just like classes and stress.” Although Blast has experienced frustrations with commuting to campus, he highlighted that commuters from Houston have an advantage since they have exposed to diversity within the city of Houston. He said:
The commuters who are Houston natives or live in adoptive cities, such as for them, it's easier for a lot of these human beings to interact on campus due to how diverse Houston is in general. And the way I grew up...I grew up around a lot of African Americans, a lot of Nigerians, Central Americans as well, and a lot of Mexicans. So, I think I benefited a lot from that. So, getting on campus, even though you would have a state of mind of how you're going to deal with a certain person and you benefit from having that extra sixth cents.

Nancy and Tony referenced that the university should consider offering programs and events that are more considerate of the commuter population. As a commuter who wishes she was able to stay on campus, Nancy commented that, “It's kind of a difficult, especially cause a lot of them are during the day. I'm sorry during the evening time. So maybe having them more reachable to students that are maybe in a time crunch or they commute. Maybe changing that a little bit.”

Tony also emphasized that, “We are a commuter campus. We only have like 11,000 people that don't stay on campus, and we have 46,000 students.” He commented that the time of events prevents some students from being able to attend. He stated, “The times for those events usually are at night. So, they're not as...not like a large turnout. They're probably like maybe like 50 people.” He recommends that “[the university] probably try to be more commuter friendly. Like have a lunch, social, cause most of our students are commuters, so not everyone has the luxury of staying on campus.”

Summary

The interviews with students revealed the importance of understanding the intersections of salient identities that influence experiences as a college student. While the students’ perceptions of the campus climate focused on aspects of the physical environment, campus initiatives, and interactions with others, a focus on the identities that shape their college experience was at the center of many discussions. In the case of the students in this study, the
intersections of Latinx identity, first-generation college student identity, and commuter status identity were critical to how they navigate the campus environment. Awareness of how salient identities shape the perceptions of the climate for diversity is necessary for supporting Latinx students and consideration of their backgrounds will determine the types of support programs that will truly serve their diverse needs.

**Theme 3: Interpersonal Relationships Help Students Build Community**

The third theme that surfaced from the interviews discusses the value that students placed on forming community and the importance of interpersonal relationships. Students answered questions about their interactions on campus to better understand their relationships with faculty, staff, and administrators. As a campus with over 40,000 students, the students found it incredibly important to establish a community on campus. The sheer volume of the student population and size of the campus was a driving factor as to why the students found it important to get plugged in and make connections.

Forming relationships was also important for students as they came from tight-knit families and communities prior to attending UH. Finding an environment to emulate the feeling of home and community emphasized the significance of relationships for the students in creating a stronger sense of belonging and positive feel for the climate. This section discusses the relationships and interactions that that students have with peers, staff and administrators, and faculty through a discussion of the following sub-themes: a) Meaningful Relationships with Peers; b) Interactions with Staff and Administrators; and c) Interactions with Faculty.

**Meaningful Relationships with Peers**

Forming meaningful relationships was a key aspect to the student experiences and feelings of belonging to campus community. A majority of the students expressed that their most
meaningful relationships on campus are with their peers. Students formed friendships in class, by attending events, getting involved in student organizations, and within their residence halls. The importance of community is described as being central to the Latinx culture. For instance, Victoria discussed a community of unity within the Latinx culture, “In our culture I feel like we're all very united. Well in the Hispanic culture, at least…in the culture that I've been exposed to. We're very into sticking together, helping one another.” She also mentioned it was important to recognize how “how we're very united and we're willing to help each other” when discussing what is also important to remember about Latinx students. The idea of unity within the Latinx culture is a primary reason why students found it important to build relationships with peers on campus.

Three students discussed that their most important relationships are with their peers because they understand their “struggles” and what they are going through. Victoria discussed this when she described her most meaningful relationships:

The friends that I have made because I have a lot of different friends and some are closer to others, but a lot of them are Hispanic, and I have made a good bond with them. And they seem to really understand some of the struggles I'm going through or maybe be able to give me words of advice and trying to figure out classes or just what I'm going to do in the future post-graduation.

Similarly, Tony said the following when discussing his most meaningful relationships on campus, “My peers…the ones that I came in with, cause they're the ones going through the same thing I'm going through.” Jacob also commented, “The most meaningful relationships… I would say is probably the ones with my peers that I see every day.” He said that they are the ones that are “going to be there for you whether you need the help or whether you just need someone to talk to.”
Pablo talked about the impact of his relationships with peers at college when asked about his most meaningful relationships on campus, “I guess finally the relationship I have with my friends here. Without them, I don't know really know how my experience at UH would've been so amazing.” He also talked about how his relationships have influenced his personal growth. “I've met amazing friends here. They've helped change my life. They've helped change me in ways that… I was never a very comfortable person with like my emotions and showing and expressing them or, or helping others have difficult conversations.”

Gloria commented on her positive experience on campus and her relationships on campus. “I feel like overwhelmingly it's been pretty positive. I've made like a ton of friends. I didn't know anybody going in. So, I just kind of found my pocket and I stuck to it. So, in that sense I've been able to like have like really good experiences with my peers.” The need to establish that sense of community on college campus was noted as significant by Gloria who moved to Houston for college discussed the close-knit community, “Houston, it has such a like close knit Latinx community that I was really able to grain myself and be a part of.” She also discussed rebuilding the “web of support” she has back home when talking about the meaningful relationships she has with her peers, “I've been really good about forming a community inside…like I have a web of support, if that makes sense…like I have back home and so I kind of left without it, so I was able to kind of rebuild it. I have people that I can turn to if I need anything.”

For some of the students, their most meaningful interactions are with their fellow student organization members. Fred talked about his relationship with student organization members, “My most meaningful relationships are those with my fellow officers in org members. Before I was with the organization, it would only be with people that I work with on projects for classes.”
Lizzette also discussed that her closest relationships on campus are with her sorority sisters. She shared that it is not because “they’re like me” but because she says, “it’s about empowerment and that we're trying to…we strive to be culturally aware so we always have programming or something that makes us enlightened, that educates us about other people. So, I think that definitely is one of my most cherished relationships.”

Interacting with individuals unlike themselves was also a point made by the students. Several of whom shared that interacting with individuals from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds is something that they have always valued, especially since they grew up in diverse communities. Tony said, “I treat everyone the same regardless if you're green, black, blue or brown. I'm going to be myself. Like I said, it's just treating everyone the same.” Similarly, Jacob said he would not credit his experiences at university for wanting to interact with individuals from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Rather, he has always made it a point to interact with people from different backgrounds. He said, “I'm a pretty nice guy. I talk to anybody. You can be pink, purple, blue. I don't care what your color is. I could talk to you if you respect me. I respect you. That's how I see it. That's the way I was born. That's the way I was raised.”

Some of the students felt as though the university encouraged students to build relationships across difference. Victoria mentioned, “I feel like just seeing it like everybody, all different cultures, all different organizations just out there willing to show you what they're about and willing to teach you their culture is amazing.” She also shared:

I've always been really fascinated by everybody's culture. So just the openness there is around campus for you to actually know and get to talk to them is. it's actually really, really cool because you will be able to get exposed to all of these cultures you'll be exposed to in your workplace as well. So that'll just be a little heads-up for their career.

Pablo also referenced interacting with individuals with diverse backgrounds. He emphasized that while institutional diversity efforts on campus have not influenced him to
interact with individuals from diverse background more than he has already, they have helped him become more aware of different backgrounds. He stated, “I've always been someone who could interact…who always likes just talking to people. So, I didn't really care what kind of culture or cultural backgrounds… diverse background they came back from. But I would say like it helped me become more aware of the different types and how to better interact. So maybe not necessarily interact more, but interact better.”

Blast also talked about interactions with individuals different from himself. He said, “It's just more about, you know, stepping out of your shell. Um, Blacks, Asians, uh, Vietnamese, all types of, um, Hindu people. They're very open to me and especially, I, you know, some Hispanics, they have a tendency of looking like they're Middle Eastern.” He also shared, “And I find that very interesting and our behaviors, how we interact with each other. It's very interesting. I know that UH does it on purpose, so we don't feel like outsiders to each other.”

**Involvement.** The students in this study were members of several organizations, including professional, faith-based, sports related organizations, Greek letter, student-fee funded organizations, and cultural organizations. The students found it necessary to get connected on campus through student organizations as it would help build a stronger sense of belonging and mattering on campus. Student organizations also provided opportunities for building friendships with peers.

Students emphasized that there is a place for everyone on campus and student organizations are an outlet for students to get together no matter their background or their interests. Lizzette shared, “There's something for every little niche that you're into, every interest that you have.” She said the university has a space for students to learn about student organizations and can access information about them online. Jacob also said, “Whether that's
clubs or organizations or fee-funded organizations, here at the University of Houston it’s pretty much something for everybody.” He also commented, “It's just like there's a lot of organizations here on campus that try to tailor to different cultures… So, there's not one specific organization that just deals with, Hispanic culture…it's an organization that deals with a lot of them.”

The size of the campus also was a factor as to why to students wanted to get involved on campus. Lizzette expressed that “one of the negative things is that since it's so big it can be easy to like feel swallowed up by it or like just kind of wander.” Victoria voiced similar sentiments about the size of campus and involvement. She said, “Since it's such a large campus… if you're not trying to be involved, you might not get involved with anything. Not to say that the people are mean.”

Blast also expressed the importance of involvement in order to feel connected to the campus. He said, “We got nice people down here in Houston and at UH. Um, but you have to like expose yourself or jump into groups, clubs, organizations, if you really want to be a part of it.” He has been intentional about joining student organizations in last year, “I've joined a couple of groups in as of late as well as of last semester and my fall semester here. So, it'd be like the beginning of my fourth year. And so that's been a positive.” He expressed that his organization is “wonderful” and that he enjoys the company of the people involved in the organization. Blast said that initially it was challenging to get plugged in on campus, but the people in the organizations are “very friendly, very talkative” which made him more comfortable once he finally got plugged into the organization. He likes that “people around there take us into consideration and the clubs and societies are open for people like us or people like me.”

Getting connected on campus was especially important for Fred who transferred to UH from a community college. “After the first year…after the second semester when I was at UH, I
wasn't involved in any student organizations. But it wasn't until I took the initiative and I was actively involved in a student organization. That's when I started to have some kind of pride with the university and started to feel a...I guess a sense of camaraderie there.” He credits his involvement with feeling a stronger sense of pride and connection to the university, but shares that he did not feel that the university gave him a lot of “inclusivity” and did not make it “feel at home.” He explained, “It wasn't until I got involved in luckily that the...the group that I'm in with the majors that we have, there's a lot of people of Latinx and Hispanic origin that I'm able to communicate with them and relate to them and get their perspective on things.” He expressed his concern with not being able to join a student organization that is intended for Hispanic business majors because his degree, although related to business, is housed in a different college. He hopes that in the future, this particular organization does not exclude Hispanic/Latinx students from joining even if they are not a part of the sponsoring college.

Some of the students felt compelled to join culturally-based student organizations. Lizzette decided to join an “historically Latin-based/multicultural sorority.” She emphasized, “I liked that a lot because I want to be culturally aware and I want to like learn more about others. But I also appreciated that there's that history in my culture.” Her experience with her sorority has been very meaningful and positive. Victoria also finds a lot of pride with being involved in a Latin-based student organization, “I am involved in an organization that is more Latin based. So, I'm just having those people that I guess know where I'm coming from or we have some similarities really helps.”

For Tony, he especially found comfort in his fraternity, a Historically Black Greek Fraternity. He shared that his experience on campus is positive, but not necessarily with the Latino community. He described that his involvement in a Black Greek Letter Organization was
influenced by a mentor in an outreach program that he was involved in during high school. Most of his mentors were Black males, and one in particular attended UH and was a part of the Greek organization. Tony decided to join that fraternity and is now the president.

Students also shared that being involved has provided them with leadership opportunities. Whether serving in a leadership position in their organization or developing skills, such as networking and event planning, students found their involvement to be helpful for their overall growth. Jacob had the opportunity to serve in a leadership position in a fee-funded student organization that plans one of the largest campus programs. This role aligned directly with his academic major, and he was able to apply things learned in the classroom into what he was doing in his leadership position.

Regarding leadership development, Tony also stated that, “The things I do on campus, the leadership roles I've taken… it's helped me grow as a person, a student, and even as a leader.” Victoria also shared that her interactions with her sorority sisters help her with “leadership skills, social skills, [and] networking.” Pablo mentioned that serving as an orientation leader has helped developed his skills and has prepared him both professionally and academically.

Two students also discussed creating their own organizations after identifying a gap in organization offerings and finding a need to be addressed. For instance, Pablo created a student organization that serves the Hispanic and Latinx community at-large. He found a lot pride in serving as an orientation leader but wanted to also create a student group to bring together Hispanic and Latinx students from all backgrounds. He explained, “We started this organization to kind of bring together the Latinx and Hispanic body cause the only like Latinx/Hispanic organizations are either major related or restricted to a certain nationality.” Blast also created a
student organization based on his passion for soccer, so he created a student organization that is
the spirit group for the UH Division I NCAA Women’s Soccer Team.

**Interactions with Staff and Administration**

Students also discussed their relationship with staff and administration as positive.

Students viewed relationships with supervisors, academic advisors, and student organization
advisors as significant to their experience. When referencing administrations, students related
these roles to professionals in student affairs positions and upper-level positions. Additionally,
students mentioned their positive relationships with staff. When referencing staff, students noted
individuals in campus support roles, such as custodial and dining staff. These distinctions are
important to note because staff positions were seen mainly as helping roles.

Pablo described one of his most meaningful relationships on campus was with his
academic advisor. His advisor has assisted him with course selection and keeping him on track.
He said, “she's the one that's gotten…helped me figure out my classes when I didn't. I mean, it
was pretty easy to figure out classes I need, but she just helps me clarify that that's what I need
and it's like there's some courses that are… been offered to me that I've been interested in taking
and she'll just let me know if I can or not take them.” He also shared that he has a “pretty good
relationship” with faculty, staff, and administrations and that he can rely on them if he ever needs
to request a letter of recommendation.

Pablo’s experience as an orientation leader has also exposed him to many faculty and
staff on campus who he finds to be supportive and resources. He commented on these
relationships:
The orientation staff... The faculty there... though I don't work for them, they definitely introduced me to a lot of the other faculty and staff across campus. Even though I never had them they'll let you know a professor or something like that. They helped me. They introduced me to them and resources, like the diversity, and directors of diversity, directors of a student involvement in all that. They just helped me.

Lizette also talked about how her primary interaction with staff is with the advisor of her sorority. She explained, “It's been pretty pleasant because my interactions with them are either about like planning my semester or my classes or related to the Greek organizations and I don't have issues with any of them... [it’s] a pretty positive experience.”

Jacob also described that his relationships with staff on campus are very positive. He says that his relationship with his academic advisor is very meaningful because of the support that they provide to keep him on track to graduation. He also mentioned that

The upper staff here at the University of Houston, they're all respectful... they're all extremely welcoming. They never say no to anything. It's like, ‘Hey, I want to talk. Okay, come talk.’ And so, it's extremely beneficial to have, you know, that type of connection with everybody that I associate with.

Jacob also described his relationship with his supervisor as positive. He emphasized the importance of interpersonal relationships with supervisors as it can help you with connections and professional development:

There’s also about if you work on campus by any means, then I know how important a relationship is when your supervisor or your or your upper level management that you work for because they have connection to other places and they can help you in almost any way possible as long as you get to them, as long as you do your job, as long as you don't see them as just the boss, you just go up to them and talk to them about your day and stuff.

Like Jacob, Blast also found relationships that help provide connections as being important:
I think the most meaningful… I think are the connections that you make in your in your desired career because that's gonna push you forward. Not in all situations, but I think those are very important to not sleep on and put in your best energy forward. Cause you never know when you might have to interact with this person or with these group of people to jump start your career or keep your career going…whether they're Hispanic, Black, Asian, White.

Blast also shared that “for the most part, staff and faculty, they're kind people and very humble towards me and anybody that I've seen them interact with.”

Gloria discussed her relationship with staff and administrators from the perspective as a student worker. Working in the Honors College, she frequently interacts with staff and administrators. She said they are “super open about things” and that it’s been overall positive. She also addressed her interactions with staff as positive. She said, “My interactions with them have been mostly positive with staff members too. I don't think I've had any like negative interactions with staff. A lot of them are super nice and helpful. I became friends with the ladies at the dining halls because I would wear my Selena shirt. Everyone was like, oh my God Selena and I was like yes.”

Blast and Tony also emphasized their positive connections with staff in helping roles. Blast talked about his relationship with the cooks and janitors, “Well in the same sense as in how my parents came over, I've seen many cooks and janitors in these stereotypical roles that they play in. I have been able to identify myself with them. Here and there I see an actual person who was like my age.” Tony also discussed his experiences of interacting with staff on campus:

Most of the faculty that I talk to…that Latina, the maintenance crew or the cleaning crew. We always treat them with respect always. Oh, you're doing good. Like I can hold little conversations like that. But as far as like deep conversations about Latino, like about race, I couldn't hold this conversation in Spanish, we're like, ‘Oh, how are you doing? Okay. If you need anything, yeah, let me know. I got you. Need some water? Here you go.’ But yeah, just I always, but now it's really hard.
Overall, the students found their interactions to be positive whether interacting with professionals in student affairs positions or staff in maintenance or custodial positions. The positive relationships with individuals in these positions help create a more welcoming campus environment for the students. They serve in positions that aid students with student success outcomes or are relatable because they share similar cultural backgrounds.

**Interactions with Faculty**

Student also discussed their perceptions of faculty and the importance of the connections with their professors. Pablo perceived his professors to be helpful and supportive and stated, “My professors, they helped me a lot. If I've ever run a up on a problem or I need clarification on something, they're quick to just help me out when I need it just cause. I established a pretty good relationship with them.” Tony discussed engaging with one of his professors because they shared a connection to El Paso. He said, “I really only had one Latino professor now that I think about it, and that was for our world cinema class. He was actually from…taught at UTEP in El Paso, so like cool little engagement.”

Gloria spoke about developing strong relationships with faculty in the Mexican American Studies department. She has not only learned from them, but she has made it point to develop personal relationships with some of her professors. She discussed the relationships, “Those relationships and those connections have been super, super important for me being able to graduate and have a plan after graduation.” She talked about making a personal connection to one of her professors. She talked about his extensive knowledge on a particular area and being able to learn from him and develop a personal relationship, “He knows so much about it and I feel like I learned a lot, not from only his class but from him personally. And so that's been super great.” Her professors who serve as mentors are also significant to her experience. She described
conducting research with guidance from a professor and being directed to resources, such as scholarship opportunities, research opportunities through the Mellon Foundation, and learning about fellowships. The guidance from her professors prompted her to apply to the Fulbright scholarship.

Victoria identified her professors as helpful and resourceful, “I love going to class, I love interacting with them. And if I have a question I go and ask them stuff. They're very helpful. They are resourceful, so I really do appreciate them and everything they do for the students.” Blast appreciated that his professors “don’t pick on people.” This has helped him feel more comfortable in the classroom.

Gloria emphasized that if the class sizes were smaller, students might have an opportunity to make more personal connections with their professors. Whereas in her Honors courses that cap their class sizes at 25 students, her regular classes are between 100-200 students. She commented on class sizes, “My classes are usually anywhere between like 100-200 students. For the Honors College it's 15 students. I think we cap at 25, so there's a lot more of that like interpersonal connection there. But with the university at-large, I feel like I've had like a mostly positive experience.” She acknowledged that she has had a unique experience in the Honors College and it has afforded her new opportunities that not all students are aware of or have access to because of the sizes of the classes.

**Summary**

The relationships on campus were central to the experiences of the students and their perceptions of climate for diversity. Building relationships with peers were noted as the most important relationships for students. These relationships helped them feel more connected to the campus community, especially because of the physical size of the campus. Finding a student
organization to join also helped students gain a stronger sense of belonging and mattering. Several of the students expressed that without the involvement, they would not feel as connected on campus. Some of the students sought out peers and organizations that relate to their Latinx identity, while other formed relationships based on their interests. Either way, the students also noted that the diversity of the campus allowed them to also form friendships with individuals who share different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

In addition to developing positive relationships with peers, the students discussed their interactions with staff, administrators, and faculty. The students found these relationships to be positive. Some of the students formed strong relationships with their academic advisors, student organizations, and supervisors, while others frequently engaged with custodial, dining, and maintenance staff. Students also discussed having positive relationships with their faculty and described them to be helpful and resourceful.

**Theme 4: Classroom Diversity Shapes Learning Experiences**

The fourth theme that emerged from the interviews is centered on experiences within the classroom. How the students perceive the climate for diversity in the classroom is important as this is the most common experience that students will have on a college campus. Not all students will choose to get involved with cocurricular activities; however, all students share the common experience of being in a classroom setting. Students were asked about their experience as a Latinx students in the classroom. Responses varied based on personal experiences and whether they had thought about their classroom experiences from a cultural lens. For the most part, students described their experience in the classroom as positive. Jacob stated, “there's nothing negative about being in a classroom, being a Latino student at all.” Lizette explained that she feels very comfortable in her classes and with her “high abilities.” She also stated, “I don't feel
shy at all to like raise my hand if I need to get one of the ones that participate the most in class just because I'm a little curious and I like learning. I don't really feel like afraid, or intimidated to raise my hand.”

While not all of the students thought about their Latinx identity in the classroom, classroom diversity did influence learning experiences for the students in the study. The common threads discussed among the students when asked about their experiences within the classroom focus on the following areas: a) Compositional Diversity; b) Different Perspectives from Peers; c) Challenges with Faculty Diversity Perspectives. This section will expound upon these sub-themes and discuss how these areas shaped their learning experiences.

**Compositional Diversity**

A common thread among the student responses when discussing their classroom experiences was the acknowledgement of the compositional diversity within the classroom. Given the racial and ethnic diversity of the university student population, it is no surprise that there is diversity within the classroom. The compositional diversity of the student body is an aspect of the college that many of the students were drawn to when applying to UH, and they agreed that classroom diversity was important to their experiences.

Students frequently commented on the racial and ethnic diversity of the students within the classroom and how it shaped their classroom experience. When asked about experiences in the classroom, Jacob and Blast commented on the different racial and ethnic backgrounds in the classroom. Jacob also shared, “there's a lot of people, a lot of different backgrounds, a lot of different ethnicities, all in one classroom.” Blast mentioned, “I feel like the classroom setting is, is the same for everyone being, being how culturally diverse to school is the campuses.” The fact
that the classroom is “same for everyone” stood out to Blast as everyone in the classroom has the same opportunities to engage and be successful in the classroom.

In addition, the students made references to Latinx representation within the classroom. Gloria mentioned that her classes are “super diverse.” This was especially true for her classes in the Mexican American Studies Program, which has more classroom diversity than her Honors College courses. She frequently discussed enjoying her classes in the Mexican American Studies Program because of the classroom diversity and being able to learn with individuals who share similar cultural backgrounds.

Lizette made a comment that she does not feel like she stands out in anyway in the classroom, referring to the fact that there are other Latinas in the classroom. She stated, “I don't feel like I stand out at all because it's a Hispanic serving institution. There's a lot of us, so there's always at least like maybe three other, four other girls depending on the class.” Similarly, Blast mentioned Latinx representation in the classroom, “I guess we're very noticeable. I feel comfortable in the classroom.” Fred also made comments about other Latinx students in the classroom, “I'd say I feel in the classroom setting, I feel okay. The good thing about the University of Houston…it's very diverse, so there's all kinds of people there. And knowing that I'm not the only Hispanic of like one certain place”

For Jacob, the representation of Latinx students and welcoming peers also made him feel comfortable speaking Spanish in the classroom. He explained, “I love the fact that I can, I can try to say something in Spanish and then someone understand me and that's, that's, that's amazing. Cause I have a couple of friends in other universities where they just get looked at because they don't know what they're saying.” The opportunity to speak Spanish in class with his peers was
very comforting to Jacob knowing that he shared that experience with other Latinx students and was not judged by his other classmates who do not speak Spanish.

Pablo had not thought much about his experiences in the classroom from the lens of his Latinx identity prior to being asked. His experience in the classroom is similar to that of high school setting. He described this perspective, “I've never…I haven't really noticed too much. It's a lot the same as my high school experience cause you know, my high school was mainly Hispanic as well.” He said that “98%” of his classmates were Mexican in high school. Although there were a lot of Latinx students in his high school classes, he discussed the differences that he noticed at UH. He shared:

Whereas here it's like, you know, I'm half [Salvadorian]…some of my closest friends are Salvadorian and Cuban. I've met Puerto Ricans. I met Colombians. I've met people of all races and descents. And I've just learned more about their own distinctive cultures and things, you know, things that were unaware to me.

Pablo has since realized that among the commonalities of Latinx groups, there are also distinct differences that make up various groups. He said, “I thought we were all the same, but it turns out we all very different…No I didn’t…I knew we weren't like all the same, but I knew, I thought we were more similar.”

Gloria has met several students in her Mexican American studies classes. She appreciated not only getting to meet other people, but the opportunity to learn more about the history of Mexican Americans. She talked about this experience, “I've met a ton of people [in] a lot of my Mexican American studies classes, even though I come from like an area where like 98% of us are Mexican American or like Mexican. I didn't know there was this entire rich history of Mexican Americans in the U.S., so I feel like I learned a lot.”
Different Perspectives from Peers

The compositional diversity in the classroom mentioned by the students is what some expressed as an influence for various perspectives in the classroom. For many of the students, the classroom diversity invites diverse perspectives. The students voiced that they felt they could share diverse perspectives, while others mentioned that the diversity of student backgrounds contributes to different perspectives in the classroom.

Victoria referenced that her background as a Latina helps bring diverse perspectives into the classroom and that her professors appreciate her different perspectives and ideas. She shared, “In the class, actually, I find that I kinda benefit in some sort of way because it doesn't matter what kind of class I'm in. Sometimes my opinion or my point of view is very different than some of my classmates. And my professors seem to appreciate that, especially because I can be very outspoken.” She continued, “They really appreciate that I am willing to go out and say my opinion as a different… I guess point of view or different, coming from a different background.”

Blast described what he calls “cultural diffusion” that takes place in the classroom when people from diverse backgrounds come together in a learning environment. He stated, “Obviously the cultural diffusion that takes place when you set different people in the classroom and how by default when you choose a career, you’re choosing it because you like it. That's your personality.” He found that different perspectives in the classroom inherently takes place because individuals from different backgrounds bring something ideas to classroom discussions.

Fred commented on how he felt that his experience in classrooms at UH was different from his experience at his former community college. When discussing his peers in community college, he stated that they “all came from the same place as the university” referring to many of the students coming from similar backgrounds or areas of Houston. Since attending UH, he has
noticed that the classes are very diverse, including the diversity among Latinx students. Fred cited the diverse perspectives that he has been exposed in the classroom to by meeting people from other countries, “I got to meet people from different countries and I liked that part about being at UH because it gives you different perspective.”

Gloria also spoke about different perspectives from students in the classroom within her Honors College courses when discussing students from majority racial backgrounds. In this case, the students shared perspectives that challenged her own beliefs. She described:

In all of the classes that I'm taking, especially cause I'm a political science major, it's a lot of White students who like are willing to like overlook things like Jefferson being a slave owner and it's... little things like that kind of discouraged me a little bit, especially like with the Honors College.

Although Gloria has experienced encouraging classroom peers who share different perspectives that conflict with her own beliefs, she has found community in her Mexican American studies program. She hopes that the courses and content within the Honors College progresses in their perspectives as the institution continues to diversify and serves more students from traditionally underserved racial and ethnic groups.

Challenges with Faculty Diversity Perspectives

The final sub-theme focuses on challenges with faculty diversity perspectives. Gloria and Fred were vocal about experiences with some of the faculty that they viewed as problematic. Gloria distinguished her experiences in her Honors courses versus her experience in her minor courses in the Mexican American Studies department. For Gloria, she felt that her experiences in the classroom and university at-large was overall positive, but she expressed feeling more connected to her minor program and faculty versus her Honors courses. She expressed that her professors in her honors courses used outdated language or expressed viewpoints that were problematic from her point of view. The use of outdated language or lack of awareness of Latinx
culture made her feel as though some of her classes were not as inclusive. She stated, “I feel like there's professors who still like use outdated language or they'll have certain views about what's important and what's supposed to be taught in a classroom.”

Gloria also explained, “Sometimes you'll see…you'll have professors that you'll hear about. They won't say anything and they won't do anything to you. But they're also kind of looking for like a fight.” She commented that continuing the use of alienating language is “aiding in this like killing of people.” She also referenced a specific experience in the classroom about one of the professors:

One of the professors at the Honors College, he does that. I've met him before. He seems fine like on a personal basis, but then he'll say things that you're just like… Or they'll use language ... I guess it's just like a personal thing, but I feel like we shouldn't be using the words like illegal to describe people, and that's still used a ton and I'm just like what era are you living in? It just dehumanizes people.

Gloria also referred an incident when one of her friends asked a philosophy professor to apply course content to a Latin American context. Gloria shared that “the professor just outright told her…well I don't know anything about Latin America…I was just like what? I mean he doesn't need to be a Latin American studies scholar to like be able to like apply something.”

These experiences with her professors are primarily in her upper-level political science and philosophy courses where she feels there is a lack of inclusion and that “there’s a hierarchy of what is accepted and what it prioritized over others.” She perceived faculty as deciding what to discuss and who to exclude in course discussions. She pointed out that her philosophy classes include mainly Western philosophy and that “it just feels not inclusive in any way, especially when you have like a ton of kids who obviously are diverse because the university is diverse, but it's not reflected from the top down.”
Fred also discussed experiences of faculty diversity perspectives shared in the classroom. He explained, “I guess one of the mundane things I don't like… I guess I could say that some of the professors, they don't… some of them are biased in a way where they say things and they don't necessarily… they say things with their own opinions, but they don't take into account how it affects others.” He shared an example:

> I have a good example of what one stats teacher said. I don't know what she was thinking, but she was mentioning something about reparations. This is before class, sorry. And I was thinking to myself, what is she talking about? The only time where I actually spoke with a professor that had a very intellectual conversation about these types of subjects was a sociologist. I took for an elective, and he actually made me feel… wow I really liked this course, even though it's not part of my major. He knows the different sides of things.

In general, he is concerned that some professors share things “but they don’t know the social context behind it” and that he feels that there is an “imbalance” of perspectives among professors. He expressed concerns that there are some professors who might not have experience or education on certain topics but discuss them in the classroom. This may make students from uncomfortable and can contribute to negative experiences in the classroom.

**Summary**

The students discussed the impact of classroom diversity on learning experiences. Several of the students highlighted the racial and ethnic diversity within the classrooms at UH. The diversity provided an opportunity to interact and learn from students with different cultural backgrounds. For some of the students, the cultural diversity emulated their high school classroom, whereas for other students, the diversity was different than previous learning experiences. This experience was enlightening for many of the students as they learned new ideas by having different perspectives in the classroom and also being able to share learning experiences with other Latinx students. In addition to different perspectives from peers, two
students experienced challenges with the diversity perspectives of faculty. In these cases, the perspectives of the faculty created challenges in the learning environments.

**Theme 5: Awareness of HSI Designation and Supporting Latinx Students**

A major purpose of this study was to explore Latinx students’ understanding of UH’s designation as Hispanic-Serving Institutions. The University of Houston was officially recognized as an HSI in 2012 and reported a total 32.4 percent Latinx students in Fall 2019 (UH, 2019). As a top-tier institution that serves a large percentage of Latinx students, a greater awareness of students’ interpretations of the designation and their expectations of institutions diversity and inclusion at the university was a major component of this study. Students were asked about their understanding of HSIs and the ways that UH can support Latinx students. The interviews revealed that students lacked awareness of the HSI designation, and the students emphasized increasing support for Latinx students in the areas of financial resources, community outreach, and faculty/staff representation. Thus, this section will delve into sub-themes that discuss the following areas in more details: a) Lack of awareness of HSI designation b) Provide more financial resources; c) Increase community outreach efforts around Latinx students; and d) Increase Latinx faculty/staff representation

**Lack of Awareness of HSI Designation**

Students were asked about their understanding of a Hispanic-Serving Institution and if they were aware that UH holds this designation. Overwhelming, the students were generally unaware of the unique campus designation. When asked to describe an HSI, two of the students did not even attempt to describe an HSI or did not know how to answer the question. For instance, Jacob was unsure how to describe the designation. He said, “To be completely honest
with you, I don't know. I don't...I never heard of that until you've mentioned that, but I wouldn't know how to say it. I wouldn't know how to describe it.”

Blast and Tony had similar responses as they questioned if the designated meant that it was for Hispanic people. Blast asked, “Is it like similar to UH and how diverse they are or just solely for Hispanic people? Tony asked, “The makeup of the student bodies mainly Hispanic?”

When asked to describe his understanding of an HSI, Pablo shared:

So, my understanding of a Hispanic-Serving Institution is one that serves a big majority of the Hispanic population. Not...they don't just serve Hispanics and just like the majority of the institution is Hispanic and the area, I guess is very Hispanic as well. Like Houston is, you know...It's a great Hispanic population here. So, they obviously want to tend to the needs of the Hispanic population.

Victoria was unaware that the university carried the HSI designation. She described her understanding of an HSI as:

My understanding would mostly be that they are welcoming towards the Hispanic culture. They are willing to help and they are willing to make it...facilitate everything. Maybe, some people are first-generation students so it can be very hectic or very worrying, so they don't know exactly what's going on and how to pursue a higher education. So just being able to have access to all these resources. They have those resources so all these people can actually go to school, graduate, and make a career a year.

Lizzette, who also did not know that UH was an HSI before the study described an HSI as, “From what I understand, I think they restrict their admissions to where they give importance or priority to like underprivileged, Hispanic individuals. And, yeah, that's all that I understand when like Hispanic-Serving Institution.”

Two students were aware that the designation is associated with a metric related to Latinx enrollment and that universities have access to funding associated with the designation. Gloria stated:
I think we briefly talked about it in one of my Mexican American Studies classes or if I'm not mistaken, it's that...I don't remember what the percentage it is at the university needs to meet, but a certain percentage of their student populations identify as Hispanic and so therefore they are like a Hispanic-Serving Institution. And I don't know if it's the state or the federal government who gives them extra funding because of that designation.

Fred also stated, “If I believe correctly, I think it's a metric of 25% Hispanics at a university and it has something to do with a law that was passed a while back and the government gives funding to schools that are considered HSI.” He also shared that, “I didn't know when I applied that it was an HSI. I assumed it was, but I didn't know the actual statistical percentage of the Hispanic student that attended. But I thought I would assume that UH would be an HSI.”

Students were also asked if their knowledge of the HSI designation would have influenced their college choice decisions. The responses varied per student. Some of the students expressed that the designation would have not impacted their decision to attend. Gloria was the only student that mentioned that she was aware that UH was an HSI when she applied. Blast indicated that he may have been told about the designation, but “they bombard you with a lot of information when you're going in.” His main focus when applying for colleges was to pursue scholarship in soccer. This framed his college decisions and he was not thinking about other factors at the time. He says, “those things really didn’t appeal to me. It was more about can I get into the school that I want to pursue my career in?” Jacob also mentioned that it wouldn’t have necessarily impacted his decision. If he saw the information on a website, he would have been like “cool” but it would have not been a driving factor in his decision to apply and attend.

For students like Fred, the designation would have influenced his decision to attend the university. He stated, “I guess that's actually another good reason why I wanted to go to UH because if I were to go to.” He said that he would not feel “at home” if he attended a school that
did not have a large amount of Hispanic/Latinx students, which is one of the reasons why he decided to attend UH. Lizzette and Victoria would have also considered the school because of its designation. Victoria mentioned, “but overall I think that would have definitely kind of influenced my decision if I would have known and it would have actually regained the confidence that yes, UH is the school I belong in.”

The students also discussed their expectations of the institution given the designation. Blast expressed that his expectations of the institution involve fairness. He posed a few questions related to fairness, “Like are they being fair in this arena of people? Are they playing fair in this arena of people? Who gets to shine and the shine? Who gets to do what I get? I guess those are my expectations to be honest.” He also stated, “It becomes high because even though I'm Hispanic, and I want to rejoice with my Hispanic crew, I always want to learn more about other cultures and I feel like they should push initiatives for that to take place as well.” This was important to Blast as he described the importance of stepping outside of your comfort zone and learning how to interact with others. Tony, on the other hand, shared that his expectations are “pretty high” and that Latinx students should have “one of the largest graduating percentages” as they are one of the largest student populations on campus.

**Provide More Financial Resources**

In addition to describing their understanding of an HSI, students were asked to discuss support services that are necessary for supporting Latinx students as a way for enhancing the climate for diversity at the university. An important area for supporting student success included increasing financial support for Latinx students in the form of scholarships and financial aid. Increasing financial aid resources was especially important for students as several of them
identified financial burdens. For instance, Tony shared the following when discussing services that could better support Latinx students:

The money. I feel like they should, uh, try to give out more money to, uh, Hispanic students because, you know, uh, I, uh, I've had troubles with my financial aid but that's different reasons, but yeah, I just feel like they should just try to give out more money if they're getting more money, let's try and give out more money to Latino students. He also mentioned, “I feel like financial stability is a major component. Cause… most, as my knowledge is, most Latinx students are first-generation students.” He described that many Latinx students do not have the privilege of getting financial assistance from their families, so the university should increase financial aid resources for students.

Jacob also talked about financial aid for Latinx students and the reality that first-generation college students may face by not having parents that have not gone to college. He stated:

Financial aid I guess cause … being a Hispanic, you know, doesn't necessarily mean that you have the money to pay for college. Cause there's a lot of Hispanics don't… a lot of their parents don't go to school. They haven't gone to college. And so, the financial aid office I feel like is extremely important.

Students also described the importance of increasing resources that support institutional efforts, including departmental funding for Hispanic studies programs and student organization funding, especially since the university is an HSI. Gloria stated, “So I feel like if a university is given that designation, it should do like a little bit more than just like funding opportunities.” She mentioned that the institution should invest in the faculty and Mexican American Studies program, especially due to the limited course offerings. She stated, “So like I just ran out of classes to take with CMAS… it's just kind of like you're really great about like funding certain opportunities, but you're also like underfunding like departments that we probably need.”

Gloria also discussed providing more resources outside of the Honors College, especially considering that she has been exposed to many opportunities as an Honors student. She stated, “I
feel like again, I do get like a ton of opportunities but it's... I feel like when it comes to my classes themselves that are not inside of these niche pockets, they're still kind of a long ways to go.” She posed a thoughtful question about expanding resources, “So it's just like if you're going to be an HSI, like institution… wouldn't you do more than just inside of these like pockets?”

In addition, Lizzette and Victoria discussed increasing resources for student organizations. Lizzette started by stating, “I get that also universities are considered businesses. So, I get that accessing that new funding. But then that also increases the expectation you have to serve your population better because now you have more resources.” She also added, “So there's specific offices on campus that deal with like giving funds to organizations and those organizations can be culturally based or not.”

Similarly, Victoria expressed, “I feel like inclusion should be expanding as well and maybe providing more organizations more resources.” She also discussed more intentionally around communicating available resources, “Just make sure to kind of showcase them because those resources might be out there but we might not know about them.” Generally, Victoria felt like the institution has done a great job of putting efforts in place to support Latinx students, but she shared, “but as time progresses I'm pretty sure those numbers are going to increase in Hispanics, and I feel like I hope that their resources expand as well and amount of effort and willing to help also improve or it goes up.”

**Increase Community Outreach Efforts around Latinx Students**

Two students mentioned the need for more community-based efforts that focus on Latinx outreach. The students felt that as an HSI, the university should do more to reach more Latinx students in the community with more consideration of the schools and neighborhoods where recruitment takes place. Tony emphasized that the city of Houston has a “very large Latino-
based community” and that the university could be more impactful though community outreach particularly in inner-city high schools. As a Latinx and low-income student from the inner-city of Houston, he had first-hand experience of not seeing UH at recruiting events at his high school. He felt that the university could be doing more to reach students from similar backgrounds. He expressed that he stated:

I feel like the University of Houston doesn't even recruit at inner city high schools for Latinx cause I feel like my experience is this difference between…there's a cultural difference between Latinx students from inner city and Latinx students from suburbs just from my interactions and cause it's just a cultural difference, you know?

Tony also discussed that although he lived right down the street from the university, he never saw recruiters visit his high school. He shared:

I remember all the college fairs I've had… going back to high school. I never saw the University of Houston there. And they're down the street from where…My high school is literally down the street from here. I never saw them, so I feel like maybe just trying to get University of Houston to recruit more inner-city kids, uh, in the Latino community.

Victoria also explained the importance of community outreach efforts from the perspective of a first-generation college student. As a mentor to high school students, she interacts with students who she says do not have the “higher education mentality” whether that is influenced by interactions with their parents or that they do not think it is “reachable.” She suggested that the university not only try to engage students within the university but reaching out to high school students. She suggested targeting at-risk high school students:

At risk high schools and maybe starting from there and that will definitely kind of show that they're willing to go the extra mile for these Latin students so they can see that college is accessible and while they're at the university just kind of maybe do a program or something in which they keep track of all these students that are coming through and make sure that they are being successful in classes but outside of class as well.

The importance of reaching students in areas that consist of prominently underserved students from Latinx backgrounds was seen as a priority that the UH should invest more time.
While the university may have similar initiatives in place, these students reflected on their own experiences as a Latinx and first-generation college students that many students in the city of Houston could find relatable.

**Latinx Faculty/Staff Representation**

Finally, students also discussed increasing Latinx faculty and staff representation as part of enhancing diversity and inclusion efforts and supporting Latinx students. These efforts were emphasized as being integral to the HSI designation, but it is still one area that should be addressed when considering the university at-large.

Fred discussed that he would like to see more Latinx representation among the faculty, staff, and administration. Fred emphasized the importance of having more faculty and staff from Latinx backgrounds who Latinx students could relate to more. He shared, “It would be better to see that faculty and administrators that come from [Latinx] background because then you can help them relate to the actual student, tell them these are the resources that you need.”

Pablo also expressed similar opinions about the representation of Latinx faculty and staff. He noted that he has not interacted with many and that they are probably mostly within the cultural departments; however, he stated:

I think we do need more diversity or maybe not more diversity because we do have a pretty diverse staff. I would say more Latinx and Hispanic representation within our staff, faculty. Cause we do have them. I guess our bigger representation in every field because most teachers, most professionals I've read, I've had, were either, you know, Anglo, European descent, or African.

Lizzette discussed that she has not encountered any Latinx faculty or staff during her time at UH. Most of her experience with faculty from that have diverse racial backgrounds are African American. She stated, “I have…again the contact with the most, they're African American. So, it's like nice to see that there's representation in administration as well.” While she
felt that having faculty from other backgrounds was also a good in terms of representation, she also agreed that more Latinx faculty and staff could benefit students.

Victoria also noted limited encounters with Latinx faculty and staff on campus, since she has only had one Latinx professor during her time at UH and that she thought that she would have had more Latinx faculty considering the diversity of the campus. She stated, “I would have thought there would been more, especially knowing how diverse that this school is, but I feel like maybe it's not as a version of Latin aspects of having more Latinos in, but they do have other nationalities as professors.” She shared that having more Latinx professors could help students who “don’t have as much confidence in their Latin culture to kind of express themselves a little better” and to simply see other professionals around campus as an example to look up to.

Gloria discussed the lack of Latinx faculty in the Honor’s college and how most of her professors are “old White men.” She described that in one of the introductory courses, there is a rotation that includes 15 professors, one of which is a “Person of Color”. She commented that there are some discussions about the need for more Faculty of Color in the Honors College taking place in incremental steps. She pointed out the lack of diversity among the faculty to the college dean:

I know [a professor] definitely went up to the Dean and basically told them like, you I know you're not like a racist or anything, but you need to stop hiring and promoting people who look like you when there’s like a ton of other people who are also applying for these jobs.

Gloria said that “it had never crossed his mind...that underlying bias in his like hiring practices.” She also shared concern for professors who receive tenure and shared an instance of faculty member who left because they did not receive a promotion. She explained:
Also, professors who get tenure… I know that one professor my freshman year, she ended up leaving because she actually had her Ph.D. She had been working with the college for a really long time and this other professor who just had his masters got tenure over her and he had just gotten there like a year or two ago. And so that really kind of ruffled… that caused a lot of animosity and so she ended up leaving.

The lack of Latinx faculty and staff was an important aspect of the institution for some of the students; however, some students noted that the identity of faculty and staff was not essential as long as the students were respected. For instance, Jacob noted that the need for diverse faculty and staff was not important. He stated, “I don't necessarily seem like it's important for them to identify like I identify, but it's important to know that they respect it regardless.”

**Summary**

This theme focused on the students’ understanding of the HSI and support services that were discussed as important given the HSI status. Generally, the students were unaware of UH’s designation as an HSI. Some of the students noted that awareness of the HSI status would have positively influenced their decisions to attend the university, while this status would have not impacted the decision for others. Overall, students lacked a general awareness of the HSI designation but described that their expectations had increased once learning about the designation primarily in ways to better support Latinx students, which included increasing financial resources, increasing community outreach efforts for Latinx students, and increasing Latinx faculty and staff representation.

**Conclusion**

The interviews with the eight participants illustrated some of the experiences that Latinx students have at UH. Students described their experiences in and outside of the classroom and also described their understanding of HSIs. The interviews revealed that the students’ experiences with the campus climate was overall positive. They discussed the importance of
building community and establishing meaningful relationships with their peers. Involvement was an important factor for students’ sense of belonging and connection on campus. In addition, students found relationships with faculty, staff, and administrators as significant.

Although the students mostly described their experience as positive, they also communicated some aspects of the campus that require more attention. A majority of the students mentioned that they have not experienced any forms of discrimination, while others pointed out instances of hostility and exclusion. Some students also critiqued institutional efforts in place for Latinx students and would like to see more done to serve Latinx students.

Compositional diversity was mentioned throughout the interviews, especially as the students noted that the institution regularly shares their status as the second most diverse college campus in the United States. The diversity of the campus body influences diverse perspectives in the classroom and interactions with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. While the student body is racially and ethnically diverse, the students want to see diversity reflected in the faculty and staff especially as it relates to Latinx representation. The students also recommended that the university move beyond a focus on diversity and start focusing more on inclusion. The focus on inclusion within the Latinx community was also significant, since events and educational opportunities tend to focus on Mexican American heritage.

The interviews also revealed that students lacked awareness about the university’s status as an HSI. While the status was not significant for some students, several of the students noted that the designation would have influenced their decision to attend the university. This was important for students who were seeking institutions with diversity, especially among the Latinx community. Increased awareness of the HSI status raised student expectations for the institution
to do more for Latinx students, especially in the areas of financial support, community outreach, and faculty and staff representation.

Finally, the interviews revealed that the student’s Latinx, first-generation college student, and commuter identities were important to their overall experience. Although the primary focus of the interviews was to understand campus climate experiences and the student’s awareness of the HSI status from the lens of their Latinx identity, the intersections of the first-generation college student and commuter status significantly has impacted their ability to navigate the campus and overall experience as a student.
CHAPTER 5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine Latinx students’ perceptions of the campus climate for diversity at a Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs). In addition, this study focused on the students’ knowledge and awareness of the University of Houston’s HSI designation and their expectations of institutional diversity and inclusion given the HSI status. The following research questions were used for this study:

1. How do Latinx students describe the campus climate of a four-year public HSI within curricular and co-curricular settings?

2. What understanding do Latinx students have of the institution’s HSI designation, and how does their understanding influence their expectations of institutional diversity and inclusion?

A thorough analysis of participant interviews revealed five major findings that answered the research questions. The themes that emerged from the analysis include: a) The Good and the Bad: Perceptions of the Campus Climate, Diversity, and Inclusion; b) Saliency of Identities Shapes Colleges Experiences; c) Interpersonal Relationships Helps Build Community; d) Classroom Diversity Shapes Learning Experiences; and e) Awareness of HSIs and Supporting Latinx Students. This chapter summarizes these findings in connection to existing literature. In addition, this chapter discusses implications of theory in relation to the Multicontextual Model for Diverse Learning Environments (MMDLE) (Hurtado et al., 2012). Finally, the chapter includes a discussion about implications for practice, recommendations for future research, and the limitations of this study.
Interpretation of Findings

Latinx students attending the University of Houston shared their perceptions about the campus climate for diversity and their understanding of HSIs. The findings highlight the significance of the students’ identities and conditions that shape their curricular and cocurricular experiences, such as interpersonal relationships, classroom diversity, and areas to support Latinx students attending HSIs.

The Good and the Bad: Perceptions of the Campus Climate, Diversity, and Inclusion

The first finding in this study discusses student perceptions of the campus climate, diversity, and inclusion. The students described their overall experiences at the university as positive and perceived the campus environment to be welcoming for Latinx students. Previous literature has shown that students who feel valued and perceive the campus environment as welcoming are more likely to be retained and persist (Hurtado et al., 2012; Strayhorn, 2018). In describing the campus environment, the students highlighted their appreciation for the compositional diversity of the student body. This finding is consistent with research that acknowledges that Latinx students are drawn to institutions with greater student diversity (Cuellar and Johnson-Ahorlu, 2016; Hurtado, 1992). While the students appreciated the university’s diversity, they also perceived the university as “boasting” about its ranking as the second most diverse college in the United States and emphasized the need to focus on more inclusion efforts. Creating diverse educational and social conditions that lead to success must move beyond the compositional diversity of the student body and integrate efforts that focus more on inclusion and cross-cultural interactions (Hurtado et al., 1998).

In addition, a majority of the students in the study described that they have never felt or observed incidents of discrimination. Hurtado (1992) asserted that institutions that have a greater
number of Latinx students are often perceived as less hostile; however, two students described incidents of hostility and exclusion and two students referenced segregation among students. According to Cuellar and Johnson-Ahorlu (2016), “students of color may simultaneously perceive the campus climate positively and negatively at campuses where they may comprise a substantial proportion of the student population” (p. 149). Therefore, although the majority of the students discussed their experiences as mainly positive, it is not uncommon for Latinx students to have both positive and negative perceptions of the campus climate.

Saliency of Identities Shapes College Experiences

The interviews revealed that the participants’ identities as Latinx, first-generation college student, and commuter students were important to their overall experience. The saliency of these identities was apparent in their perceptions of the campus climate and how they navigated the campus climate. A majority of the students expressed pride in their Latinx identity and recognized the institution as being inclusive of Latinx identities through celebrations of Latinx culture and opportunities for engaging with other Latinx students. On the other hand, some of the students acknowledged that they would like to see more efforts that focus on Latinx students.

Two students discussed the ability to speak Spanish with no judgment. They felt affinity to other campus members who spoke Spanish or appreciated their ability to speak Spanish. They associated speaking Spanish with home and maintaining aspects of their culture. In a study including seven Latino fraternity members at an HSI, Guardia and Evans (2008) found that speaking Spanish and Spanglish contributed to the participants’ ethnic identity development and strong ties to their culture. Although two students discussed their comfort with speaking Spanish on campus, one student identified as a non-Spanish speaking Latino and discussed his negative experiences with the Latinx community as a result. This student felt excluded by the Latinx
community for not being able to speak Spanish and found stronger community among the Black community. Bedolla (2003) asserted that “bilingualism and monolingualism would be less of an issue in the community if they did not have such significant effects on Latino feelings of self-esteem, socioeconomic mobility and life chances. Latinos are very aware of the value attached to each language, and how it affects the stereotypes of Latinos more generally” (p.275). Thus, while Spanish is often attributed to Latinx identity, non-Spanish speakers can struggle with feelings of belonging if not accepted by the Latinx community as a result.

The first-generation college student status was also a salient identity for several of the students in the study. Seven out of the eight students identified as first-generation college students, and they frequently discussed some of the challenges associated with being the first person in their families to attend college or continuing the college-going tradition after one of their siblings attended college. A common theme among these students were the struggles associated with figuring out how to navigate college and identifying resources that would assist them in their success.

In addition, some of the students referenced the responsibility that comes with being a generation college student, such as the pressure to be successful or supporting family members back home. Therefore, the institutions commitment to serving first-generation college students was seen as a priority for the students and shaped their perceptions of the campus climate. Woosley and Shepard (2011) found that “students' perceptions of the campus environment were especially important in explaining first-generation students' ability to adjust to university life in a variety of ways (e.g., socially, academically, homesickness-related distress, and institutional satisfaction)” (p. 711). Furthermore, in an exploratory qualitative study on enrollment and persistence of high-achieving first-generation college Latinx students attending Hispanic-Serving
Institutions, Vega (2016) reported that first-generation college students experience increased pressures of responsibility to be successful. The author also highlighted the expectations that students placed on the institution to help them be successful in achieving outcomes, such as graduation and leading a better quality of life (Vega, 2016).

Lastly, some of the participants discussed how being a commuter student shape their collegiate experience. They referenced the challenges of navigating the physical campus due to its size and the need to get connected in order to feel a stronger sense of belonging within the campus community. The need to feel connected is essential as building community on campus can increase the likelihood of student retention and completion (Tinto, 1993). The students also discussed challenges of commuting to campus due to length of travel time and issues with parking. In addition, students commented on the challenges of attending university events due to the scheduling. This finding is consistent with previous research that concluded that these challenges impact “collegiate sense of community” of commuter students (Kirk & Lewis, 2015). Kirk and Lewis (2015) noted that “students with higher [collegiate sense of community] were more likely to report improved affect, greater self-efficacy, and higher life satisfaction” (p. 57). As a large, urban, public institution, the University of Houston’s demonstrated commitment to commuter students can impact the sense of community that commuter students feel, especially the students in the study who described the desire to establish a stronger sense of community outside of simply attending class.

**Interpersonal Relationships Help Students Build Community**

Students emphasized the importance of forming interpersonal relationships as essential to building community. This finding was particularly notable for students because of their strong communal values that are closely tied to their Latinx identity. Some of the students described the
Latinx community as “united” and valuing community. Soto and Deemer (2018) also found that Latinx students place a strong value on communal goals in efforts to “assume social roles that help to maintain the integrity of the family and/or community unit” (p. 37). Students feel more valued in their campus environments when they develop a network of support of peers, faculty, and staff (Strayhorn, 2018; Wolf et al., 2017).

The students referenced that relationships with their peers were the most meaningful among all of their relationships on campus. They often commented on the fact that their peers could relate to what they were going through and were supportive in their journey throughout their college experience. Forming a community of peers often took place through student organization involvement. Several of the students expressed that without organizational involvement, they would not feel as connected on campus. Students joined organizations that connected them with other Latinx students or that were based on professional, social, religious, or academic interests. Connecting with other students and building friendships through involvement helped students achieve a stronger sense of belonging on campus.

Previous research has found that student who are engaged in involvement opportunities are more likely to persist and graduate (Tinto, 1993); however, social belonging and integration is noted as more complex for Latinx students than traditional integration models suggest (Núñez, 2009). In addition, the students described interacting with peers from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. This finding aligns with research that has concluded that students of color attending institutions with greater student diversity are more likely to have friendships with individuals from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds (Park, 2014).

Lastly, students highlighted their relationships with faculty and staff. Several students talked about the value of relationships with advisors, especially as they played a pivotal role in
their overall success and course planning. The students found these relationships to be positive and necessary for aiding them in navigating university systems, such as advising and financial assistance. Some of the students formed strong relationships with their academic advisors, student organizations, and supervisors, while others frequently engaged with custodial, dining, and maintenance staff.

Although most of the students referenced relationships with staff and administrators, a few referenced relationships with faculty. Some of the students found their faculty to be accessible, resourceful, and helpful. One student acknowledged the importance of her relationships with faculty who served as mentors. The faculty invested in her research interest and exposed her to scholarship opportunities. Torres and Hernandez (2009) noted that mentor and advisor relationships can make a positive impact on decisions to persist through college. Previous research also supports that the role of faculty relationships in and outside of the classroom positively influences academic achievement at Hispanic-Serving Institutions (DeFreitas & Bravo, 2012). Faculty who develop relationships with their students can assist with college adjustment for Latinx students (Schneider & Ward, 2003). Supporting Latinx students with college adjustment is incredibly important as many of the students in the study identified as first-generation college students and commuter students.

Classroom Diversity Shapes Learning Experiences

Classroom diversity played an important role in shaping learning experiences for the Latinx students in the study. Students acknowledged that classroom diversity mirrored the racial and ethnic diversity of the university. This provided them with an opportunity to engage in a learning environment with individuals who shared similar cultural backgrounds and students with backgrounds different than themselves. For many of the students, the compositional
diversity within the classroom reflected their classroom experiences in high school; however, there was more diversity within the Latinx community at the university resulting in increased learning and engagement with Latinx students from different ethnic backgrounds. Previous research suggest that compositional diversity is only one aspect of learning within the classroom (Denson & Chang, 2009). Incorporating intentional pedological methods that incorporate diversity-related activities and emphasize cross-cultural interactions is necessary for achieving diverse educational outcomes (Hurtado, 2001).

Classroom diversity also invited diverse perspectives within the classroom from peers. One student described this experience as a “cultural diffusion.” On the other hand, two students were conflicted with the diversity perspectives of their faculty. One student described one of her professors as using “problematic language” while another noted that his professors exhibited a bias when discussing certain social issues. Supportive academic environments and faculty interest can influence students’ perceptions of the campus environment and affiliation with the institution (Maestas et al., 2007). Faculty who take stronger interest in creating educational environments that take into consideration the needs of students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds can influence how students perceive the climate within the classroom (Hurtado, 2001; Hurtado et al., 2012).

**Awareness of HSI Designation and Supporting Latinx Students**

The final theme that emerged from the study indicated that students lacked a general understanding of HSIs. The findings revealed that only two students were familiar with HSIs, and only one student knew of UH’s status as an HSI when they applied to the university. This finding supports a previous study that found that Latinx students who enrolled in an HSI were unfamiliar with the designation (Santiago, 2007).
Students explained that familiarity of the university’s HSI status would have positively influenced some of their college choice decisions, while the status would have not impacted the decisions of some of the students. The students who shared that awareness of the HSI designation would have influenced their college choice decision discussed their interest in attending an institution with a high percentage of Latinx students. In addition, all but two of the students intentionally decided to attend UH because of proximity to home, which was one of the primary factors for attending UH. This supports previous research that shows that Latinx students attending four-year HSIs are more likely to place a higher significance on attending institution’s closer to home (Núñez & Bower, 2011). Santiago (2007) also noted that access, location, and affordability are factors that may lead to Latinx student decisions to attend HSIs.

Overall, students lacked a general awareness of the HSI designation but described that their expectations related to ways that support Latinx students had increased once learning about the designation. These expectations for support included increasing financial resources, increasing community outreach efforts for Latinx students, and increasing Latinx faculty and staff representation. One of the primary aspects of increasing financial resources was increased access to financial resources. Musoba and Krichevskiy (2014) examined the experiences of Latinx students attending a predominately commuter HSI. The authors found that “Latino students who received larger dollar amounts of financial aid in their first semester were more likely to graduate” (Musoba & Krichevskiy, 2014, p.13). In general, access to financial aid influences completion rates for Latinx students (Cabrera et al., 1992; Perna, 2006).

Furthermore, students discussed intentional community outreach efforts for Latinx students specifically in high schools with Latinx students from low-income, inner-city, and first-generation college student backgrounds. Santiago (2007) suggested that Latinx community
outreach efforts include Latinx college students in the process because they share similar experiences with the students who are at the center of outreach initiatives. Lastly, increasing Latinx faculty and staff representation is an area that the students found to be important for supporting students and necessary as the university is an HSI. The students described the importance of having faculty and staff that shared their cultural backgrounds and can relate to their personal experiences, especially among the faculty. Contextual knowledge of students’ experiences can influence how faculty approach learning in the classroom and supporting students (Gonzales, 2014, 2015; McCracken & Ortiz, 2013).

**Implications for Theory**

The Multicontextual Model for Diverse Learning Environments (MMDLE) (Hurtado et al., 2012) guided this study. The model focuses on the interactions and influences of macrolevel and microlevel contexts and dimensions on the campus climate for diversity. The research questions were framed around the Climate for Diversity aspect of the model, which is embedded in the Institutional Context of the model. The Climate for Diversity is shaped by cocurricular and curricular processes that center on student identity and is influenced by institutional level dimensions and individual level dimensions. The institutional level includes historical, organizational/policy, and compositional diversity dimensions. The individual level focuses on psychological and behavioral dimensions. Together, these dimensions and processes influence diverse learning environments and educational outcomes of students, including, a) habits of mind/skills for lifelong learning; b) competencies for a multicultural work; and c) retention and achievement. A result of achieving these educational outcomes in turn fulfills social equity, democratic outcomes, and economic outcomes.
The following section discusses the relevancy of the Institutional Context of the model in relation to the findings by first addressing institutional level dimensions and individual dimensions. In addition, the discussion highlights how the findings relate to the student identity, curricular, cocurricular, and processes elements of the Climate of Diversity within the Institutional Context of the MMDLE.

**Institutional Level Dimensions of the Climate for Diversity**

According to Hurtado et al. (2012), “the campus climate is a multidimensional concept that is comprised of institutional-level dimensions such as the institution’s historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion; its compositional diversity of students, faculty and staff; and organizational structures” (p. 58). These dimensions in historical, organizational/policy, and compositional dimensions. Connections to these dimensions emerged throughout discussions with the students in the study primarily within aspects of the organizational/structural dimensions and compositional dimensions.

Aspects of the organizational/structural dimension emerged through discussions with the students. This dimension “identifies structures and processes that embed group-based privilege and oppression or confer resources that often go unquestioned, such as tenure processes, decision-making processes regarding recruitment and hiring, budget allocations, curriculum, and other institutional practices and policies” (Hurtado et al., 2012). This dimension also focuses on institutional policies and practices that shape the climate for diversity. Shifting demographics and macrosystem levels influences are example of forces that shape institutional policies. In 2012, the University of Houston was recognized as a Hispanic-Serving Institution as a result of increased Latinx enrollment. Although this is an enrollment-driven versus mission-driven aspect of the university, the move toward an HSI establishes an institutional commitment to serving
Latinx students that requires ongoing assessment of experiences of Latinx students and policies and practices that shape their educational and social outcomes.

For instance, the students referenced the lack of Latinx faculty and staff at UH and the need to hire more Latinx faculty and staff to be representative of the growing Latinx student body at the university. One student spoke candidly about the lack of tenure of Latinx professors in her program and revealed that the professor left the institution because of lack of promotion opportunities. Lack of Faculty of Color in higher education is a consequence of long-standing systemic issues that have not prioritized the recruitment and retention of Faculty of Color. Intentional strategies for assessing existing policies and hiring practices are necessary for improving organizational conditions that directly impact opportunities for Faculty of Color which in turn impacts student learning experiences.

**Compositional Dimension**

The compositional dimension proved to be an important characteristic of the university to students within the study. “The compositional dimension refers to the numerical representation of individuals from diverse social identities among students, faculty, staff, and administrators” (Hurtado et al., 2012, p. 64). The diversity of the study body is an aspect of the university that attracted several of the students to apply to attend the university; however, the students also noted few faculty, staff, and administrators from Latinx backgrounds.

The student diversity at UH was reflected in classroom settings, student organizations, and university events. Compositional diversity of an institution is found to influence perceptions of the campus climate for diversity. Students from traditionally underserved racial and ethnic backgrounds are more likely to experience incidents of bias and discrimination. Whereas, students at institutions with greater diversity are more likely have positive experiences with the
campus climate. This is especially the case of Latinx students who attend institutions with more diversity (Park, 2009); however, there are instances when Latinx students can have both positive and negative experiences at institutions with greater diversity, which was the reality for some of the students in this study.

**Individual Levels of the Climate for Diversity**

Behavioral and psychological dimensions also influence the campus climate for diversity within the Institutional Context. The behavioral dimension of the climate of diversity refers to the “content, frequency, and quality of interactions on campus between social groups and their members” (Hurtado et al., 2012, p.70). This dimension focuses on formal interactions and informal interactions. Formal interactions consist of “campus-facilitated interactions that may occur in the classroom or cocurricular settings and are the result of intentional educational practice” (Hurtado et al., 2012, p.70). Whereas, informal interactions are those that “occur in the everyday interactions between individuals outside of campus-designed education activities” (Hurtado et al., 2012, p.70).

The findings demonstrate that these interactions were among some of the most important experiences for the students, particularly their interactions with peers. Some of the students discussed informal interactions with their peers outside of the classroom and their experience of building friendship groups that were not developed through the involvement of organizations or within the classroom. They built these friendships in residence halls or hanging around campus. However, campus-facilitated cocurricular activities are where many of the students described building friendships. Involvement in student organizations helped students make personal connections on campus and helped them form long-lasting friendships.
In addition, the psychological dimension “involves individuals’ perceptions of the environment, views of intergroup relations, and perceptions of discrimination or racial conflict within the institutional context” (Hurtado et al., 2012, p. 70). Students perceived the campus environment as welcoming and positive and that their interactions with others were mainly positive. Most of the students commented on not experiencing or observing bias and discrimination on campus, while a few described instances of hostility and exclusion. One student described challenges of not discussing important social issues surrounding historical issues of racism and enslavement while on a university-sponsored educational trip. She was one of two students of color on a trip and felt as though these issues were overlooked by her other classmates and the professor. In reference to intergroup relationships, two students did mention their experience of observing segregation among groups on campus, although they did not discuss the impacts of segregation on their own experiences on campus.

**Student Identity**

The Multicontextual Model for Diverse Learning Environments (MMDLE) focuses on social identities of students and emphasizes the importance of multiplicity of student identity. The model suggests that “the importance of context in increasing the salience of multiple social identities speaks to the ability of educators to shape DLE to facilitate social identity salience and development in college, and support the development of related outcomes” (Hurtado et al., 2012, p. 74). In the case of the students in the study, their Latinx, first-generation college student, and commuter identities shaped their college experiences. These identities influenced their perceptions of college support systems in place to support their success in college. Considering the dynamic identities of college students, “Institutions must also broaden their definitions of
diversity as a compelling educational interest without dismissing distinct social identities altogether” (Hurtado et al., 2012, p.47).

The Curricular Context

The Curricular Context of the Climate for Diversity is comprised of instructor’s identity: pedagogy/teaching methods, and course content. The instructor’s identity was discussed by students through the perspective of needing more faculty from Latinx backgrounds and the lack of experiences that students had with Latinx professors. One student noted they had not had a Latinx professor because they are mostly in the social sciences, while another student discussed that most her Latinx professors were in her courses in the Mexican American Studies Program. Another student commented that she valued that her non-Latinx professor appreciated was interested in cultural background which made her feel comfortable and valued in that class.

Two students mentioned teaching methods and course content. They commented on the ways that faculty approached conversations about issues related to diversity. In one instance, a student referenced that the language used by her professor felt like a personal attack on her community. Another student described a one professor who exhibited a bias when discussing a social issue by one of their professors. The availability of course content related to various Latinx ethnic groups was also referenced by a student. These comments addressed by the students reinforce the importance of diverse faculty and intentional teaching methods and course content that considers the contextual backgrounds of students.

The Cocurricular Context

The Cocurricular Context of the Climate for Diversity encompasses staff identity, practice, and programing. Like faculty, the importance of a diverse staff is noted as essential within this model as interactions with staff help facilitate student success outcomes through
support and engagement programs. UH likely has more diverse representation among student affairs than faculty as research suggest that there is more diversity in these divisions than academic affairs (Hurtado et al., 2012); however, most of the students commented that their interactions with diverse staff often took place when engaging with custodial staff, dining staff, and maintenance staff.

Institutional practices and programming were also referenced by students. The model suggests that High Impact Practices (HIPs) are forms of practices that are most beneficial to students. Although most of the students did not discuss in length their experiences with these types of programs, some of the students described experiential learning activities, such as the access to internship opportunities provided by the institution. The students also acknowledged that the institution offers programs that are supportive of Latinx students, such as cultural events. Although many of the events discussed by students were organized by student groups, they mentioned the Center for Diversity & Inclusion as a supportive office for providing guidance for student groups when developing these types of initiatives.

Processes

According to the Hurtado et al. (2012) “Processes occur at the intersection of student and educator’s identities, and intentional practices (content, pedagogy, practice, and programming), that advance both diversity and learning to achieve essential outcomes” (p. 83). These processes that occur are “socialization or resocialization, validation, and building a sense of community through encouraging students’ sense of belonging” (p. 83). The most prevalent of these processes mentioned by students building a sense of community. The students expressed feeling the strongest sense of belonging when getting involved in student organizations and building connections with their peers.
Implications for Practice

The findings from the study inform recommendations for practice that can enhance the campus climate for diversity at the UH and student success approaches for Latinx students attending an HSI. The recommendations include, a) student success programming; b) enhance inclusion efforts on campus; c) ongoing assessment of the campus climate; d) increase Latinx faculty and staff representation; d) faculty and staff development, and e) more visibility of HSI designation.

Recommendation 1: Student Success Programming

Programming that incorporates high-impact practices is often linked to student success outcomes (Kuh, 2008). Adopting high-impact practice (HIPs) activities that involve a considerable time to meaningful educational tasks, opportunities that engage students with faculty and peers, and ensure the application of knowledge to real-world experiences and problems can help with enhancing student success and transforming campus environments (Hurtado et al., 2012; Kuh, 2008; Skipper, 2017). First-year seminars and experiences, learning communities, common intellectual experiences, and global/diversity learning are examples of HIPs. These high-impact practices can incorporate diversity-related outcomes and often provide opportunities for engaging with peers and faculty from different backgrounds (Skipper, 2017). Learning not only occurs during educational activities but in the interaction with others.

One recommendation is to expand first-year seminar courses for all incoming students. The University of Houston currently offers an Exploratory Studies preparatory major “designed to provide undeclared students with resources to guide them in making confident, informed career and academic decisions” (UH, 2019). The courses include University Experience and College Success. Although some of the colleges at UH have integrated courses for first-year
students, expanding these types of course for all students could benefit more students. Many of the students in the study identified as first-generation college students and commuter students, and these courses can assist with college adjustments and helping students build connections with classmates in smaller group settings that reflect learning communities.

In addition, the University of Houston hosts orientation for all incoming first-year students and transfer students. Another recommendation is incorporating first-generation college student and commuter tracks within orientation programming as an optional opportunity for students from these backgrounds to attend workshops that would address their specific needs and connect with other students who share similar backgrounds. The students can learn more about available services and resources available at the University of Houston, including the Commuter Student Services office, first-generation college student services available through the Counseling and Psychological Services, and additional financial aid and scholarship opportunities.

**Recommendation 2: Enhance Inclusion Efforts on Campus**

The documented impacts of internal and external forces influencing campus climate requires policies and institutional support that prioritize inclusion of all campus community members (Hurtado et al. 1999). Understanding institutional response in situations that present challenges to the campus climate can be of value to university leaders attempting to improve environments for student success. Systems for reporting bias incidents and acts of discrimination must be in place for students, faculty, and staff. Otherwise, incidents can go unreported and result in no investigation (Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012). Reporting systems should be easily accessible, and individuals in place to lead investigations should demonstrate fairness.
In addition, the university has established its role as one of the leading universities for student diversity; however, the students noted a stronger need to focus on inclusion efforts. Practices that focus on inclusion are also necessary for enacting an inclusive environment for all campus community members. Braxton et al. (2013), proposed policies and procedures that should be adopted by institutions that reinforce an institution’s commitment to inclusion. The authors suggest that institutions:

- Establish campus policies and procedures that promote racial equality and understanding and the equitable treatment of all members of the campus community and that make prejudicial behaviors and racial discrimination unacceptable.;
- Uniformly enforce campus policies and procedures that make prejudicial behaviors and racial discrimination unacceptable (p.46)

One of the students mentioned her concerns with individuals who utilize the free speech zones on campus. The American Association of State Colleges & Universities (AASC&U) (2018) ranked the issue of free speech as one of the top ten issues in higher education for 2018 (AASC&U, 2018). Thus, universities must reexamine free speech and peaceful assembly policies. Yet, institutional leaders face a challenge in examining such policies as some can draw attention from state and national policymakers. Although the issue of free speech has drawn attention from state and national leaders, Braxton et al. (2013) asserts that institutions and their members must demonstrate a commitment to campus inclusion and that institutions must be clear on policies regarding public speakers. Institutional leaders should clearly communicate these messages. Specifically, he noted, “clearly communicate in speeches by campus leaders and printed and electronic materials that the institution is committed to racial equality and understanding and the equitable treatment of all members of the campus environment” (p. 46).
He also suggested that institutions use new student orientation programs as platforms to review the campus commitment to prejudice reduction and anti-discrimination.

In addition to intentional campus policies, UH should continue to focus on educational opportunities that prioritize Latinx heritage that are inclusive of multiple ethnic backgrounds. The university currently offers a minor in Mexican American Studies through the Center for Mexican American studies. Undergraduate and graduate degrees are also available in Spanish through the Hispanic Studies Program. The state of Texas has a high percentage of individuals of Mexican heritage, but it is critical to increase opportunities for students who are not of Mexican heritage as the university enrolls students from diverse Latinx backgrounds. Such programs are available through the Center for Diversity & Inclusion, which offers multiple workshops on a variety of topics. Previous topics include Migration, Social Hierarchies, & Belonging: Linking the Dominican Republic and Switzerland and Know your Rights, which focused on immigration policy. These are examples of programs that address multiple issues faced by Latinx students and multiple identities. The continuation of these types of programs can help students from Latinx backgrounds feel welcome and included on campus.

**Recommendation 3: Ongoing Assessment of the Campus Climate**

Institutional action to address campus climate issues should involve ongoing assessment to guide practices and policies. Harper & Hurtado (2007) advocate that “data gathered through ongoing assessment of campus racial climates guide conversations and reflective examinations to overcome discomfort with race, plan for deep levels of institutional transformation, and achieve excellence in fostering racially inclusive environments” (p. 21). The use of a campus climate survey is a form of assessment that should be adopted by institutions.
According to King et al. (2016), “these assessments can inform a continuous process of planning, implementing, and reflecting on progress made and lessons learned. Performing assessments that address unique aspects of the campus community can ensure they align with institutions’ efforts to improve their campus climates and student outcomes” (p. 166). Institutions may develop local instruments or utilize nationally validated instruments to assess campus climate on campus. Questions addressing campus climate might also be embedded in other national surveys. For example, the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE) is administered to first-year and senior students and measures several engagement indicators, one of which includes “supportive campus environment” that captures aspects of the campus climate. Finally, in gathering the responses of the assessment, it is important that administrators “close the loop” on any issues that arise (Banta, & Palomba, 2014). “Closing the loop” ensures that the initial goals of the assessment are revisited following the data collection and data analysis stages and a plan is in place to address any issues that arise (Banta, & Palomba, 2014).

Using campus climate survey as a form of assessment requires intentional planning. Planning effective assessment involves engaging stakeholders, establishing the purpose and goals central to the assessment plan, and appropriately timing the delivery of the assessment. Providing leadership, selecting or designing collection approaches, and providing resources for faculty and staff, in addition to educating faculty and staff, and assessing resources and processes as well as outcomes is also necessary for assessment (Banta & Palomba, 2015). UH has committed to examining the institutional culture and recently assessed the campus culture between April 2018- April 2019. They enlisted an external organization to work with a committee to work on the following areas:
• Assessment of the University’s current culture and how it affects outcomes for faculty, staff, and students

• Recommendations for aligning the University’s culture with national standards and best practices through appropriate changes in policies, practices, professional development and training, traditions, and/or new departments, programs or services

• Development of a strategic plan for implementing the recommendations and assessing the University’s culture on an ongoing basis (UH, 2020a)

The main steps of this process include: 1) Campus Visits 1 & 2 – Interviews, Idea Walls, Town Halls; Preliminary Telephone Interviews; Data & Document Review; 2) Review of Exemplary Culture Initiatives; Surveys of Staff, Faculty, & Students. 3) Information Synthesis & Assessment; Campus Visit 3 – Presentation of Findings to Steering Committee & Leadership; Community Review. 4) Campus Visit 4 – Analysis & Strategic Planning Retreat; Draft & Final Strategic Plans.; and 5) Implementation Planning; Revised Survey Instruments (UH, 2020).

Results of the campus climate survey should inform policies and practices at the department and institutional level. By working to improve institutional culture, UH must ensure that all levels of the institution are committed to survey outcomes in order to implement necessary changes for enhancing the campus climate.

**Recommendation 4: Increase Latinx Faculty and Staff Representation**

HSIs should demonstrate an institutional commitment to serving Latinx students by prioritizing the hiring, promotion, and tenure of Latinx faculty. Schneider & Ward (2003) argued that “increasing the number of minority faculty and Latino students on campus may be one important way to enhance the impact of ethnic-related support on campus, which has been found to buffer the adjustment of highly identified Latinos at larger institutions” (p. 552). Research also
indicates that Faculty of Color from African American and Latinx backgrounds are more likely to incorporate diversity-related pedological approaches in the classroom, which influence diversity educational outcomes (Hurtado, 2001).

Currently, there is a total 2,274 ranked and non-ranked faculty at UH. Of the 1078 total ranked professors at UH, only 89 or a total of 8.9% are Latinx. In total, UH has 30 full professors, 41 associate professors, 16 assistant professors, and 70 non-ranked faculty who identify as Latinx. In comparison, there are a total of 1,794 White ranked and non-ranked faculty at the university, comprising 64.7% of all faculty. Latinx students represent 32.4% of the entire student at UH, the largest percentage among all student groups. Given that they make up a large percentage of the population, body, there is a need to increase the representation of faculty to reflect this student population.

The university’s Center for ADVANCING UH Faculty Success has recently launched a new program with the goal of recruiting and retaining diverse faculty. This program is a result of feedback from a 2017 ADVANCE Faculty Climate Survey. The main survey findings included:

1. Women faculty and Faculty of Color perceived UH systems, policies and procedures as less transparent, equitable and fair than their male and non-minority counterparts.
2. Perceptions of coworker support were linked to employee well-being, faculty members’ social engagement in the UH community, and diversity climate, pointing to the need to further enhance the levels of support coworkers are able to provide to one another.
3. Faculty concerns about levels of transparency and fairness in decision making were voiced through the survey, and were more pronounced in some units than in others.
4. Effectiveness of department chairs as unit supervisors focused on the promotion of individual faculty members’ success varies widely, potentially requiring dedication of
further resources towards enhancing some department chairs’ administrative skill sets. (UH, 2020b)

The university implemented programs to address the survey findings. For instance, a toolkit that encompasses tips and resources for recruiting diverse faculty and professional staff is now available to all search committees. The university also insists that search committees use “more positive diversity language in University job postings, as well as encouraged postings to minority-specific job boards” (UH, 2020d). While this program is a step in the right direction, the university must also create conditions that are supportive of Faculty of Color, and ongoing faculty climate surveys can ensure continuous feedback from faculty. HSIs should use similar approaches to identifying areas for improvement among staff and take measures to hiring and retaining Latinx staff. The university should also consider a climate survey that focuses on the experiences of professional staff and administration as representation of Latinx staff is also important for shaping positive and welcoming campus environments for students attending HSIs (Dayton et al., 2004).

**Recommendation 5: Faculty and Staff Development**

Increases in student diversity requires an increased investment in faculty and staff development. Faculty must be prepared to engage a diverse classroom and must also be conscious of how they too can contribute to negative campus climate experiences of students. In addition, diversity-related curriculum and opportunities for intergroup interactions should be prioritized by intentionally embedding diversity across curricula (Hurtado, 2001). However, training must prepare faculty to implement diversity approaches and prepare them to have difficult conversations (Sue & Constantine, 2007). In addition, adjunct instructors, lecturers, and
teaching assistants should have access to similar training since they interact regularly with students in the classroom setting.

Research also indicates the importance of training and development also benefits staff as they work regularly with students (Cuellar & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2016). Fostering diverse learning environments requires intentional conditions put in place by staff to implement diversity programming and utilize culturally-relevant advising practices for supporting Latinx students. Braxton et al. (2013) recommends the use of sensitivity training for both faculty and staff as an approach for enhancing faculty and staff awareness and knowledge of diversity and equity. In addition to training, incentivizing and awarding staff and faculty who demonstrate a commitment to inclusive excellence through research and practice is recommended (Braxton et al., 2013).

In addition to training and development offered directly by the university, UH should encourage faculty and staff to utilize resources available through organizations, such as the American Association of Colleges, & Universities (AAC&U), the Hispanic Association of College & University (HACU), and Excelencia in Education. These are examples of organizations that provide resources on issues related to Latinx student success, curriculum, and assessment.

**Recommendation 6: More Visibility of HSI Designation**

The final recommendation is focusing on increasing the visibility of the HSI designation at UH. HSIs receive their designation through an enrollment driven metric; however, these institutions lead other institutions in enrolling and graduating Latinx students. The landscape of postsecondary institutions is continuously shaped by the increase of the Latinx students in the United States; therefore, it is expected that these institution types will continue to grow. As more
colleges and universities gain this status, increasing the visibility about this designation will be important.

There are benefits for increasing the visibility of the HSI status at the University of Houston. The university currently does not list the HSI status on the admissions website. This information is also not included in the admissions presentation to prospective students and families. Awareness of this status can aid students in their college-choice decisions, especially as students who attend HSIs are often unaware that the institution carries the designation (Santiago, 2007). Sharing this designation on the university websites and on printed publications can benefit prospective Latinx students, including those targeted through community outreach programs in high school recruitment programs. Although the university shares its ranking as a leader in enrolling diverse students, some Latinx students want to attend universities that have high Latinx enrollment. In addition, HSIs tend to serve a diverse student body inclusive of students from other traditionally underserved racial and ethnic backgrounds, thus, awareness of this designation can also appeal to other racially and ethnically diverse students. Articulating the organizational identity as an HSI may not involve intentionally adding the HSI designation to the university’s mission, but UH must continue to communicate how and why they continue to serve Latinx students.

In addition, UH should ensure that all faculty and staff are aware of the HIS designation. New Employee Training and professional development opportunities can incorporate information about this designation. Faculty and staff can learn more about their role in supporting Latinx student success. In addition, the university should create a central location to access information about how HSI funding has helped transform academic research and student
outcomes. The university can showcase the HSI research and presentation of faculty, which lets students know that their professors are invested in prioritizing their success.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Additional research can benefit the understanding of diverse learning environments that can improve student outcomes for Latinx students attending HSIs. Recommendations for future research include a) expanding the literature to include a greater representation of Latinx ethnic groups studied in HSI research; b) examining the experiences of Latinx students at HSIs who are non-Spanish speakers at HSIs) and d) researching the experience of students attending institutions mission-driven versus enrollment-driven HSIs.

The first recommendation for future research is to increase the representation of Latinx ethnic groups studied in HSI research. Individuals from Latinx backgrounds are multifaceted and represent a wide range of ethnic groups. The U.S. Census Bureau (2010) reported over 50 million Hispanic/Latinos living in the United States. While 63% of the Hispanic/Latino population reported identified as Mexican/Mexican-American, the remaining 37% of Hispanic/Latino identified as Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican, and other Central and South American ethnic backgrounds. Thus, Latinx students attending college represent backgrounds that are unique to their respective ethnic group. Although Latinx identity groups share aspects in common, the unique backgrounds linked to ethnic heritage can influence their experiences on campus. Therefore, more HSI research should examine the experiences of Latinx students from different ethnic groups. In addition, examining Afro-Latinx student experiences at HSIs is also necessary when considering the intersections of Latinx ethnic identity and Black racial identity.

Additionally, a study focusing on non-Spanish speaking Latinx students at HSIs can improve the understanding of influence language on sense of belonging and inclusion. One of the
few studies examining this issue was led by Limon (2011). The researcher conducted a phenomenological study to uncover the experiences of non-Spanish Latino/as including four participants attending a Midwestern University. One of the findings suggested that non-Spanish speaking students internalized negative stereotypes about Latino/as who cannot speak Spanish. This was mainly because the student’s expressed that language is so closely connected to ethnic identity. Similarly, one of the students in this study addressed feeling excluded by the Latinx community because he could not speak Spanish. Therefore, more research on non-Spanish speaking Latinx students at HSIs can lead to more knowledge about ethnic identity development with consideration of language.

Lastly, a greater percentage of HSIs represent colleges and universities gain the designation through enrollment metrics. Whereas, very few colleges and universities were established with the missions of serving Latinx students on the United States mainland. For instance, Boricua College in New York City was established in 1974 with a mission to serve Latinx students primarily of Puerto Rican heritage. This private institution enrolls approximately 1,200 students, and Puerto Rican students make up at least 80% of the student body. Boricua College is described by their “commitment to strengthening Latino culture through a bilingual, bicultural approach to learning” (New York’s Private Colleges & Universities, 2019). Research on mission-drive HSIs, such as Boricua College, can contribute to broader knowledge about organizational structure and institutional strategies in place to serve Latinx students. The study of pedological methods used by faculty at mission-driven HSIs can add to existing research on the faculty role of serving students from diverse backgrounds.
Limitations

Using a qualitative single instrumental case study approach was appropriate for this study (Stake, 1995). The use of interviews and processes to examine the campus environment provided a richer understanding of the student experiences and institutional context. However, there are limitations to this study that should be considered. The first limitation is that the study only focused on a single institution. Second, this study was limited by the sample selection. Lastly, this study was limited by the accessibility to the research site.

The first limitation is that the study only examined a single institution. Studying the experiences of students attending the University of Houston provided a greater understanding of students attending a four-year public HSI in a large urban city. These institutional characteristics differ from the characteristics of other HSIs. For instance, students attending HSIs in rural areas may perceive their campus environment differently than those attending school in a larger city. Yet, Stake (1995) asserted that while single instrumental cases studies may limit the broad application of findings, cases with similar settings and participants can learn from the study. Utilizing a multiple case study design to examine student experiences at more HSIs could increase awareness of HSIs that share similar characteristics.

Moreover, the sample selection can be a limitation in this study. First, the study only consisted of eight students including five men and three women. Increasing the number of students would have added more perspectives and a greater representation of the student population. Moreover, five students identified as Mexican/Mexican-American, two students identified as Salvadoran, and one student identified as both Salvadoran and Mexican-American. Although the students shared in common their Latinx identity, but they not the same. Their distinctive cultural backgrounds and histories are unique. Limiting the study to a single ethnic
group could have added to a greater understanding. Lastly, all of the students in the sample in
were involved in student organizations. The experiences of students who are not involved in
student organization could have added an additional perspective about student engagement and
belonging.

A final limitation of this study was the accessibility to the research site. Since the
university was located out-of-state, engaging students in face-to-face interviews proved
challenging. Although I attempted to visit the campus for face-to-face interviews, students were
only available for interviews via video chat. The students expressed that the time that they spent
on campus was limited due to work obligations or the time spent to travel to campus for an in-
person interview was inconvenient. Interviews via video chat could have impacted the level of
comfort that students experienced or their level of vulnerability in sharing their experiences on
campus.

Conclusion

Given that Latinx students make up nearly 60% of students enrolled in Hispanic-Serving
Institutions, understanding the conditions that lead to student success is imperative for educators,
administrators, and policymakers as more Latinx students enroll in HSIs (Vargas, 2018). The
number of Latinx students enrolled in postsecondary education is a leading factor in the growth
of Hispanic-Serving Institutions, one of the fastest growing sectors in postsecondary education in
the United States. The state of Texas alone has over one million Latinx students, representing
39% of undergraduate students in the state (HACU, 2019). In 2019, HACU reported a total of 93
HSIs and 46 Emerging HSIs in Texas. The University of Houston is among this group of HSIs
and one of the few HSIs and is recognized as one of the few R1 – highest research activity –
institutions in the state. Awareness of how Latinx students perceive the campus climate for
diversity and understand the HSI designation is necessary for supporting Latinx students and consideration of their dynamic backgrounds will determine the types of support programs that will truly serve their diverse needs.

This study used a single instrumental case study design (Stake, 1995). The study yielded five major themes that answered the two research questions used for this study. The findings included, a) The Good and the Bad: Perceptions of the Campus Climate, Diversity, and Inclusion; b) Saliency of Identities Shapes Colleges Experiences; c) Interpersonal Relationships Helps Build Community; d) Classroom Diversity Shapes Learning Experiences; and e) Awareness of HSIs and Supporting Latinx Students.

The findings are consistent with elements of the Multicontextual Model for Diverse Learning Environments (Hurtado et al., 2012), primarily in the examination of the Climate for Diversity within the Institutional Context. Institutional forces influence the climate for diversity through processes within curricular and co-curricular environment. Additionally, student identity shapes Latinx student experience and perceive the campus climate. Diverse learning environments that promote inclusion, cross-racial interactions, and diversity related topics with curricula can move to produce even greater outcomes for Latinx students. As more institutions serve Latinx students and are recognized as HSIs, prioritizing these areas will be necessary for not only ensuring that students feel valued and welcomed on their college campuses but to make certain that students are retained and graduate.
APPENDIX A. INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

ACTION ON EXEMPTION APPROVAL REQUEST

To: Ariana Vargas
Higher Education

From: Dennis Landin
Chair, Institutional Review Board

Date: August 1, 2019

Re: IRB# E11790

Title: The campus climate experiences of Latinx students attending an HIS: A case study


Review Date: 7/31/2019

Approved X Disapproved

Approval Date: 7/31/2019 Approval Expiration Date: 7/30/2022

Exemption Category/Paragraph: 2b.c

Signed Consent Waived?: No

Re-review Frequency: Three years unless otherwise stated

LSU Proposal Number (if applicable):

By: Dennis Landin, Chairman

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING – Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:
1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU’s Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects.
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
8. SPECIAL NOTE: When emailing more than one recipient, make sure you use bcc. Approvals will automatically be closed by the IRB on the expiration date unless the PI requests a continuation.

* All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU’s Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at http://www.lsu.edu/irb
APPENDIX B. RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Greetings!

I hope that this email finds you well! I would like to request your participation in a study that I am conducting about the campus climate experiences of Latinx students attending Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs).

To participate in the study, the following criteria must be met:

1. You are 18 years of age or older
2. Full-time undergraduate student attending University of Houston;
3. Completed at least two full academic terms at the University of Houston (non-transfer student); and
4. Identify as Latino/Latina/Latinx and/or Hispanic

If you meet these criteria and are interested in participating in the study, your participation would include the completion of a quick survey to collect general background information and to ensure you meet the participation criteria. Interviews will last approximately 60-90 minutes in length. The interview will focus on your experiences as an undergraduate student attending an HSI and your expectations of institutional diversity and inclusion given the HSI designation. If you are selected for the study, you will receive $10 for participation in the study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You can withdraw your participation from the study without any penalty. If you are interested in participating and do not have any additional questions, please use the following link to complete a pre-screening survey for eligibility for the study:

http://lsu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3yOmaWgB3BdmRKt

This survey should take no longer than 5 minutes to complete.

If you have any further questions, please email me at avarg13@lsu.edu. Thank you for considering this opportunity!

Sincerely,

Ariana Vargas, M. Ed.
Doctoral Student
Louisiana State University
APPENDIX C. PARTICIPANT BACKGROUND SURVEY

You are invited to participate in a study. The purpose of this study is to investigate the campus climate experiences of Latinx students attending a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). Specifically, the study will explore how Latinx students experience the campus climate in curricular and cocurricular settings, in addition to investigating how Latinx students understand the HSI designation. Finally, this study will attempt to understand Latinx student expectations of institutional diversity and inclusion given the HSI designation.

To participate in the study, the following criteria must be met:

- You are 18 years of age or older;
- You are a full-time undergraduate student attending University of Houston;
- You have completed at least two full academic terms at the University of Houston (non-transfer student); and
- You identify as Latino/Latina/Latinx and/or Hispanic

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You can withdraw your participation from the study without any penalty. You will be given an opportunity to select a pseudonym that will be used as an identifier on the transcript to remain confidential. Additionally, all data collected through the study will be kept secure and confidential. If you are interested in participating and do not have any additional questions, please complete this pre-screening survey, which should take no longer than 5 minutes.

All participants who are selected for this study will receive $10.

Investigators
The following investigators are available for questions about this study:
Ariana M. Vargas, Louisiana State University, avarg13@lsu.edu
Q1 Are you interested in participating in this study?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q2 First Name


Q3 Last Name


Q4 Are you 18 years or older?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q5 Are you Latino/Latina/Latinx and/or Hispanic?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q6 Are you a full-time undergraduate student attending the University of Houston?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q7 Gender


Q8 Hometown


Q9 Select the **highest** level of education completed by your **mother**:

- [ ] Less than a high school diploma (1)
- [ ] High School degree or equivalent (e.g. GED) (2)
- [ ] Some College, no (3)
- [ ] Associate degree (e.g. AA, AS) (4)
- [ ] Bachelor’s degree (e.g. BA, BS) (5)
- [ ] Master’s Degree (e.g. MA, MS, MEd) (6)
- [ ] Professional degree (e.g. MD, DDS, DVM) (7)
- [ ] Doctorate (e.g. PhD, EdD) (8)
- [ ] unknown or not applicable (9)

Q10 Select the **highest** level of education completed by your **father**:

- [ ] Less than a high school diploma (1)
- [ ] High School degree or equivalent (e.g. GED) (2)
- [ ] Some College, no (3)
- [ ] Associate degree (e.g. AA, AS) (4)
- [ ] Bachelor’s degree (e.g. BA, BS) (5)
- [ ] Master’s Degree (e.g. MA, MS, MEd) (6)
- [ ] Professional degree (e.g. MD, DDS, DVM) (7)
- [ ] Doctorate (e.g. PhD, EdD) (8)
- [ ] unknown or not applicable (9)
Q11 You are currently enrolled as a

☐ Freshman (1)

☐ Sophomore (2)

☐ Junior (3)

☐ Senior (4)

Q12 What year did you enroll in college?

______________________________________________________________

Q13 What is your major?

________________________________________________________________

Q14 Please select one:

☐ I live on-campus. (1)

☐ I live off-campus, but I have lived on-campus at some point. (2)

☐ I live off-campus, and I have never lived on-campus. (3)

Q15 Are you a transfer student?

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

☐ I am not sure. (3)

Q16 What is the best way to reach you?
Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. A researcher will be in touch with you. If you have any questions, please contact Ariana M. Vargas at avarg13@lsu.edu.
APPENDIX D. PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Study Title: The campus climate experiences of Latinx students attending an HSI: A case study

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to investigate the campus climate experiences of Latinx students attending a Hispanic Serving Institution, which are colleges and universities that have an at least 25% Hispanic/Latinx student enrollment. Specifically, the study will explore how Latinx students experience the campus climate in curricular and cocurricular settings, in addition to investigating how Latinx students understand the HSI designation. Finally, this study will attempt to understand expectations of institutional diversity and inclusion given the HSI designation. Participants of this study will take part in a 60-90 minute interview with one member of the research team utilizing a semi-structured interview protocol. Each interview will be audio-recorded for transcription purposes. In the event that the interview cannot take place in person, participants may participate in a web-based interview (e.g. Skype, Google Hangouts, FaceTime) or a phone call interview.

Risks/Discomforts: There are minimal risks involved in this study. Participants of the study may experience some discomfort associated to answering questions related to identity, diversity, and inclusion. Students do not have to answer questions that may cause discomfort. Files will be kept in secure cabinets to which only the investigator has access.

Benefits: Students will receive $10 for participating in the study. Results from this study will inform institutional leaders and higher education policymakers about postsecondary conditions that contribute to Hispanic/Latinx student success and institutional diversity/inclusion.

Investigators: The following investigators are available for questions about this study, M-F, 9:00 a.m. -4:30p.m: Joy Blanchard, Ph.D., (225)-578-2192, jblanchard@lsu.edu; Ashley Clayton, Ph.D., (225)-578-1792, aclayton@lsu.edu; and Ariana Vargas, (850)-321-7045, avarg13@lsu.edu.

Performance Sites: The University of Houston | Houston, Texas

Number of Subjects: 8-10 participants

Subject Inclusion: To participate in this study, subjects must meet the following criteria: (1) 18 years of age or older; (2) full-time undergraduate student attending University of Houston; (3) completed at least two full academic terms at the University of Houston (non-transfer student); and (4) identify as Latino/Latina/Latinx and/or Hispanic. Subjects who do not meet the criteria will be excluded from the study.

Privacy: This study is confidential. All interviews will be recorded and transcribed, and all audio recordings and transcriptions will remain safely secured in a password-protected electronic folder and secured files cabinets to which only the investigator has access. Results of the study may be published, but no names or identifying information will be included in
the publication. Participant identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

**Financial Information:** Subjects will receive $10 for participating in the study.

**Right to Refuse:** Participants may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they might otherwise be entitled.

**Signatures**
The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Dennis Landin, LSU Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692, irb@lsu.edu, or www.lsu.edu/irb.

I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

**Subject Signature:** ___________________________ **Date:** ______________

The study subject has indicated to me that he/she is unable to read. I certify that I have read this consent form to the subject and explained that by completing the signature line above, the subject has agreed to participate.

**Signature of Reader:** ___________________________ **Date:** ______________
APPENDIX E. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Date______________________ Time ___________________ Location___________________

Interview Questions:
1. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. As I previously mentioned, you can withdrawal at any time with no penalty. To get started, please tell me more about yourself.
2. Please discuss how you decided to select the University of Houston to pursue your college studies.
   ○ What were the primary factors that led you to this decision?
3. How would you describe your experience as a Latinx student at this institution?
   ○ How would you describe your experiences in the classroom?
   ○ How would you describe your experiences at UH outside of the classroom?
   ○ How would you describe your interactions with faculty? staff and administrators? peers?
   ○ What relationships on campus are most meaningful to you?
4. In what ways has the institution been successful at supporting your academic and social needs as a Hispanic/Latinx or African American student?
5. How would you describe institutional efforts related to diversity and inclusion?
   ○ In what ways has the institution been effective in diversity and inclusion efforts?
   ○ In what ways can the institution be more effective at diversity and inclusion?
   ○ Would you credit any of these efforts toward your decision to interact with diverse others and/or participate in diversity-related activities?
     ■ If yes, please describe specific programs or interactions related to diversity and inclusion that influenced your reason to interact with diverse others and/or participate in diversity-related activities?
6. Can you describe your understanding of an Hispanic-Serving Institution?
   ○ How does your understanding of an HSI designation influence the expectations that you have for the institution to advance diversity among student?
    ○ Advance outcomes for Latinx students?
7. What expectations do you have of the institution in supporting Latinx students?
8. As a Latinx student, what do you believe are the most helpful and necessary services and or programs needed to support your matriculation through college and success after college?

Closing Questions
7. Of all the things we discussed, what to you is the most important?
8. Considering the purpose of this study, have I missed anything you may want to share?
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VITA

Ariana M. Vargas is originally from Waterbury, Connecticut but spent a significant portion of her life living in San Antonio, Texas. She received her Bachelors of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies with a focus on Elementary Education and a minor in Special Education from Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas. She also received her Master’s of Education in Student Affairs in Higher Education from Texas State University.

Prior to moving to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, she served as a Student Program Coordinator at Florida State University in Tallahassee, Florida. Her role focused on diversity education while supporting leadership development and community engagement initiatives. She developed educational programs for students, faculty, and staff, led small and large-scale student-centered programs, advised student groups, and taught in the Leadership Certificate program. Since beginning her career in higher education, Ms. Vargas has lived out her life’s mission as an educator and advocate for social justice, inclusion, and equity and has used both education and research as a tool to make meaning of collegiate experiences as it relates to identity, social justice, and campus climates.