

When cultures clash: Exploring Latino students' experiences with cultural mismatch in
academic advising

by

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A.A., Yuba College 2011
B.A., California State University, Chico, 2013
M.A., California State University, Sacramento, 2016

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Special Education, Counseling, and Student Affairs
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2026

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Approved by:

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Wendy G. Troxel

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Abstract

In an environment of rapidly changing student demographics and enrollment, higher education institutions face the challenge of eliminating institutional performance gaps. Latino students are the fastest-growing population in higher education and represent an opportunity for institutions to grow enrollment, yet this population experiences disproportionately low rates of degree completion. This study aimed to understand how academic advisors may contribute to the successes or challenges of Latino students through the lens of cultural mismatch theory. Using a generic qualitative approach, interviews were conducted with undergraduate Latino students regarding their academic advising experiences. Two overarching themes emerged from the interview data, indicating that Latino students experience cultural match or mismatch in their advising interactions, depending on whether they view advising as relational vs. transactional and on whether their advisors offer them flexibility versus rigidity in navigating the institution. These findings suggest that institutions may improve Latino student success by building advising structures that foster ongoing connections between advisors and advisees and by intentionally providing professional development for their advisors to enhance relational skills.

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made in order for me to achieve this milestone will never be lost on me. I know we will never get these years back and I am so looking forward to our next chapter.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all of the students past, present, and future who have been challenged by educational systems that were built without consideration for their needs or realities. You deserve accessible and relevant learning opportunities. You deserve education that empowers you. I hope this work, in some small way, advances us collectively towards creating and sustaining more equitable educational and social systems.

I'd also like to dedicate this work to academic advisors who work tirelessly to help students succeed. This work is in honor of those of you who go above and beyond the duties of advisors to also be co-navigators, mentors, supporters, and friends to your students. You light the way from within institutions and are often the first to call out inequities unseen by others. I hope this work advances our profession and our impact.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Students attending higher education institutions in the United States are increasingly diverse, with students of color making up a substantial and growing portion of enrolled undergraduates (Cahalan et al., 2022). Unfortunately, the simple presence of diverse individuals in colleges and universities does not guarantee their success. Students of color often persist and graduate at lower rates than their historically represented peers (Contreras-Mendez & Cruse, 2021; Lawton, 2018). The postsecondary enrollment of Latino students, in particular, has increased substantially over the last 50 years (Pew Research Center, 2009). This group now constitutes the second-largest population in American higher education institutions, but their retention and degree completion rates remain low (Espinosa et al., 2019). Up to 50% of surveyed Latino students report experiencing challenges staying enrolled (Greenberg, 2023), and only 35% of Latino individuals who begin college persist to degree completion (Espinosa et al., 2019; Mora, 2022).

While many factors are at play in the educational and post-secondary success of students of color including education policy (Lieb, 2024), inequitable resources (Baines, 2022), academic preparation (Geiser, 2020), and financial capital (Greenberg, 2023), recent studies have suggested that the challenges faced by these students may be caused, in part, by cultural mismatch (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020; Schell, 2023). Cultural mismatch refers to students encountering institutional cultures that differ from the culture of their home environment (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012). This phenomenon has been demonstrated to impact multiple areas of the postsecondary student experience, including academic performance (Stephens, Townsend et al., 2012), student life (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020), and, most recently, academic advising (Schell, 2023). Research on Latino students' experiences with cultural mismatch

presents a promising opportunity to better understand the institutional structures and barriers that influence their success. Additionally, this line of inquiry presents an important opportunity to weave academic advising into the student persistence and success literature.

In Chapter 1, I present the demographic and student-success concerns affecting higher education today. I then introduce cultural mismatch as a relatively new and expanding concept in the higher education literature on student success. Next, I present the purpose of this study, the research questions I intend to answer, and the theoretical framework I will use. Then I discuss the significance of the study and provide definitions of key terms. Finally, Chapter 1 closes with a brief review of my positionality as the researcher.

Overview

Changing Demographics and Student Outcomes

There are an estimated 16 million students attending degree-granting institutions in the United States as of 2024 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2023c). Current estimates of enrolled undergraduates at degree-seeking institutions show that 0.69% are American Indian/Alaskan Native, 7.11% are Asian, 12.61% are Black, 21.40% are Hispanic, 0.27% are Pacific Islander, 50.68% are White, 4.29% are two or more races, and 2.95% are U.S. nonresident (NCES, 2023b). Postsecondary enrollment of Latino students, in particular, has doubled over the past 20 years (Hernandez & McElrath, 2023), making up the second-largest racial/ethnic group among undergraduate students in American higher education (NCES, 2023b). Despite increased enrollment, the retention and degree completion rates among Latino students remain low. Approximately 84% of Latino students persist beyond the first year of enrollment, but only 35% complete their degrees (Espinosa et al., 2019).

Educational Challenges

People of color, particularly Black and Latino individuals, have experienced challenges with education in the United States in the primary, secondary, and postsecondary environments. These challenges can be observed through significant demographic separation in primary and secondary institutions (Noonan & Piazza, 2023), disparate outcomes on standardized school testing (Reardon et al., 2019), inequities in higher education admission and access (Geiser, 2020), and over-representation in remedial courses (Chen, 2016). For those who can access and enroll into higher education institutions, the more universal challenges of transitioning to college such as developing one's academic identity and finding a sense of belonging (Skinner, 2023) are layered with financial challenges (Llamas et al., 2020; Ponciano et al., 2023), experiences with racism and discrimination (Llamas et al., 2020), and incongruencies between home and campus culture (J. Chang et al., 2020). These challenges layer and interact with one another to influence the retention and graduation rates of these students, which are statistically lower than those of their historically represented peers (Espinosa et al., 2019).

Cultural Mismatch

Cultural mismatch theory has emerged as a lens of understanding how students are required to navigate the intersection of their own culture and the culture of their higher education institutions (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012). This theory suggests that a student's relative match or mismatch with the institutional culture affects the way they perceive tasks and interactions in the setting and, ultimately, their performance. Cultural mismatch theory draws on literature in organizational theory and culture to understand higher education institutions as home to distinct institutional cultures (Wilson-Stykes, 2023), which have been found to reflect the middle-class norm of independence (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012). Students whose home culture does not

align with such norms have been shown to experience emotional and social challenges (Phillips et al., 2020; Stephens, Townsend et al., 2012). Students experiencing cultural mismatch have also been found to engage in maladaptive coping behaviors, such as distraction and resource avoidance (J. Chang et al., 2020), and often experience negative academic outcomes (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012; Vasquez-Salgado et al., 2015).

A variety of university settings have been examined to understand how students experience cultural mismatch (Schudde, 2016; Talavera et al., 2019), and academic advising has recently been included in this line of inquiry. While no single definition exists for academic advising, it may generally be described as institutional representatives connecting with students to help them learn and develop, make sense of their education, and make informed decisions about their higher education experience (McGill, 2021). This work is carried out by a variety of institutional representatives, including staff, faculty, and peer advisors. Some advisors engage in this work full-time, while others advise part-time. A single study has recently shown that students from the Chinese Diaspora experience cultural mismatch in academic advising (Schell, 2023). However, the understanding of how students experience cultural mismatch in academic advising has not yet been extended to additional populations. Substantial scholarly inquiry and research are needed to investigate how academic advising professionals' practices may contribute to students' success or struggles, particularly those of Latino students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how Latino students attending a public, historically white university experience and interpret the culture of their educational institution in the context of their academic advising interactions.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the study:

1. What features of, or interactions within, advising sessions create an experience of cultural match or cultural mismatch between Latino students and the academic advisors they work with?
2. How do Latino students make meaning of the cultural match or mismatch they experience through their academic advising interactions?

Theoretical Framework

This study was approached through the lens of cultural mismatch theory (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012). Cultural mismatch theory makes three overarching claims. First, the culture of higher education institutions and society at large in the United States primarily reflects the middle-class cultural norm of independence. Second, whether a student is positively or negatively impacted by the institutional culture depends on whether the student's culture aligns with it. Third, students' relative match or mismatch with the institutional culture influences how they view tasks and interactions in the setting and affects their performance (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012).

At the foundation of cultural mismatch theory is the idea that people operate with one of two concepts of self: independent or interdependent (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 2010). People with an independent self-construal conceptualize themselves as individuals and maintain that self-identity by operating in ways that prioritize their unique thoughts, feelings, and experiences. People with an interdependent self-construal conceptualize themselves as connected to others and operate in ways that maintain interdependence within a community, rather than seeking differentiation (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 2010). In cultural mismatch theory, this concept is

applied not only to people, but to the educational institution as well (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012). American universities are theorized to value, promote, and reward independent modes of operation (Fryberg & Markus, 2007).

Situated in this understanding of independent vs. interdependent modes of self, cultural mismatch theory then postulates what will occur in instances where an individual's environment does not match their mode of self. In instances where the person is in an environment that does not reflect their mode of self, they experience negative effects (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012). Here, cultural mismatch theory leverages the scholarship on stereotype threat (also referred to as social identity threat) which posits that individuals who know that low expectations stigmatize their identity will feel stress, and that stress experience will ultimately undermine their performance (Inzlicht & Schmader, 2012). Cultural mismatch theory extends this idea of stereotype threat to suggest that individuals will not only be impacted by stereotypes, but that they will be similarly impacted by experiencing a mismatch between their cultural norms and the cultural norms of their environment (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012).

This qualitative study explores the prevalence and impact of cultural mismatch for Latino students at a public, historically white institution. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with students to capture the students' experiences with academic advising, the messages communicated by advisors related to the university's institutional culture, and the meaning that students make of these messages. Results will be discussed in relation to the three foundational claims of cultural mismatch theory.

Significance of the Study

Nationally, a looming enrollment cliff, caused in part by decreased birth rates, will soon require higher education institutions to enact new approaches to sustain their enrollment

(Harvey, 2021). Given that Latinos make up the largest growing population in the United States (USAFacts, 2022), and more than 18% of Americans with some college and no degree (National Student Clearinghouse, 2024), more effectively supporting, retaining, and re-enrolling these students represents a critical opportunity for higher education institutions in the United States. The most effective enrollment management models are those that address the student experience (Hutton, 2021). In order to benefit from Latino student enrollment, institutions will need to better understand the Latino student experience. One promising method for understanding the Latino student experience is through the exploration of cultural mismatch theory to understand and address challenges faced by these students in the institution (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012).

Recent studies have suggested that the challenges faced by students of color in the postsecondary environment may be caused, in part, by cultural mismatch (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020; Schell, 2023). Cultural mismatch theory suggests that students are challenged by the need to navigate the incongruencies which exist between the cultural messages they receive from their educational institutions and the messages and values communicated by their home cultures (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012). Higher education institutions are home to distinct cultures (Wilson-Stykes, 2023) that have been found to reflect the middle-class norms of independence (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012). While much of the literature surrounding the concept of cultural mismatch has operationalized the concept of cultural differences as a dichotomy of independent versus interdependent modes of self (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012), more recent publications are beginning to expand the understanding of this mismatch to additional components of culture including autonomy, voice, exploration, passion, and socioemotional support (Schell, 2023).

A student's relative match or mismatch with the institution's culture is theorized to impact the way they view tasks and interactions in the setting and, ultimately, their performance

(Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012). Students encountering cultural mismatch have been shown to experience less positive and more negative emotions (Stephens, Townsend et al., 2012), including greater stress and anxiety (Talavera et al., 2019), inner personal conflict (Vasquez-Salgado et al., 2015), lower subjective social status (Phillips et al., 2020), and cognitive and physical stress (Stephens, Townsend et al., 2012). While a variety of university settings have been examined to understand how students experience cultural mismatch (Schudde, 2016; Talavera et al., 2019), academic advising interactions have only recently been considered (Schell, 2023). Substantial scholarly inquiry is needed to investigate how the practices of academic advising professionals may contribute to the successes and/or struggles of students, particularly Latino students.

Academic advising has been clearly linked to student success (Kimball & Campbell, 2013) and advisors' communication skills are recognized as a critical component of advising relationships (Menke et al., 2018). This includes advisors' verbal and nonverbal communication skills (Jordan, 2015). However, relational skills are not often consistently introduced, practiced, or emphasized in advisor training programs (McGill, Heikkila, & Lazarowicz, 2020). This lack of training is problematic as advising work is situated within institutions that perpetuate oppression of marginalized populations (Schindler & Stevens, 2021). Given that advisors' values and beliefs inform their practice (Kimball & Campbell, 2013), advisors must address their own biases such as how they nonverbally react to students' appearances (Jordan, 2015) and how they discuss topics like personal values (Coll & Draves, 2009) in order to effectively and equitably serve diverse student populations. Advisors need professional development and learning opportunities focused on relational and communication skills (Hughey, 2011) to navigate this process. Conducting research to understand how advisors and advising contribute to cultural

match and/or mismatch represents an opportunity for those within the academic advising profession to better understand their impact on vulnerable student populations, as well as an opportunity to develop training programs to improve advising practice.

The ultimate significance for this study is its potential to improve the human condition by supporting student retention and, through retention, students' opportunity to reach their educational and career goals. For the student, dropping out of college without earning a degree can have multiple implications. Adults in the US who do not hold a 4-year degree earn less than half the income of their degree-holding counterparts across their lifetime (Tamborini et al., 2015). Additionally, many of these individuals acquired student loan debt during their enrollment and must now repay that debt without the earning power of a degree. While exact percentages are widely contested, it appears that at least 40% of people with student loan debt do not hold a college degree (Specht, 2021). Understanding the student experience, adjusting educational practices to improve that experience, and providing effective support to students ultimately serves the goal of facilitating a more just society through equitable access to resources.

Important Terms

Some specific terminology will be utilized throughout this study that warrants explanation to ensure clarity and understanding.

- **Cultural Mismatch** refers to an interaction between the culturally driven behavioral norms that a student brings with them from their home culture into the postsecondary setting and the culturally accepted behavioral norms present at the institution itself (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012). Cultural mismatch theory posits that this interaction between incongruent cultural norms influences the individual performance of students in higher education.

- **Institutional Culture** refers to a pattern of beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors which guide and shape behavior within higher education institutions (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). Institutional culture is both something that an institution has and something an institution does, influenced by both student characteristics and conditions external to the institution (Kuh, 2001). Institutional culture is influenced by its inhabitants; however, it is also relatively stable once created and socializes new individuals into the existing culture (Kuh & Whitt, 1988).
- **Institutional performance Gaps (IPGs)** refers to differences in retention and graduation rates between low income, first generation, and historically underserved and minoritized racial groups and their peers in the higher education setting (Bensimon & Spiva, 2022). Previously referred to as “achievement gaps” or “equity gaps”, institutional performance gaps have gained the attention of administrators, staff, and faculty nationwide. Much work has been done in attempts to close these gaps including efforts to redesign courses, implement mentorship programs, and increase students’ sense of belonging (E. Chang et al., 2019). Yet, for all the efforts made to improve existing inequitable practices in the instructional work of educational institutions, little progress has been made in closing these equity gaps. In fact, these gaps have actually widened for some institutions in recent years (California State University, 2022).
- **Latino** refers to individuals of Latin American descent residing in the United States (Martínez & Gonzalez, 2021). I approach the use of this term with both recognition of, and respect for, the fact that there is ongoing dialog both within and outside of this ethnoracial group as to the most appropriate and preferred identifying term. I recognize that the terms Hispanic and Latino are historically most familiar (Martínez & Gonzalez,

2021). I opt not to use the term Hispanic due to its inclusion of individuals from Spanish-speaking countries outside of the Americas, as well as its exclusion of others within the Americas on the basis of spoken language. While Latino is more fitting to the population I'm seeking to learn from, I am compelled to recognize that the term Latino carries with it a gender-specific indicator which could be interpreted as exclusionary to women due to the male default, as well as to those within the LGBTQ+ community due to the implied binary of Latino vs. Latina. While alternative terms such as Latinx, Latin@, Latin*, and Latine have gained popularity in recent years as potential gender-neutral alternatives, they have simultaneously created divide amongst those in the population who feel they are unnecessary and/or inconsistent with language and cultural norms (Salinas, 2020). As an individual who is not part of the community, I will defer to the recommendations of my colleagues and committee members who are in-population and will use the term Latino for the remainder of the study.

- **Persistence** will be used to refer to a student's continued pursuit of education. A student may persist towards their degree by leaving one institution to pursue their studies elsewhere or by staying enrolled at a particular institution. In this sense, persistence is in the hands of the individual student and is not a campus or institutional goal.
- **Retention** will be used to refer to the percentage of students who return to an institution from one term to the next. Retention is a reference to the goal of the institution to keep as many students as possible continuously enrolled from one term to the next.

Positionality

My role and positionality as the researcher in this study is rather unique. In relation to institutions of higher education, I entered higher education as a white, cis-gendered, female,

continuing generation student, potentially marking drastic differences between my personal undergraduate experience and the experiences of the students I seek to learn from. I have since earned a Master of Arts in Higher Education Leadership and Policy Studies and am currently working towards a Doctor of Philosophy in Leadership in Academic Advising. I have also worked my entire professional career in higher education, specifically working in the field of academic advising for over 10 years. In more recent years, I have transitioned to a role in the administration and management of academic advising. My higher education and advising experiences position me as someone closely tied to the institution.

In relation to the experiences of Latino students, my positionality does not fit into the dichotomy of insider vs. outsider but sits somewhere between the two (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). As a White, cisgendered female, I acknowledge that I do not and cannot ever fully understand the reality of navigating and existing within higher education institutions as a person of color. However, I am not fully removed from the Latino experience either. My stepfather, who came into my life at a very young age and raised me to adulthood, is Latino. I was raised partially in the Mexican culture, surrounded by the shared traditions of a large family, and therefore have a deeper understanding of some aspects of the culture than others who share my identity. I also learned about my stepfather's experiences as a Latino man in the American education systems from a very young age. His stories, in large part, are what have motivated me to study Latino student experiences to improve their educational outcomes through the dismantling of institutional policies and practices that prove to be problematic for this group. I am aware of and grateful for my insider-outside positionality as I enter this study (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

Summary

Latino individuals represent one of the largest and most rapidly growing populations in American higher education today (Pew Research Center, 2009), yet this population struggles to attain their postsecondary education goals (Espinosa et al., 2019). In an effort to understand if cultural mismatch (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012) plays a role in the challenges faced by Latino university students, this study leveraged semi-structured interviews with self-identified Latino individuals to explore what types of cultural match and/or mismatch these students experience in interactions with academic advisors at their higher education institutions.

Chapter 2 - Review of Related Literature

Chapter 2 provides an in-depth review of the data and literature related to elements of higher education that shape students' experiences of cultural match and mismatch. Chapter 2 opens with a review of the current higher education landscape in the United States, including number of types of institutions, enrollment shifts, changing student demographics, and student outcomes as institutional performance indicators. Next, I provide a more narrowed review of literature on the Latino student experience in particular, examining how both historic and modern educational access, early learning experiences, and transitional experiences impact how Latino individuals experience higher education. I then review the current literature around cultural mismatch including foundational elements of the theory, what causes mismatch, where it is known to occur, how it impacts students, and what may mitigate mismatch. Finally, I close out Chapter 2 by presenting a review of the professional field of academic advising and highlighting its role in cultural mismatch experiences for post-secondary students.

Problem Statement

In an ever-changing higher education environment, rife with political tension and fiscal constraints, it is critically important for higher education professionals to not only develop a comprehensive understanding of the student experience, but also to continuously improve it as a means to positively influence their institutional outcomes and support student well-being and societal progression. As institutions nationwide stare down a demographic cliff that promises to change the trajectory of higher education, they are compelled to reconsider whom and how they serve. Increasing Latino student enrollment represents an excellent opportunity to bolster headcounts, both through new student enrollment and re-enrollment of those who have departed campuses without a degree. However, Latino student outcomes currently fall short of idealized

goals, with Latino students experiencing lower retention, persistence, and graduation rates that many of their peer populations. Exploring Latino students' postsecondary experiences through the lens of cultural mismatch theory offers an opportunity to discover the areas in which institutions are failing to meet and recognize the needs of these students and how inhospitable educational environments persist.

The Higher Education and Student Success Landscape

The higher education landscape in the United States is shaped by an intricately woven web of factors including population demographics, cultural influences, economic conditions, student outcomes, public policy, public opinion, and historical events. These elements lead to continuous fluctuations in the number and types of institutions in operation, as well who and how many people attend colleges and universities across the nation. For those who seek to positively influence the state of higher education and the postsecondary student experience in modern America, it is essential to consider both the distinct and intersecting influence of these elements.

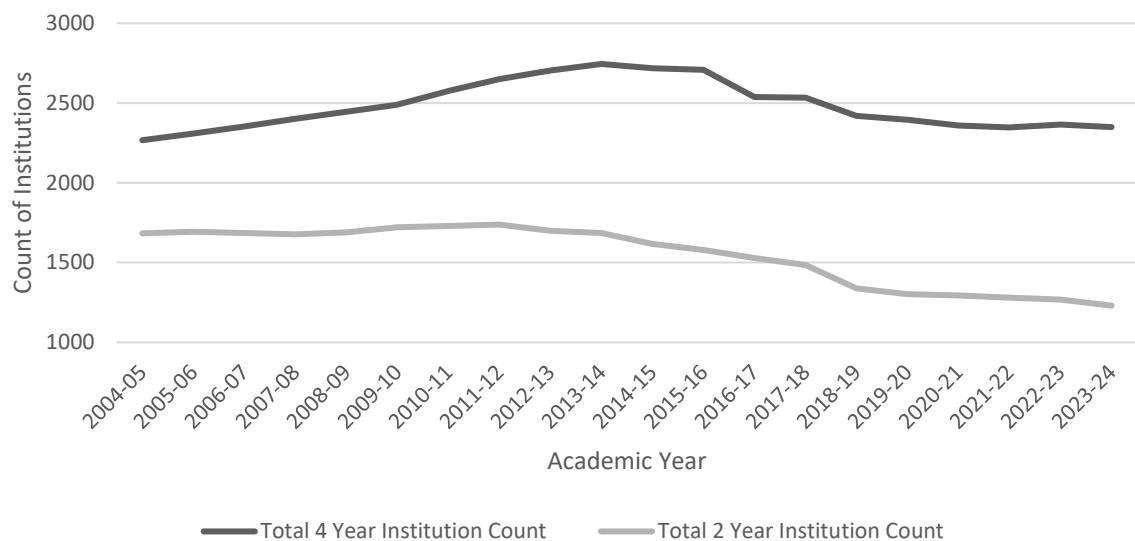
Types of Higher Education Institutions

Since the 1970's, there has been a relatively steady increase in number of degree-granting institutions across America, which has only recently begun to decline over the last 15 or so years (Korhonen, 2024). Amongst current higher education institutions, there are a variety of characteristics that distinguish one institution from another including level of degree awarded, control type, level of access, and specialty designations. As of academic year 2023-2024, the higher education landscape in the United States included 3,579 degree-granting post-secondary institutions (NCES, 2023a). Of these institutions, 66% of them are identified as 4-year institutions and 34% are identified as 2-year institutions. The total count of 4-year institutions peaked in academic year 2013-2014 at 2,745 institutions and has since decreased 14%. The total

count of 2-year institutions peaked slightly earlier in academic year 2011-2012 at 1,738 institutions and has declined by 29%. While shared factors have influenced the decline of both institution types, it is worthwhile to consider that the decline in the total number of 2-year institutions may be partially due to the factor that some 2-year institutions have begun offering 4-year degree programs, which alters their classification (NCES, 2023a).

Figure 0.1

Count of Higher Education Institutions by Degree Type, 2004-2024

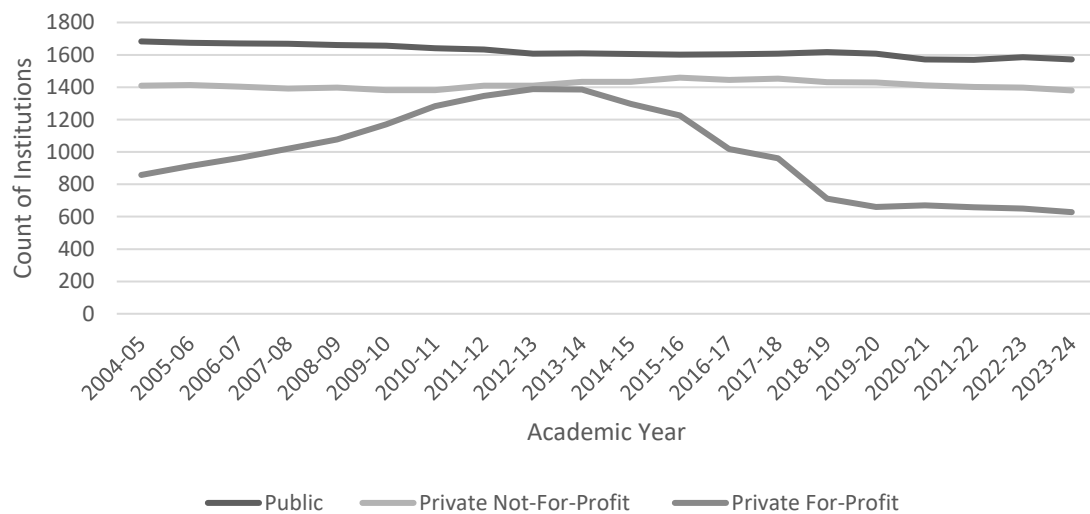


Institutions by Fiscal Control Type. The overarching categories of 4-year and 2-year institutions can be further understood in terms of their control type and funding models. Public (not-for-profit) institutions account for 44% of operating institutions, while 39% are private not-for-profit, and 18% are private for-profit (NCES, 2023a). Private not-for-profit institutions make up the majority of 4-year institutions at 55%, while public institutions make up the majority of 2-year institutions at 64%. When considering institutions by control type only, for-profit institutions appear to be fairing the worse in the current landscape. Having peaked at 1,388

institutions in the academic year 2012-2013, there are now only 628 for-profit institutions in operation as of the 2023-2024 academic year, a reduction of 55%. While both public and private not-for-profit institutions are also on the decline, their decline has been far more gradual. The total number of private not-for-profit institutions has declined 5% from a peak of 1,459 in 2015–2016, to a total institutional count of 1,380 in 2023–2024. Comparably, the total number of public institutions has declined 6% from an earlier peak of 1,675 in 2005–2006, to a current count of 1,571 (NCES, 2023a).

Figure 0.2

Count of Higher Education Institutions by Control Type, 2004-2024



Institutions by Access Type. In considering level of access, post-secondary institutions can be divided into those that are open access with no admission criteria, those that accept 75% or more of their applicants, those that accept 50-74.9% of their applicants, and those that accept less than 50% of their applicants (NCES, 2023a). In this respect, 2-year institutions are the most accessible with 92% being open access. Private not-for-profit institutions are somewhat more

selective at the 2-year level compared to their public and private counterparts, with just 59% being open access. Amongst 4-year institutions public institutions are most accessible with 29% being open access and 48% accepting 75% or more of their applicants. Conversely, private not-for-profit 4-year institutions are the most selective with only 14% being open access and 13% accepting less than 50% of their applicants (NCES, 2023a). While private for-profit institutions appear highly accessible through the lens of being open access, it is important to note that they also have higher costs of attendance which limits accessibility based upon students' fiscal resources.

Variations in Institutional Size. Postsecondary institutions vary widely in terms of size and number of students enrolled. Thirty-six percent of institutions enroll under 1,000 students per year, while 39% of institutions enroll between 1,000 and 5,000 students per year (NCES, 2023a). The vast majority of higher education institutions have 5,000 students or fewer enrolled. Larger institutions serving between 5,000 and 20,000 students per year are present in the current environment and make up 20% of institutions in the U.S. Public institutions are the majority in this range. Just 5% of institutions enroll more than 20,000 students, yet (due to their size) compose 38% of total higher education enrollment (NCES, 2023a).

Institutional with Special Designations. Institutions also vary by specialty designations associated with serving different populations. There are approximately 99 historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in operation which are recognized for having been established prior to 1964 with the expressed mission of educating Black Americans (NCES, 2023a). There are also 561 Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) which are recognized as such for having student populations that 25% or more Hispanic. Thirty-five institutions in the country are identified as tribal colleges. Typically residing on reservations, these institutions are recognized

for serving indigenous students. An additional 32 institutions are recognized as women's colleges in operation across the country (NCES, 2023a). A variety of additional institutional designators can be found in higher education literature and vernacular, but do not appear in national data sets or reports. These institutional designators evolve and change more fluidly than other institutional categorizations such as control type, access type, and size, because they are so closely tied to the ever-changing landscape of student enrollment activity.

Student Enrollment Activity

Enrollment at higher education institutions is impacted by the changing demographics of the nation. The past 50 years have been a stage of monumental shifts in state and national demographics which have directly impacted demand for higher education, enrollment trends, and student needs. What began as a significant rise in enrollment from 7.3 million students in 1970 to a peak of 18 million students in 2010, has since become a decline. There are an estimated 19 million students currently enrolled in post-secondary institutions (Hanson, 2025).

The initial rise in enrollment in the 1970's was spurred by the post-World War II baby boomer generation coming of age and completing their secondary education, decreased high school dropout rates, increased college-going rates for high school graduates, and U.S. veterans of multiple wars having incentive to return to school with the support of the GI Bill (Haggstrom, 1971). At that time, retention rates were holding steady, and enrollments were projected to continue to rise, which they did until around 2010, when population declines and changing perceptions of the value of higher education have led to a decline in enrollment that is evident in current numbers (Harvey, 2021). Just as the rise of enrollment from the 1970's was spurred by multiple changes in national and educational demographics, so too is the contemporary

enrollment decline. One of the demographic factors that has shifted significantly in the higher education enrollment landscape is student enrollment by gender.

Student Enrollment by Gender

In 1970, male students represented 58% of higher education enrollment and women represented just 42%. However, females took the enrollment majority by 1980 and their representation in higher education institutions has continued to increase since (NCES, 2023c). Female students now compose 58% of enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions and males represent 42% of enrollment (National Student Clearinghouse, 2024). Females hold the majority of enrollment across both 4-year and 2-year institutions as well, although they have a greater majority of 60% at 2-year institutions compared to 40% for males. The female majority in higher education is a relatively recent development.

The gap between male college attendance and female college attendance that was present from 1930-1970 was known as the gender gap, while the changes since 1970 have been referred to as the gender gap reversal (Goldin et al., 2006). This reversal had many causes. One such cause was the changes in female expectations to join the workforce. At the opening of the 1970's, only 30-35% of young women reported expectations to join the workforce. However, by the late 1970's, 80% of young women expected to work (Goldin et al., 2006). This was likely influenced by the passage of Title IX in 1972 which allowed women access to more fields of study and work. Additionally, the college-going women of the 1970's had also performed better than their male counterparts in secondary education and investing in a college education led to a greater wage increase for women than for men of the time (Goldin et al., 2006). Women now earn more degrees across all levels of education than their male counterparts and this trend is present in many countries (DiPrete & Buchmann, 2013). It is both necessary and important to

recognize that not all individuals are accurately represented by the dichotomy of male vs. female. Unfortunately, national statistics do not currently provide statistical data to adequately represent enrollment of those whose identity falls outside of the gender binary. While gender representation amongst higher education students has shifted significantly, gender is not the only fluctuating demographic factor. Student enrollment across various racial and ethnic groups has seen significant changes as well.

Student Enrollment by Race and Ethnicity

The demographic changes shaping tomorrow's higher education environment and enrollment trends include substantial changes in the race and ethnicity of incoming students, as a reflection of larger changes in the country's population. Over the past decade, institutions have seen the representation of some populations on campus decline, while others have risen. Groups experiencing a decline amongst the total enrolled population include White and Black populations. Since 2010, the percentage of undergraduate enrollment held by students who identify as white decreased from 60% to 51% (NCES, 2023d). Projections indicate that this group will continue to decline slightly, particularly amongst graduates of public high schools (Bransberger et al., 2020). The percentage of enrolled undergraduates who identify as Black is currently around 13%, with the enrolled headcount declining by 27% since 2010 (National NCES, 2023d).

Groups experiencing relatively unchanging representation amongst enrolled undergraduates include those who are identify as Pacific Islander and those who are identified as American Indian/Alaskan Native. These two groups have held steady at 1% or less of the enrolled population and are not expected to shift significantly over the next decade. It is certainly worth noting that data on the presence and enrollment of those who identify as Pacific Islander is

challenging to separate from the larger Asian population due to imperfect data identification practices.

Undergraduate student groups which have been experiencing growth include Hispanic, Asian, and multiracial students (NCES, 2023d). Hispanic student enrollment has grown from 14% of undergraduates in 2010 to 21% of undergraduates as of 2021. Projections indicate that this population has likely reached a point at which it will hold steady through the 2030's (Bransberger et al., 2020). The Asian population, which again is challenging to separate from the Pacific Islander population, has grown somewhat, rising from 6% to 7% of enrolled undergraduates and projected to gain an additional two percentage points in the decade ahead (Bransberger et al., 2020; NCES, 2023d). Students who identify with two or more races or as multiracial have seen their share of undergraduate enrollment rise 2% over the past 10 years (NCES, 2023b) and have a projected increase of an additional percentage point (Bransberger et al., 2020). Collectively, these changes to the racial and ethnic make-up of undergraduate student populations indicate that there is work to be done in ensuring that institutions are able to meet the rapidly changing needs of their enrolled students.

Student Enrollment by Generational Status

Undergraduates' generational status as college students is a factor which influences multiple aspects of their institutional engagement. Current estimates indicate that 42.5% of minors live in households where the guardians did not hold a college degree, making them a large potential population of first-generation college students (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2025). Amongst currently enrolled undergraduates in the United States, 25.8% are identified as first-generation. First generation students choose to attend a variety of institutional types, with the largest number going to for-profit institutions (39.9%) and public 2-year

institutions (32.7%). These are both institutional types that offer the highest degree of access in terms of open admission policies, presenting low academic barriers to enrollment. The distribution of first-generation students amongst various racial and ethnic groups shows that Latino students are most likely to be first-generation college students at 45.8%, followed by 32% of Black students, 28.2% of Native American students, 27% of Asian students, and only 16.7% of white students (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2025). This distribution of college-going generational status amongst various racial and ethnic grouping likely due in part to the length of time each of these populations has historically had access to higher education learning opportunities.

Student Enrollment by Age

Amongst the most challenging demographic changes for higher education institutions to manage will be a change in the age of the average undergraduate student. As of 2023, total college enrollments for the nation were made up by 9.8% of students under the age of 18, 57.7% of students ages 18 to 24, and 32.3% of students ages 25 and up (Ulasava, 2025). Non-tradition aged students, those 25 and older, have been enrolling in greater numbers due in part to the accessibility of online degree programs and their need to develop new skills as labor markets change. By the year 2030, students 25 and old are projected to make up 35% of total enrollments (Ulasava, 2025). Due to the birthrate decline that accompanied the 2008 Recession, a looming demographic cliff will soon require colleges and universities to be more intentional in managing their enrollment (Harvey, 2021). Beginning in 2025, higher education institutions across the nation are projected to experience a decline in applicants and subsequent enrollments as a result of fewer students graduating high school. This decline is expected to result in an average 11% enrollment decrease across all institutions, with varied impacts by geographic region (Harvey,

2021). Many enrollments management professionals are looking to adult and returning students to fill the enrollment void that will be left by the drop in high school graduates, a strategic move that will further transform the higher education landscape.

Public Opinion and College-Going Rates

One of the most challenging enrollment influences for college and university administrators to account for is public opinion. The college-going rate for high school graduates is one indication of this. While college-going rates fluctuate regularly, they have displayed a drastic decline from 70% of recent high school grades ages 16 to 24 in 2009 to 61.4% in 2023 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2025). The college-going rate for men is currently 57.6%, compared to women at 65.3%. Amongst racial and ethnic populations, college going rates are lowest for Hispanic/Latino students at 51.8%. Both white (59.95) and Black (59.6%) students are currently attending college at similar rates. The only group not currently declining in rates of college attendance is Asian students who have the highest college-going rate at 84.7% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2025). For students who do attend postsecondary institutions after high school graduation, fewer are choosing 2-year institutions and more are choosing 4-year institutions (National Center of Education Statistics, 2024). College going rates may be influenced by a variety of factors including rising cost of attendance, concerns regarding the value of investing into higher education in comparison to the burden of student loan debt, and perception of post-graduate marketability. Public opinion around these factors has led to increased scrutiny of higher education outcomes, primarily retention and graduation rates.

Institutional Performance Metrics

A prominent topic in higher education today is the issue of institutional performance gaps (IPGs). Previously referred to as “achievement gaps” or “equity gaps” but later re-named to

place responsibility for outcomes on the institution rather than the student (Bensimon & Spiva, 2022), IPGs refer to gaps in the retention and graduation rates for certain student populations in comparison to rates for the total student populations. Gaps have been identified across social class, racial and ethnic groups, gender, and additional identity indicators (Ziegler et al., 2021). Additionally, there have been gaps identified across multiple outcomes including enrollment persistence, graduation rates, funding, and more. The persistence of these IPGs points to structural inequities within institutions that challenge some populations, while benefiting others. Many initiatives have been undertaken across multiple institution types to remedy these gaps (E. Chang et al., 2019), yet the gaps remain and, in some instances, have widened despite efforts to narrow and eliminate them (California State University, 2022). As attention on IPGs increases at campus, state, and system levels, institutions are experiencing pressure to understand and close these gaps. Due to the diverse ways that various student groups experience higher education, institutions must consider the unique experiences and needs of each student population experiencing disparate outcomes.

Latino Student Success

Postsecondary enrollment of Latino students has increased substantially over the last 50 years, growing from 4% of the enrolled population in 1980 to 21% as of 2021 (NCES, 2023d). Latino students now make up the second largest racial/ethnic population in American higher education (Espinosa et al., 2019). Despite increased enrollment, Latino students' rates of retention and degree completion remain low. Approximately 84% of Latino students persist beyond the first year of enrollment, yet only 35% complete their degrees (Espinosa et al., 2019). In total, Latinos age 25 and older hold fewer bachelor's degrees than their counterparts from other ethnic groups (Santiago, 2006). Educational experiences and outcomes for Latino students

are influenced by a variety of factors including public policy and funding, challenges in transitioning into and navigating higher education institutions, and the various sources of strength and knowledge these students lean on to succeed.

Hispanic Serving Institutions

The federal government recognized the problematically low rates of degree completion for the Latino population and moved to create programs to support the success of this population. In 1992 the federal government created a new designation for public and private not-for-profit institutions whose student population is composed of 25% or more Hispanic/Latino students (Santiago, 2006). These institutions are currently recognized as Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), a designation which comes with eligibility for federal funding to support the grouping population. However, it is important to recognize that the HSI designation is based solely on enrollment, not institutional mission or outcome metrics, and does not provide any indicate of how effectively these institutions serve Latino students (Santiago, 2006). Since the inception of the HSI designation, additional organizations have emerged which work to improve the Latino student experiences the degree to which institutions adequately meet their needs through research, advocacy, and information sharing. For example, the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) is an organization composed of leaders of Hispanic-Serving Institutions which works to address issues for Hispanic/Latino students and advocate for policy changes (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, 2025). Excelencia in Education is another national organization which works to units HSI leaders, compile and share data on factors influencing Latino students, and brings attention to practices which have proven effective in increasing Latino student success (Excelencia in Education, 2024). Excelencia in Education also offers a certification known as the Seal of Excelencia, an acknowledgement of institutions

which truly serve, not just enroll Latino students. The presence and work of these organizations is increasingly critical in the modern higher education climate as the current federal administration seeks to eliminate the funding that supports the work of HSIs (Burke & Dipierro, 2025).

Transitioning to Postsecondary Education

Students face a variety of challenges as they navigate the transition to college. Both physical and mental health represent difficulties for new college students with mental health challenges including depression, anxiety, loneliness, and subsequent substance abuse being prevalent (E. J. Jones & Schreier, 2023). Additional challenges include finances, developing appropriate study and organization habits, connecting socially with others, navigating an abundance of new information, and balancing school and home life (Stokoe et al., 2024). Highlighted amongst these challenges for all new college students is the need to adapt to a new level of academic expectations (Elliott & Brenneman, 2018) and the need to self-manage as an emerging adult (Goodlad et al., 2019). These transitional hurdles are often magnified for underrepresented groups including low-income, first-generation, and racially marginalized students. Latino students, in particular, are known to experience additional challenges such as poor academic preparation, which leads to a more significant academic adjustment to college rigor and greater academic challenges (Llamas et al., 2020).

Colleges and universities have traditionally utilized placement tests to determine students' preparedness for college-level academic coursework (Belfield & Crosta, 2012). These tests have typically assessed students' skills relative to math, reading, and writing. Students who scored well on these types of tests have been deemed "college-ready" and permitted to enroll into college-level coursework. Those who have scored lower have been placed into remedial

coursework (also referred to as developmental or preparatory) to aid in skill development (Tierney & Garcia, 2008). The number of students entering higher education needing remedial coursework is quite high with up to 40% of students at four-year institutions and 68% of students at two-year institutions taking at least one remedial course (Chen, 2016). Students of color in particular are over-represented in remedial courses, particularly Black and Latino students (Chen, 2016).

Unfortunately, the challenges that Latino students face in transitioning to higher education institutions are often continuations of the challenges they have experienced in secondary schooling environments. Studies show that from the time they enter high school, Latino students experience internal conflicts regarding culture, feel distressed by the lack of care directed at them by teachers, and anguish at the task of navigating organizational structure and practices of education (Edeburn & Knotts, 2019). These students are more likely to have attended under-resourced high schools and had limited access to information that would prepare them for college (Acevedo-Gil, 2019), which further disadvantages them in terms of adequate preparation for college-level academic expectations and rigor (Bitew, 2016).

Latino students also encounter many transitional challenges related to culture. The most noticeable forms of cultural challenges are caused by an unwelcoming campus environment, including instances of racism and discrimination (Llamas et al., 2020). Other types of challenges come in the form of acculturative stress stemming from incongruencies between campus culture and home culture (Chun et al., 2016). Latino students report being asked to return home frequently by family members, creating a direct conflict with their need to stay at school to attend to their studies. These students report feeling stressed about school if they prioritize their family but also report experiencing interpersonal conflicts and guilt if they prioritize their studies

(Gloria & Castellanos, 2012). When prioritizing their studies, Latino students commonly experience commentary from family members about the misalignment of their choices and family norms, a stressful phenomenon known as cultural distancing (Llamas et al., 2020). A phenomenon known as family achievement guilt may also impact Latino students succeed academically as the development their new creates a sense of disconnect or loss between them and their families (Williams et al., 2024). Another type of cultural incongruity known as cultural mismatch can occur when students receive messages from the institution that are framed by independent culture which conflicts with the interdependent nature of their home culture (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012). These types of stressors have been shown to be positively correlated with depressive symptoms for Latino students (Ponciano et al., 2023).

To aid these students in making successful transitions to college, many schools and universities partner together to provide transitional programs, some of which are federally supported. The Federal Trio Programs, as an example, are grant-funded initiatives that are typically run out of higher education institutions with the goal of connecting with secondary students to support their transition to and through college (U.S. Department of Education, 2024). Amongst the eight Trio Programs, Upward Bound is one that boasts significant student outcomes. Through partnership with targeted schools, Upward Bound provides first-generation and low-income students with academic instruction, learning support, counseling services, and financial literacy programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). These programs demonstrate significant positive outcomes for participants including increased college enrollment and degree receipt (Cahalan & Goodwin, 2014). While the federally funded programs are widely known, additional site-specific programs can benefit students as well. For example, many high schools are beginning to partner directly with colleges to enroll secondary students in dual credit

programs to help them develop study and prioritization skills before entering a university setting (Allen et al., 2023).

Navigating Higher Education

Both secondary and post-secondary challenges impact the educational trajectory of Latino students. These individuals contend with low academic self-concept and recognize long before reaching higher education institutions that they will likely be challenged by academic under preparation, potential citizenship status challenges, and many who hold the intersecting identity of first-generation fear getting lost in the institution (Acevedo-Gil, 2019). Additionally, while Latino students understand and articulate the importance of social interactions in higher education, they often are challenged by engaging with new peers and making connections (Bitew, 2016). Latino students also commonly report experiencing financial challenges during their college years (Llamas et al., 2020; Ponciano et al., 2023), to the extent that many report that working in college is simply not optional, it's a necessity (Adams & McBrayer, 2020). These challenges often cause them to work long hours while also attempting to balance family and school obligations (Arana et al., 2011). Despite the many challenges Latino students face in higher education, this population has also been known to leverage a variety of community strengths on their paths to education.

Academic Identity Development

Meeting a variety of obstacles in the transition to and through college can impact students' beliefs about their potential to succeed in education, often referred to as academic identity (Skinner, 2023). The three areas of academic identity development include sense of belonging, mastery orientation, and ownership and commitment. Each of these areas contains sub-features as well, furthering understanding of the influence of individual nuanced variables on

academic identity formation. Sense of belonging encompasses relatedness, self-worth, and contributions. Mastery orientation contains efficacy, growth mindset, and mastery goals. Finally, the ownership and commitment component of the model is composed of value, autonomy, and purpose (Skinner, 2023).

Latino students' experiences with sense of belonging are regarded as some of the first contributors to their academic identity development (Skinner, 2023). In this context, students' sense of belonging refers to their feeling of being valued members of the learning community including being welcome, safe, maintaining a sense of self-worth, and making contributions to the learning environment. While Latino students have been reported to enjoy and appreciate the diversity of overarching campus environments, it is their experiences in microclimates such as departments, majors, classrooms, and smaller social groups that most heavily impact their perceptions of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Serrano, 2022). In these smaller academic spaces, Latino students report experiencing harmful and alienating microaggressions, even at Hispanic Serving Institutions (Serrano, 2022). Additionally, recent studies have captured the sense of fear for personal safety that students of color experience on college campuses, particularly at predominantly white institutions due to political polarization and incidents targeting marginalized groups (Adams & McBrayer, 2020). Simply engaging with the larger campus is not sufficient to create a sense of belonging for Latino students, as these students develop their sense of belonging by engaging in smaller groups, such as study groups or organizations that allow them to connect across both campus and community (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

The second area of academic identity development is referred to as mastery orientation and is composed of items such as the student's self-efficacy, growth mindset, and goals (Skinner,

2023). Essentially, this area focuses on the individual student's belief in their capacity to learn and grow. A review of literature on academic self-efficacy of Latino students confirms that this population experiences positive correlations between their academic self-efficacy and academic performance outcomes (Manzano-Sanchez et al., 2018). Additionally, the development of Latino students ethnic-racial identity was also positively correlated with academic self-efficacy, possibly due to the students' recognition that they were achieving a milestone that was not socially expected of them (Wheeler et al., 2022). While academic self-efficacy has been shown to be positively correlated with academic outcomes, Latino students have also been shown to have lower levels of academic self-efficacy than their majority peers (Peguero & Shaffer, 2015), indicating that this particular area of academic identity development presents a challenge for Latino students.

The final area of academic identity development is ownership and commitment (Skinner, 2023). This references the degree to which the student is dedicated and bought into the educational process and their purpose for being in college. In terms of having a sense of purpose in college, recent studies do support the idea that Latino students, particularly those who are first generation, are bought in to the college process and view obtaining a degree as an important step towards life improvement and overcoming financial adversity (J. Chang et al., 2020). However, Skinner's (2023) model references autonomy, authenticity, and exploring personal interests and passions which do not necessarily culturally align with all Latino students. While some Latino students feel empowered to create individual goals, others resist personal interest exploration and are more motivated by collective or community interests (López, 2024). This highlights the diversity of thought and experience that exists within the broader Latino population.

Ethnic identity development is a critical component of academic identity development for Latino students (López, 2024) but isn't effectively represented in popular models of academic identity. In reaching young adulthood and entering college, Latino students are confronted with the reality of the many ways that discrimination and racism have impacted them. This adds to their plate the additional task of making sense of their ethnic identity in the context of both society and education in order to fully develop their academic identity (López, 2024; Syed, 2010; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). Confronting the reality of prejudice against a foundational component of one's identity is challenging enough, but these students must now do so in a new environment, away from their community and the individuals they have typically looked to as authority figures. Some students may begin to internalize the discriminatory messages against their identity, which can undermine their academic performance and identity development. Alternatively, Latino students who come to understand their challenges as byproducts of racist and discriminatory social constructs are poised to develop an informed Latino ethnic identity as well as academic identity (Torres & Hernandez, 2007).

Latino Community Strengths

While Latino students must overcome a variety of obstacles on their way to a degree, their journeys and outcomes are not defined by their challenges. Latino students often find success in educational settings by leveraging funds of knowledge, which are resources and skills accumulated within, and passed down through, families which are essential for well-being (Moll et al., 1992). These funds of knowledge are often passed down through relational interactions (as opposed to transactional) which build relationships and community for the student. Examples of these skills may include knowledge common within their household environments such as budgeting, herbal medicine knowledge, home maintenance, and more (Moll et al., 1992). These

pieces of knowledge and skills prove to be strengths for many students in higher education when they are appropriately leveraged. Many Latino students navigate college by relying on funds of knowledge support provided to them by their families and communities (Contreras & Kiyama, 2022). While the funds of knowledge that students bring with them into colleges and universities should be continuously considered and recognized, the institution simultaneously has a responsibility to understand the areas where students are facing challenges and work to dismantle institutional barriers to student success.

Cultural Mismatch

One of the many challenges faced by various student groups in higher education today is cultural mismatch. Cultural mismatch theory states that 1) the cultural of higher education institutions and American society at large reflect and promote independent social norms, 2) that students' experiences can be positively or negatively influenced depending on whether they experience a match vs. mismatch between their own cultural norms and institutional cultural norms, and 3) that a student's relative match or mismatch with the institutional culture will ultimately influences their view of and performance on tasks within the academic setting (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012).

Conversations on cultural mismatch gained prevalence in higher education literature with the publication of cultural mismatch theory by Stephens, Fryberg, et al. (2012). This theory builds off the scholarship on stereotype threat/social identity threat which suggests that individuals who know that their identity is stigmatized will feel stress, and that stress experience will ultimately shape their performance (Inzlicht & Schmader, 2012). Cultural mismatch theory extends the idea of stereotype threat to suggest that individuals who are faced with an institutional culture in their education environment that differs from their own cultural norms and

expectations, they will experience a cultural mismatch which will similarly impact their performance and/or wellness (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012). It has also been found that the more a student experiences discrimination in college, the more likely they are to experience mismatch with their institutional culture (Feasel et al., 2024).

Institutional Culture

Drawing from studies on organizational culture, higher education institutional culture has been described as something an institution has (collective norms, values, beliefs, and assumptions), as well as something the institution does (practices) (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). Institutional culture is formed over time by the inhabitants of the institution and, once established, these cultures are stable enough that they actually socialize new institutional members into the existing culture (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). This is demonstrated by the fact that first tier institutions, which are some of the older and most selective, present with independent cultural norms (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012). Second-tier institutions, including public and state institutions, present with norms that are significantly less independent (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012). Two year, open-access institutions, such as community colleges, present with interdependent cultural norms (Tibbetts et al., 2018). Each institution type is reflective of its inhabitants.

Populations Experiencing Cultural Mismatch

In early publications of cultural mismatch theory, the concept was applied to specifically describe the cultural mismatch between first-generation college students, who were theorized to hold working-class norms characterized by interdependence, and their institutions, which were found to promote middle-class norms of independence (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012). As additional scholars have taken on exploration through the lens of cultural mismatch theory,

applications and theoretical considerations have been expanded. Nguyen and Nguyen (2020) expanded on cultural mismatch theory to considerations of mismatch based upon race and ethnicity, particularly amongst Cambodian American students. This consideration has been further expanded to encompass many races and ethnicities including students from the Chinese diaspora (Schell, 2023), Latino students (Feasel et al., 2024; Vasquez-Salgado et al., 2015), and more.

Consequences of Cultural Mismatch

The current literature indicates that the students who encounter cultural mismatch in higher education experience a variety of consequences, including those that are academic, social, physical, and psychological in nature. On the academic front, students who experienced mismatch were able to complete fewer academic tasks than their peers in a set timeframe and perceived assigned tasks to be more difficult (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012). Students experiencing mismatch are shown to have poorer grade outcomes in both the first and second year of enrollment as compared to those who did not experience mismatch (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012). These outcomes are displayed clearly in GPA differences, even when controlling academic preparation levels (Phillips et al., 2020). This may be, in part, related to the fact that students who experience cultural mismatch are found to engage in resource avoidance (Schell, 2023). For Latino students in particular, experiencing mismatch between home and school demands were found to experience negative academic outcomes if they chose to prioritize family leading to inner personal conflict due to juggling the independent nature of their school priorities and the interdependent nature of their family dynamics (Vasquez-Salgado et al., 2015).

Students experiencing mismatch report experiencing social impacts such as lower subjective social status standing than their peers (Feasel et al., 2024; Phillips et al., 2020) and

experience a poor sense of social “fit”. These individuals also report experiencing greater stress and anxiety (Talavera et al., 2019), both in terms of cognitive stress and physical stress in the form of increased cortisol production (Stephens, Townsend et al., 2012). They have less positive and more negative emotional reactions to tasks (Stephens, Townsend et al., 2012), and have been shown to leverage coping behaviors in the face of stress that included distraction, avoidance, and not seeking campus resources (J. Chang et al., 2020; Schell, 2023).

Mitigating Mismatch

For multiple decades, Vincent Tinto’s (1987) theory of student departure, which proposes that students must successfully integrate into both the academic and social systems of an institution, has been a prominent framework for how higher education professionals understand student retention and attrition. However, multiple scholars have identified shortcomings of this theory, including the fact that it states that students must leave behind their home cultures and adapt to institutional culture in order to succeed (Museus, 2014). Given evolving understanding of the challenges students face related to acculturation, this stance is no longer effective and there is a significant need for institutions to adapt to their students, rather than the other way around. Unfortunately, just as institutional culture is challenging to define, it is also challenging to change; a single program or initiative is not capable of changing an institution’s culture

Culturally Focused Spaces

Institutional culture must be changed gradually, through multiple connected efforts (Kuh, 2001). One way to address both the students’ experiences with cultural mismatch and their need for resources would be to establish cultural centers on college campuses. These centers would allow students to engage with their like-minded peers and offer culturally validating spaces that mitigate mismatch (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020). Cultural spaces offer students a way to offset the

impact of cultural mismatch in multiple ways including serving as a reminder of the campus's commitment to diversity which has been shown to lower stress responses in those experiencing mismatch (Sladek et al., 2020), as well as reduce cultural dissonance and increase student persistence (Museus & Quaye, 2009). These spaces can also help to mitigate the low sense of fit that many students report as contributing to their mismatch (Phillips et al., 2020). Additionally, these spaces offer a place where students with similar experiences can share their challenges and have a space to build capital together (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020). Embedding resources into these spaces would make them readily available, addressing many students' unwillingness to seek them out (J. Chang et al., 2020). For example, placing academic advisors in these spaces would also be useful given that first generation, ethnic minority students are less likely to seek out help. Such centers could also offer difference-education programs to help students understand how their educational experiences may differ from other student populations, a technique that has been demonstrated to eliminate equity gaps (Stephens et al., 2014).

Culturally Engaging Campus Model

On a larger scale, higher education administrators would benefit by beginning the work of institutional culture change by learning, sharing, and adopting alternative, culturally relevant frameworks for understanding their student's journeys such as the Culturally Engaging Campus Environments Model (CECE) (Museus, 2014). The CECE Model proposed by Museus (2014) recognizes the many factors that influence the higher education experience of students, particularly racially diverse individuals. This integration framework recognizes that students enter the institution with their own pre-college input including demographics, academic preparation, and individual dispositions. It then acknowledges that the extent to which the campus environment culturally engages its students in a variety of supportive and educational

activities exerts influence on students' sense of belonging, academic disposition, and academic performance. All of these factors merge together to influence student's college success, with understanding that influences external to the campus environment are present and influential as well (Museus, 2014). If the CECE model, or one similar, were to be recognized at the highest tier of institutional leadership and broadly adopted, it would position individual unit leaders within the institution to begin collaboratively building the components of a culturally engaging campus environment.

Recent literature on cultural mismatch theory has illuminated the fact that students experience mismatch when they are expected to explore and navigate their institutions independently, leaving them feeling lost and floating (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020; Schell, 2023). Universities often recognize that their students have a need for navigational support and offer numerous resources in response, making them readily available for students to access. However, it has been shown that many of the student populations that experience cultural mismatch, including first-generation students and students of color, are culturally less likely to reach out for help (J. Chang et al., 2020). Instead, these individuals more often employ distraction techniques and try to solve their own problems instead (J. Chang et al., 2020). This inability to navigate the campus culture independently is reflective of these students lacking cultural capital that is both valued and expected at the institution. Cultural capital can be described as cultural signals, knowledge, and behaviors (Lamont & Lareau, 1988). Multiple scholars have since begun to incorporate concepts of cultural capital as additional means to explain how students navigate and are impacted by congruent or incongruent cultures, including by race and ethnicity (J. Chang et al., 2020; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020).

Low-income students who attend a college-preparatory high school did not experience the same level of cultural mismatch as their low-income peers who attended public high schools, and these students had a much easier time navigating relationships with faculty (Jack, 2016). This indicates that, even though these students didn't grow up with the cultural capital, they were able to receive and benefit from it through an educational source. Additionally, difference education programs designed to inform students that they may have different experiences than their peers, as well as interventions that work to affirm both independent and interdependent values system can both improve students' perceptions of match with their institutions (Hecht et al., 2021; Tibbetts et al., 2018).

Culturally Responsive Academic Advising

Advising administrators are positioned to influence the development of a more responsive campus culture through implementation of advisor training and development programs to inform advisors of best practices (McGill, Heikkila, & Lazarowicz, 2020). One such approach would be to conduct an ethnographic content analysis of all department communications. This process consists of reviewing documented communications to identify their cultural messages (Altheide, 1987). Culture has three recognizable components including artifacts, values, and underlying assumptions and beliefs (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). In an ethnographic content analysis, the communications sent out by a department represents the artifact. An advising unit can then review the documented communication to identify what values, beliefs, and assumptions are communicated to students and the cultural implications of those assumptions (Wilson-Stykes, 2023). This allows the unit an opportunity to update their communications to be more culturally responsive to the student population. Advising units that have undergone this process can encourage their intra- and inter-campus partners to do the same.

Academic advisors' understanding of student development informs their practice (Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008). However, many of the well-known student development theories that advisors are familiar with were developed in reference to historically affluent, white, male college students and do not account for the unique experiences of racially and ethnically diverse populations (S. R. Jones & Stewart, 2016). Advisors should learn about and leverage more recent third-wave student development theories which consider how social power structures influence students (S. R. Jones & Stewart, 2016). For example, advisors who know of ecological systems theory should consider that the higher education institution, as part of the student's microsystem, is influenced by the cultural norms and values of the larger macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The ways advisors communicate these norms can influence a student's sense of belonging at the institution (Schell, 2023) and, as a result, their educational outcomes (Strayhorn, 2016). Additionally, academic advisors could benefit from engaging in training on cultural awareness and humility.

Advisors should value working with, and should care about, the success of diverse students (McGill, Duslak, & Puroway, 2020). However, advisors are socialized into their profession (McGill, Duslak, & Puroway, 2020) at institutions which value and reproduce independent cultural norms (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012). Recent research indicates that current advising practices can create stress for students from diverse backgrounds (Schell, 2023). Recognition of such conflicts may promote development of new models of considering student needs and experiences. Learning from marginalized students about their needs and preferences in advising is an accessible way to begin. For example, students of color have expressed that advising is more useful to them when it is humanized, proactive, holistic, and connects students to culturally relevant learning opportunities (Museus, 2021).

While it is clear that advising administrators and advisors have a significant amount of work to contribute to creating a culturally engaging campus, other units do as well. For example, units responsible for new student programming could offer difference education programming to help incoming students recognize how they are different from each other and how those differences may impact their experiences at the institution. These educational programs have been demonstrated to be effective at aiding student transitions and improving academic performance (Stephens et al., 2014, 2015; Townsend et al., 2019). Embedding reminders that the institution values diversity in such educational programs can also serve to lower the stress response of students (Sladek et al., 2020).

Summary

The current higher education landscape is causing concerns for higher education administrators as enrollment projections continue to decline and public opinion on the value of a college education appears to be waning. With fewer traditional aged students graduating high school and a smaller portion of that population enrolling in postsecondary education, institutions nationwide will soon be challenges to maintain present day enrollment numbers. One opportunity to bolster enrollments is through better serving Latino students. As the largest enrolled population in American higher education today, and as a demographic group with a large number of individuals who left college without earning a degree, Latino students represent an excellent opportunity for institutions to regain and/or avoid enrollment loses. However, in order to attract, enroll, and retain Latino students, higher education administrators must first gain a better understanding of the Latino student experience and where these students are facing challenges. Experiences of cultural mismatch between Latino students and their educational

institutions may be one area of challenge that campuses can address through investigation and culturally relevant trainings.

Chapter 3 - Methodology and Procedures

Chapter 3 details the study's design, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures. The chapter opens with a review of the current study parameters, including problem statement, purpose, and research questions. The research design is introduced and discussed through the lens of the selected methodological framework. Next, the research procedures are disclosed, including site identification, participant selection, recruitment techniques, and data collection procedures. Finally, the study's data analytics are discussed, including a step-by-step review of the analysis process, ethical considerations regarding participant privacy and data security, and methods to ensure trustworthiness and authenticity.

Problem Statement

Disparate persistence and degree attainment outcomes have been recognized amongst postsecondary student populations (Cahalan et al., 2022). Specific student populations, including first-generation, low-income, and students of color, are found to persist in and graduate from college at lower rates than their peer groups, prompting conversation about equity gaps or institutional performance gaps. Higher education scholars and practitioners have explored many diverse approaches to close these gaps, including increased representation (Bowman & Denson, 2022), course re-design (Mowreader, 2023), college transition programming and education (Stephens et al., 2014), participation in undergraduate research opportunities (Haeger et al., 2024), and more. However, academic advising has only recently and sparingly been included in equity efforts and literature (Museus, 2021; Schell, 2023).

Cultural mismatch theory (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012) has emerged in literature as a theoretical lens from which to consider the ways that the institutional culture of a given higher education setting could influence the outcomes of students at that institution. Cultural mismatch

theory posits that students whose home culture does not align with the culture of their educational institution will experience stressors and challenges stemming from this mismatch (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012). Multiple studies have explored the impact of cultural mismatch from a quantitative perspective, demonstrating that it leads to physiological and psychological stress among those who experience it (Stephens, Townsend et al., 2012; Talavera et al., 2019). This mismatch has been studied in relation to institutional communications (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012), student life opportunities (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020), and, more recently, academic advising (Schell, 2023). Further study of cultural mismatch presents an opportunity to explore the impact of academic advising on student success and outcomes from a new lens. However, exploration of cultural mismatch in academic advising has been sparse to date and has not been expanded to all student populations, student demographics, or institutional settings.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how Latino students attending a public, historically white university experience and interpret the culture of their educational institution in the context of their academic advising interactions.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the study:

1. What features of, or interactions within, advising sessions create an experience of cultural match or cultural mismatch between Latino students and the academic advisors they work with?
2. How do Latino students make meaning of the cultural match or mismatch they experience through their academic advising interactions?

Research Design

A qualitative approach was most appropriate for this study given its exploratory nature and the focus on understanding each student's subjective experiences with cultural transference (Bhattacharya, 2017). A quantitative study would not allow for a rich description of the interactions between advisors and advisees, much less the lasting implications of such practices. I approached this study as a generic qualitative inquiry.

Qualitative inquiry is a research approach which focuses on understanding the context and meaning of an experience. This inductive approach to research often utilizes words and language as data to understand, interrogate, and deconstruct human experiences (Lather, 1991). In qualitative inquiry, there are a few well-established approaches including phenomenology, narrative inquiry, ethnography, and grounded theory research (Bhattacharya, 2017). I selected generic qualitative inquiry (Caelli et al., 2003), also known as basic qualitative inquiry (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) as my approach because this study is not guided by any one established qualitative methodology. A generic qualitative approach provides the researcher with flexibility in approach and analysis when exploring new areas of research in which the desire is to understand participants' perceived experiences and perspectives (Ellis & Hart, 2023). This approach works particularly well for studies which emphasize the depth of experiences in small sample sizes.

This study drew on methods associated with phenomenology, which aims to learn how people make meaning from living through a shared experience (Bhattacharya, 2017; Creswell, 2007). I interviewed multiple Latino students who have shared experiences of engaging in academic advising and seeking to learn about how these students experience advising and make meaning of their experiences. While phenomenological studies are generally conducted through

multiple interviews with 5-25 individuals who have lived through the experience of interest (Creswell, 2007), my study engaged with each participant only once.

Research Setting and Context

Since the aim of the study was to explore how Latino undergraduate students at historically white public institutions experience their institutional culture through advising, my criteria for participant inclusion began with identifying an institution that meets the criterion of being a historically white, public institution. I selected Northern Valley University (NVU), a pseudonym, as the study site. NVU is a regional public institution in the United States. This institution is a historically white institution. However, its student population has shifted to include more Latino students, qualifying it as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). This particular institution was chosen because, although it is designated as an HSI, the institutional performance outcomes indicate that there are substantial retention and graduate rate gaps between its Latino students and its historically represented populations. This makes NVU an appropriate institution from which to explore how long-standing institution culture may be affecting its current student population.

Sampling Strategy

After identification of the research site, criterion sampling was used to ensure that potential participants from the identified site were able to speak to the phenomenon of interest. At the individual participant level, I utilized the criteria of actively enrolled undergraduate students who self-identify as Latino, Latina, Latine, Latine, and/or Hispanic. Additionally, the potential participant pool were narrowed to include only those who have experienced at least two separate academic advising interactions during their undergraduate career, to ensure each

participant has sufficient advising experiences to speak from. The sample size for the study was nine participants.

To identify and recruit participants who fit my desired criteria, I sought assistance from representatives at NVU who serve as coordinators and/or directors of cultural affinity centers, student support programs, and academic advising units that serve a large number of Latino students. I emailed these individuals with an explanation of my study and requested their partnership in recruiting participants through their departments, programs, and spaces. I provided recruitment materials in the form of invitational flyers (Appendix A) with details about the study, including goals of the research, incentives to participate, estimated time commitment of participation, and contact information for interested parties. The institutional representatives assisted me by posting these flyers in multiple spaces around campus that Latino students frequent such as cultural affinity centers and student support program offices. Additionally, some of the institutional representatives agreed to distribute a recruitment email (Appendix B) to their respective student populations.

Students interested in participating in the study were asked to express their interest by scanning a QR code on the recruitment flyer or clicking a link in the recruitment email which directed them to complete an electronic intake process based in Qualtrics. This process consisted of completing the informed consent form (Appendix C) and a brief screening survey (Appendix D). Those students who expressed interest and met the desired criteria were asked to provide their contact information and preferred method of communication for me to reach out to schedule an interview.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected from participants through interviews. One semi-structured interview (Bhattacharya, 2017) was conducted with each participant to gather data around their academic advising experiences, as well as the meaning that students made of those experiences. For consistency, all interviews for the study were conducted virtually through the Zoom platform to ensure that both on-campus and virtual students had equal opportunities to participate. The virtual modality of interviews was also used to maximize scheduling flexibility and to ensure that the physical setting of the interview did not cause participants discomfort as the participants would be free to select their own location from which to log into the sessions (Durdella, 2019; Talmage, 2012). Interviews were scheduled at mutually available times with deference given to the student participant's schedule.

The semi-structured interview questions (Appendix E) were informed by my research questions and evolved based on the information gained from the prior interview sessions. Each participant was interviewed one time for a duration of 30-90 minutes. I spent approximately five minutes at the beginning of each interview reviewing the details of study. During this introductory conversation, I disclosed to the participants my own background working as an academic advisor, current role as an advising administrator, and why I am interested in studying Latino student experiences with advising. I intentionally acknowledged my outsider position in respect to the student populations and clearly explained what motivated me, both personally and professionally, to study and understand the experiences of these students. I proactively asked students about their comfort and interest levels in continuing to participate in the interview, given my positionality, and let them know that they were free to decline the invitation if they were uncomfortable.

After confirming the participant's willingness to continue, I began the interview with questions intended to build rapport. This included asking participants what motivated them to attend college, what led them to choose the institution, and what they were majoring in. I then directed the focus of the interview towards how the student first became aware of advising at the institution, gathering information about how the student learned about advising as an institutional service, when and how they first engaged with academic advising, and any expectations that might have been communicated with the student related to academic advising. Next, I asked a series of questions about the individual's advising experiences, such as which topics the student discussed with the advisor, the extent to which they found the advising session relevant or helpful to their education journey, and any implicit or explicit expectations of the advisor. Finally, I asked the student questions related to their meaning-making process as it pertained to their advising experiences. In this final phase of the interview, I sought to understand the long-term influence that the advising interaction(s) had on the participants' self-perceptions or their perceptions of advisors.

Data Analysis Procedures

With the participant's permission, each interview session was recorded and transcribed, via Zoom. Immediately following the conclusion of each interview, both the recording and transcript file were saved to my personal password-protected OneDrive account. I began analysis of each interview transcript shortly after completing the interview. Analyzing data concurrently with ongoing data collection helped me to ensure I asked questions and gathered data that attended to my research questions as closely as possible (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This provided me with the opportunity to refine my questions before engaging in the next interview and to create additional questions to clarify information as needed.

The first step in my analysis process was preparing my data for review. The Zoom videoconferencing platform, utilized to conduct virtual interviews, offered functionality that provided a transcript of the interview conversation. I reviewed each individual transcript multiple times. During the first review, I watched the recorded interview video and reviewed the transcript concurrently while utilizing a word processing software to amend the transcript in areas where the software may not have captured the responses accurately, as well as to get increasingly familiar with participant responses through repeated exposure (Saldaña, 2011). After I had amended and corrected transcripts where needed, I reviewed the video and transcript concurrently again to ensure the transcript was accurate. I then reviewed the transcript and video a third time, adding notations to indicate any significant tone, volume, and/or body language of the participant that was not captured by audio alone (Roulston, 2014). These notations were made as additions to the transcript, noted within brackets such as [said with enthusiasm] or [heavy sarcasm], etc. Once the transcript was reviewed for accuracy and appropriate notations had been added, I uploaded the document to the cloud-based qualitative analysis program, Dedoose.

Once documents were uploaded to Dedoose, I began the process of segmenting. While Dedoose is capable of automated segmentation and code identification, I utilized it only as a tool for enhancing organization as I engaged in manual segmentation and code identification. During segmentation, I identified small, individual units of data within the transcripts that may contribute to answering the study's research questions (Saldaña, 2021). For each segment that I identified, I also created and applied a code. The goal of coding is to identify a phrase or word that represents the meaning of each segment. The style of codes I will utilize is In Vivo codes which are short, verbatim quotations from my interview participants that represent the data

contained in that segment (Saldaña, 2021). I continued this process until all transcripts had been thoroughly reviewed, segmented, and coded.

After segmentation and the first cycle of In Vivo coding, I entered a second cycle coding (Saldaña, 2021). I found it to be organizationally useful to move my process out of Dedoose for this phase and instead conducted the clustering and thematic analysis in a Microsoft Excel sheet stored in OneDrive. During this phase, I worked to cluster the In Vivo codes into groupings with meaningful similarities, or clusters. I continued the work of reviewing and refining these groupings until each cluster of In Vivo codes was mutually exclusive, with codes belonging in only one group (Saldaña, 2021). At this point I was able to identify two primary themes that had emerged from the data, each with a number of subthemes within them.

Trustworthiness and Authenticity

I utilized various styles of journaling and analytic memos at all steps of my data collection and analysis process to remain conscious of my impact on the data and results (Peoples, 2021). This journaling required me to reflect upon my own pre-conceived notions and anticipations (Grondin, 2016). Journaling allowed me to actively recognize, explore, and document any preconceptions to help ensure that I rely on my data, not my personal notions, in the process of seeking data that informed research questions.

In the interview phase, I took brief notes as a form of journaling, particularly in an effort to remain mindful of my own reactions to participant responses (Saldaña, 2011). I utilized handwritten notes to indicate areas of emotional reactivity within myself during the interviews, as well as while re-reading interview transcripts (Maxwell, 2018). These notes assisted me in keeping track of potential alternative interpretations of participant responses and allowed me the

opportunity to check in with participants at strategic times during the interview to verify the accuracy of my own understanding and interpretation.

During segmentation, coding, and clustering, I consistently wrote analytic memos to assist me with analyzing the data identified from interview transcripts (Saldaña, 2011). I used these analytic memos to record my thoughts, ideas, reflections, and feelings around why I assigned and grouped codes in a given way and what thought processes inform such groupings. The ways I grouped codes together was based on my own interpretations of the data and their meanings (Durdella, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) so these groupings had the potential to reflect any personal prejudices or anticipations I may have (Grondin, 2016).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations for this study were taken into account from participant recruitment onward. Initial ethical concerns surround the recruitment procedures. While I utilized incentives to both increase participation and to honor the value of participants' time, I intentionally offered an incentive amount that would not unduly influence any one individual to participate. If a participant decided to discontinue their participation, I honored any incentive offers for the time they had contributed to ensure that no participant was put in a position where they felt compelled to participate against their will on the basis of personal economic need. All participants were asked to sign informed consent at the time of expressing interest in participating. In addition to having the participants complete the informed consent document, I verbally confirmed that all participants understood their rights to withdraw from the study at any point in time at the opening of each interview.

Given that the study asked participants to reflect on times when they may have felt like they did not belong, ethical considerations included being prepared to assist participants if they

experienced emotional distress or discomfort during the interviews. To prepare for this potential, I gathered information on available mental health and counseling resources on or around the research site campus. If needed and desired by the participants, I was prepared to connect the student in distress with an accessible and appropriate resource to ensure their needs were addressed.

Throughout the process, I worked to intentionally maintain continuous awareness of my dual role as both a researcher and an academic advising administrator. As someone who has worked for over a decade as an academic advisor, and more recently as a higher education administrator, it was critical that I was both transparent about, and continuously aware of, my positionality and the positionality of my participants. It was important for me to actively acknowledge with my participants that I have experience working as an advisor, yet I was not an advisor to any of my participants in particular. Additionally, I acknowledged that while I do work as an advising administrator, I am not a supervisor to any of the academic advisors that my participants referred to. I worked to maintain awareness of my own potential triggers during these interactions, such as any potential desire to defend or represent what academic advising could/should be in light of the stories shared by the study participants.

Data security was one of several ethical considerations in this study, as data were collected as Zoom video recordings and transcripts. Both data types were recorded and stored on the password protected Zoom platform. Any downloads that occurred were made over VPN-protected internet connections. Content was downloaded to a password-protected device and saved within a password-protected OneDrive account. To protect participants' identities, each participant was offered the opportunity to choose their own pseudonym, and all recordings and transcripts will be stored under the pseudonym. Documentation of which participant is utilizing

which pseudonym was stored separately from video recordings and interview transcripts. As I engaged in the clustering and coding process, data was stored in Dedoose, which utilizes encryption, and accounts are password-protected to ensure the security of personal data.

Summary

For this study, I utilized a generic qualitative approach to study how Latino students experience and make meaning of institutional culture through their experiences with academic advisors at a selected historically white, public institution. I conducted semi-structured interviews with currently enrolled Latino students to gather information about their interactions with academic advisors at the identified institution. I then reviewed the transcript from each of these interview conversations to cluster, code, and completed a thematic analysis of responses in an effort to identify any common themes from participants collective experiences and the meaning they make of these experiences. In Chapter 4, I present the findings from the thematic analysis of these interviews.

Chapter 4 - Findings

In Chapter 4, I share the findings of this qualitative study which aimed to gain an understanding how Latino students attending a historically white institution experience cultural match or mismatch with the institutional culture within the context of their academic advising experiences. Chapter 4 begins with a review of the research questions and methodology, followed by an introduction of the research participants. I then present the themes that emerged based on the analysis of participant responses. The research questions guiding this study :

1. What elements of, or interactions within, academic advising sessions illuminate cultural match or cultural mismatch between Latino students and their advisor(s)?
2. How do Latino students make meaning of the cultural match or mismatch they experience during their academic advising interactions?

Participants

To address the research questions, semi-structured interviews were conducted with Latino undergraduate students attending Northern Valley University (a pseudonym), a regional public institution in the western United States. Northern Valley University (NVU) is a historically white institution, which is now designated as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). To identify potential participants, I distributed flyers about the study to the coordinators and directors of various academic advising, support program, and cultural affinity centers on the campus. The staff and administrators who received the flyers posted them in their physical office spaces and some distributed the flyer via email to their respective student populations.

The flyers contained a QR code which directed students to a Qualtrics-based intake form. This intake form contained the informed consent, a brief survey to determine if the student met study criteria, and an option for the students to include their contact information if they were

interested in scheduling an interview. A total of 13 students completed the form, all of whom met the study criteria of identifying as Latino, being an actively enrolled undergraduate student at NVU, and having engaged in a minimum of two academic advising sessions during their time enrolled at the university. However, two students did not respond to outreach to schedule an interview and another two did not attend the interview they scheduled with me. This study was completed with a total of 9 participants, designated by pseudonyms.

Table 0.1
Interview Participants

Name	Gender	Admission type	Class level	First generation student
“Bella”	Female	First time in college	Sophomore	Yes
“Day”	Female	First time in college	Sophomore	Yes
“Felicia”	Female	Transfer	Senior	Yes
“Ishmael”	Male	First time in college	First year	Yes
“Katharine”	Female	First time in college	Senior	Yes
“Lily”	Female	First time in college	Senior	Yes
“Mira”	Female	First time in college	Senior	Yes
“Serena”	Female	Transfer	Senior	Yes
“Stephen”	Non-binary	First time in college	First year	Unknown

Bella is currently a second-year student at NVU, having been admitted as a first time in college student. She is a first-generation college student who is currently navigating the process of identifying a new major and career path after deciding that her initial plan no longer fit her goals. Bella has engaged in advising on three different occasions since beginning her enrollment. While all of these advising sessions occurred within the central advising unit, each has been with a different advisor.

Day is a first-year student at NVU. She was born in Mexico and came to the United States at a very young age. Day is a member of a formal campus support program that focuses on supporting first-generation, low income, and historically underrepresented student populations. She reported having engaged with a number of different advisors across campus including support program advisors and faculty advisors.

Felicia is in her third year of enrollment at NVU, having transferred to the university from an in-state community college. She is pursuing her undergraduate degree, while working full time at a local clinic, with plans to go on to veterinary school. Felicia has worked with multiple advisors across the campus, both staff and faculty, and leans on advisors to help her navigate curriculum in a way that allows her to continue working.

Ishmael is a first-year student at NVU who came to the institution from out of state. While he is a first-generation student, Ishmael is not currently a member of any formal support programs. However, he is an active student in the university's honors program and has engaged with advising related to that program, as well as with other campus staff advisors. Ishmael is planning to go on to medical school and is accustomed to taking heavy unit loads to reach their goals.

Katharine is a senior at NVU. She entered the institution as a first-generation, first-year student and was placed early in a formal support program. While Katharine has progressed past the stage of formal programming offered by the support program, she still reports leaning on her mentors in the program heavily for guidance. Additionally, Katharine works two different jobs on the campus, one in a cultural affinity center and one with the orientation program.

Lily entered NVU as a first-year student. She is now a senior with an extended graduation timeframe due to the pursuit of three majors and a minor, one of which is a STEM program that

was added later in their undergraduate career. Lily is a member of a formalized support program and also works part-time as a peer mentor within that program. She has extensive experience working with both faculty and staff advisors across the campus.

Mira entered NVU as a first-year student but now holds senior standing. She is working to finish out her final two semesters at the university while working part-time. Mira is a first-generation student who is a member of a formal support program on campus and works part-time in addition to her studies. Mira did not engage with any academic advisors in a one-on-one setting until two years into her undergraduate career. Since then, Mira has experienced working with both staff and faculty advisors.

Serena entered NVU as a transfer student. She describes herself as a non-traditional-aged student. Serena originally attended a community college before discontinuing her studies for a number of years while working. Serena eventually returned to her local community college and, from there, transferred to NVU. Serena is now working to complete her bachelor's degree while working on campus and is actively exploring graduate programs. Serena has close relationships with multiple faculty and staff advisors across the campus.

Stephen is a first-year student at NVU but is a few years older than is often typical. They had to delay their pursuit of college due to the development of a lifelong disability during their high school years. Stephen's condition often limits their energy levels, an impact that they proactively discuss with their advisors. Despite this person's challenge, Stephen is outgoing and eagerly engages with campus where possible. They have engaged with a handful of different advisors on the campus, all of whom have been faculty advisors.

As is typical with this type of fieldwork, interviews with each of these participants varied in length due to each individual's level of comfort and willingness to openly share their

experiences. The interviews ranged from 30-90 minutes in length. After each interview, I exported the interview transcripts from Zoom and moved them into Microsoft Word. In Word, I reviewed the content for accuracy and added notations about non-verbal cues before uploading the transcript to Dedoose. After uploading the transcripts, I utilized Dedoose to segment the transcripts and to engage in first-stage In Vivo coding. After first stage coding, I exported the data out of Dedoose and into Microsoft Excel. I utilized Microsoft Excel to conduct a thematic analysis of the codes and excerpts, grouping codes based on the commonality of the ideas each conveyed until the final themes were formed.

A total of four themes emerged through my analysis process. The first two themes speak to the areas in which Latino students appear to experience cultural match or mismatch in their advising interactions. The first theme is Relational versus Transactions and includes six subthemes. The second is Flexibility versus Rigidity and includes five subthemes. The third theme is Making Meaning of Cultural Mismatch and the fourth is Making Meaning of Cultural Match.

Results

Research Question 1: Elements of Cultural Match and Mismatch

My first research question focused on identifying the elements of or interactions within academic advising experiences that illuminate cultural match and/or cultural mismatch for Latino students. The data gathered from interviews with the nine participating students highlighted a number of elements of academic advising experiences that appear to create experiences of cultural match versus cultural mismatch across two themes. The first theme that describes these elements is relational versus transactional advising experiences. Within this theme, there are subthemes of welcoming versus unwelcoming, making time versus rushing, knowing and being

known versus impersonal, self-disclosure versus privacy, care versus lack of care, and networking versus redirecting. The second theme that describes these elements leading to cultural match and mismatch is flexibility versus rigidity. Within this theme, there are subthemes of listening versus presuming, advocacy versus pressure, and encouraging versus discouraging.

Theme 1: Relational Versus Transactional

In exploring which elements of advising interactions led to cultural match or mismatch experiences for Latino students, the concept of relationships and connections emerged as one of the most salient themes in the data. Across all interviews, participants consistently expressed that they are most comfortable talking with, most willing to trust information provided by, and most appreciative of individuals with whom they have ongoing relationships and connections. Day concisely expressed her preference for an ongoing relationship with their advisor by saying: “It was, I think, very helpful to have someone who really did know me, and kind of had that connection, therefore they wanted ...they have a better idea why it was so important for me to get this done.”

Another participant, Serena, shared similar sentiments to Day in expressing her pleasant surprise when she encountered advisors who made an effort to get to know her beyond course selection and planning by stating:

I like the fact that they ask you what you want to talk about, and it’s not just them being like, ‘This is what you need to do.’ It’s like, ‘What are your goals? What do you want to do with your degree after?’ And I was not used to that. No one ever asked me what did I want to do with my degree career-wise or anything. So, going and speaking with the advisors and them asking me, ‘First off, where do you see yourself with this degree? What’s your end goal?’ And then them recommending classes for that, I also really liked.

Conversely, when participants experienced academic advising in the absence of any personal connection or on-going relationship, they often expressed discomfort. When Stephen was asked about a recent experience with an advisor with whom they did not have an established relationship, they described it as:

I guess... uncomfortable... she wasn't one for small talk. Like, it wasn't like, oh, how's your day, blah blah blah. Like, she would be doing stuff, and it was no conversation, but... even then, like, I would kind of prefer that, but to me, it was almost like... too shut off, if that makes sense.

Participants frequently described these types of relation-less advising sessions as individual interactions or transactions. Ishmael expressed this sentiment clearly in describing a recent advising session as, "I would say it was more transactional...It was more so like, 'Hey, I'm here because you guys email me,' and she was like, 'Okay, here's the services that I'm giving you.'"

While all participants recognized the presence of multiple advising offices and entities on the campus, those who did not have an established relationship or personal connection with a campus advisor, often expressed a preference to turn to individuals with whom they did have a connection for university-related advising information. This often included individuals outside of the advising profession and/or outside of the institution. In Ishmael's case, he expressed turning to high school teachers for guidance on university decisions:

I still have pretty good connections with a lot of teachers, um, from my high school. So, I'd probably ask them as well, um, and I know I also have connections with some advisors in high school, and obviously high school is different than college. But I'm... but they also have experience advising in college, so I would probably ask them as well.

Like, would you, knowing how I was in high school, would you recommend double majoring, or would you recommend not at all, things like that.

The heavy emphasis on the need for personal connection and relationships in advising, as opposed to interactions, carried throughout all interviews. Collectively, the participants provided rich insights into the elements of advising interactions leading to connection and relationships, as opposed to individual interactions. These elements can be considered in sub themes of Welcoming vs. Unwelcoming and Knowing and Being Known vs. Transactional.

Theme 1, Subtheme 1: Welcoming Versus Unwelcoming. One of the first elements that participants discussed as being impactful on their advising experiences and connections with advisors was the level of welcome a student felt upon entering an advising space. The degree to which the student felt welcomed by the advisor appeared to influence the student's willingness to return to the space and their impression of the role and value of spending their time consulting with advisors. Serena, a participant who expressed finding significant value and comfort in her academic advising experiences with a number of different academic advisors across the campus shared:

I don't feel like I'm annoying them if I make an appointment 2 weeks later, and then again, and again. If anything, they would welcome me with open arms, and a big ol' smile, and say that they're really happy to talk over anything.

While Serena's sense of welcome from the advisors she worked with increased her comfort with advisors and her willingness to return to advising and further connect with advisors, other participants had less welcoming experiences. One of the most striking comments regarding students' sense of being welcomed into an advisor's space was from Day, who shared, "I felt like she really didn't want me in her office at that moment." A sub-theme that emerged

related to the sense of welcome, or lack thereof, that participants experienced when visiting academic advisors was their perception of whether the advisor willingly made time for them or rushed through the session.

Theme 1, Subtheme 2: Making Time Versus Rushing. Across multiple participants, the sense that advisors were willing and able to make time for the students consistently appeared as a positive influence on the advising relationship. Serena shared, “Even though sessions are normally 30 minutes, he will have his sessions extended (if he doesn’t have anyone after you) until you feel comfortable leaving his office, which I really like.” This idea of advisors creating a sense of welcome and connection by making time within the context of a singular appointment, also appeared as the idea of making time for follow-up appointments when students needed additional time to make decisions or explore options.

While some participants, like Serena, experienced advisors as people who would make time for them, many participants shared that they had frequently experienced the opposite. Bella expressed this sense of advisors rushing as “I feel like they’re just trying to wrap it up and kind of fast, so that way the next student could come in, so that way everyone can be pleased.” For some participants, this sense of rushing contributed to perceived miscommunications and lack of satisfaction with the sessions, a sense Lily shared in stating, “I remember not feeling satisfied...because it was also one of those drop-ins where I think they had multiple people and you literally had to get in line and it...felt a little but rushed.”

Participants observed and shared that the sense of rushing advising appointments was likely connected to limited capacity of the advisors and a disproportionate number of advisees per advisor. When asked what an ideal advising session would look like for them, Day asserted, “I would definitely make a very controlled limit of students to advisor ratio.” This observation of

advisors' stress levels related to workload points to the institutional structure as a mechanism to influence the degree to which students benefit from advising interactions.

Theme 1, Subtheme 3: Knowing and Being Known Versus Impersonal. When participants were asked about their perceptions of academic advisors as people they could turn to for guidance on significant decisions such as changing majors, taking a leave from school, or pursuing graduate programs, multiple participant responses suggested that the level to which Latino students were willing to trust academic advisors for guidance was dependent upon how well they and their advisor knew each other. Participants expressed being more willing to listen to the advice or guidance of someone they knew and felt known by, as opposed to someone who was less known to them. Day conveyed this idea clearly by stating:

I think maybe hearing it from people who have more of an idea of what I want for the future, and know me a little better, and have more of my best interest at heart will probably be the biggest thing for me.

Serena also emphasized the importance of knowing and being known when she encouraged their peers to leverage advising by sharing, "They want to get to know you, they want you to talk... tell them, like, what's going on. They want you to tell them about your achievement."

Conversely, Lily, a participant who expressed an unwillingness to seek guidance from an academic advisor, expressed their hesitation in doing so by stating, "They don't know you like that, so they can't tell you, like, oh, I think you might be best doing this." This concept of knowing and being known appeared multiple times across participant interviews and appeared to be a bi-directional preference in that students wanted to both be known by their advisor and to know the advisors prior to trusting that individual's guidance.

Katharine was one participant who expressed not trusting academic advisors for personalized guidance and instead preferred to seek out the guidance of a staff member affiliated with a campus affinity program. When asked why she would seek guidance from the affinity program staff rather than an academic advisor, Katharine responded:

[Affinity program staff] present themselves. I kind of know them a little bit more. They explain a little bit more about their life, where they went to college, and kind of just more human. They get to know you at a more personal level. So, it's easier for, at least me, to be more comfortable and kind of just talk to them. Advisors, I feel like you go in there once, probably every semester, and it's not always the same person, because they're always super busy, so I don't really get to know them at a more personal level.

Katharine's response highlights the idea that Latino students more highly value guidance from individuals with whom they have an established relationship, more specifically someone they know and who knows them, as opposed to the impersonal interaction of strangers or light acquaintances.

Theme 1, Subtheme 4: Self-Disclosure Versus Privacy. The state of students knowing and being known by their advisors appeared to be largely facilitated by the act of self-disclosure. The concept of self-disclosure appeared multiple times across participant interviews as an element that both influenced and was influenced by the advisors and students knowing and being known to each other. When students were willing to disclose more personal elements of their experiences, they expressed receiving useful information and guidance. Lily shared her experience with this type of self-disclosure as:

I think it also depends a lot on the advisor and how the conversation goes, but I know that with me personally, it's been a deeper conversation. For example, with the withdrawal

conversation, I was explaining how I was feeling and it was past the deadline, and all these things, and I was frustrated, so I explained that, and they were able to help me out, and it worked.

In the situations where participants expressed an unwillingness to disclose personal information to the advisors they were working with, the students also expressed more frustration with the level of information and guidance they received as not being appropriately tailored to their needs and experiences. Mira expressed this type of resistance to sharing and subsequent outcomes as:

I didn't really want to expose myself to my advisors, because I don't really know them. So, they were like, okay, well based on your grades and based on the vague information I was giving them, they just recommended that taking a lesser course load would be better for me.

The concept of a need for self-disclosure in advising interactions also appeared to be bi-directional, with multiple student participants expressing a desire for, and appreciation of, self-disclosure from the advisors as a way of improving advising interactions and relationships.

Stephen shared this concept in stating:

I feel like there would be a more balanced experience, and also a communication of what the advisors want to do. So because I went into those experiences not knowing what the advisor's goal was, I was uncertain because in a lot of situation with someone who it feels like they have a little more authority or a little more insight on something, it really helps to understand what they want, because then you can tailor the interaction from your end to making sure their expectations are met as well.

The importance and value of self-disclosure in the advising relationship for participants appears to be, in part, about the value of identifying shared experiences as a means of getting to know one another and building a working relationship. Identifying shared experiences also appeared to create circumstances in which participants felt more comfortable leaning on something for support and guidance, whether that person was staff, faculty, or a peer. While shared experiences were recognized across multiple participants and advisors, there were multiple accounts participants recognizing shared experiences and building relationships quickly with institutional representatives who also identified as Latino. Serena shared a memory of quickly identifying shared experience with an advisor as:

She's Puerto Rican you know, like she understood right away where I was coming from and she was like 'We're gonna make this work.' She's like, 'You don't worry. We will figure out a way that you can still work and still get volunteer hours, and still have your full hour to get your financial aid' you know? She was very understanding, and I think she was also a firstborn daughter, so she knew the pressures.

The act of disclosing information about oneself and, in doing so, identifying shared life experiences appears to influence the student's assessment of how well they know an advisor. Across multiple interactions, this disclosure and developing familiarity appear to influence the student's perception of whether or not the advisor in question is an individual the student is willing to consult with.

Theme 1, Subtheme 5: Care Versus Lack of Care. In addition to the elements of sense of welcome and sense of knowing and being known by the advisor, participants also expressed that feeling cared for was an important element in their perception of academic advisors. Participants who felt that their advisors wanted to help them, as opposed to be required to help

them, also expressed feeling cared for and talked about their advising interactions with a level of fondness that was not apparent in those who did not express feeling cared for. When asked to describe their impression of advising in a word or phrase, Katharine shared:

I would probably say either helpful or, if I'm thinking back to my first year [advising session], like caring, because she cared for me. She knew I wanted to get a job and kind of fixed around my schedule, and kind of eased my mind more. So caring and helpful.

Participants who had interactions with advisors in which they did not feel cared for, also expressed less of a relationship with their advisors and a resistance to go back to advisors for future concerns. When I asked Ishmael if he would feel comfortable expressing challenges with social integration at the university to an advisor, they replied pointedly:

If I'm having trouble with some of my roommates, I wouldn't go to [advisors] and be like, 'What do you think I should do?' Because then they're gonna be like, 'I don't care...I'm not a counselor. This isn't my field of expertise. I don't know what to do.'

While some participants expressed their impression of advisors not caring about them very directly, others share their experiences of lack of care in more nuanced parts of their advising conversations that similarly impacted their sense of personal connection with their advisors. Day shared a more subtle sense of lack of care when she described advisors as:

They're just kind of there...I feel like every time I've been in my major advisor's office, I feel kind of like, oh we gotta get this done and then rush you out of here kind of vibe. So I feel like they're not, maybe taking as much consideration.

In a few nuanced participant stories, the sense of care that a student felt from their advisors was related to the advisor's willingness and ability to deliver truthful and accurate information in a manner that showed care and empathy for the students, without undue

harshness. Serena shared her experience of a positive experience with honest truth when describing a recent advising experience as:

[My advisor] knew me a little bit better because I've had a class with him and I constantly take up his office hours. So, I've very thankful because he told me what I needed to hear, whether I wanted to hear it or not.

The degree to which student participants felt cared for by their advisors appeared to influence the topics students were willing to discuss with their advisors. Students who felt cared for expressed a more positive view of advising. Students who felt less cared for in the interaction expressed more neutral to negative views of their advisors.

Theme 1, Subtheme 6: Networking Versus Redirecting. Across participant stories, the students' ability to navigate the institution often required the student to utilize multiple different resources, in addition to academic advising. Participants experienced advising as more helpful and expressed more elements of cultural match experiences when their advisors utilized their social and professional networks to connect the students to the resources that they needed. Serena described how her major advisor, who was also a professor, leveraged his professional network to aid students:

My first semester, he brought in everyone. He brought in the academic advisors for [our college]. He brought in the people from the writing department. He brought in people like the graduate program studies and people that can help you write your personal statements and resumes, and they passed around books on how to do a CV, and I've never had a teacher do that. He's also an academic advisor, so he would always say, 'If you can't get in with them, I'm happy to stay after class,' and so my first semester, I went to him a lot.

While Serena spoke with appreciation for the advisor that connected her with resources, students who did not experience such connection expressed both frustration and confusion when they were redirected to alternative resources without a warm handoff. Stephen shared an example of this in stating:

I feel like I've seen so many [advising offices] around campus. I go to one building, and there's an advising office, and then they're like, 'Oh, we don't do that kind of advising. We do this kind of advising.' And it's like, okay, I guess I'll find another. Like, I can't... I haven't sought it out, but the idea of walking around and trying to find an advising office that I need is, like, how would I do that?

Appreciation for networking appears to align with the participants' expressed preferences for relational vs. transactional experiences. Students who were given access to supporting networks through their advisors' professional relationships, like Serena, reported connecting with those same advisors more frequently. Participants who were not connected to networks reported shared experiences of being redirected and feeling shuffled around the campus without support or care.

Theme 2: Flexibility Versus Rigidity

The second theme to emerge from the data describing elements of advising interactions leading to cultural match or mismatch for Latino students is the way in which advisors react to students' unique needs and circumstances. Students spoke more positively and appreciatively about advisors who worked to provide the students with flexibility in how they navigate the institution and curriculum and spoke of avoiding advisors who rigidly reinforce institutional norms. This mismatch centers on resources, with the institution expecting and assuming that all students have access to resources of time, money, and energy that would support their ability to

move through college in the traditional manner of full-time enrollment and extracurricular engagement. Multiple participants expressed that they did not have access to these resources due to the need to work to financially support themselves through their undergraduate years and therefore had less time to dedicate to their studies. These participants shared that they faced challenges with advisors expressing expectations that the students could not meet due to resources constraints. When advisors recognized the student's reality and found flexible ways to help the student to navigate the institution and their academic requirements within their resources, the students experienced feeling supported and encouraged. Felicia described an advisor working to create this flexibility for her in a situation in which a required course in presented a time conflict with their work schedule:

She was able to reach out to [the department chair] and ask him if there's any other courses I could take to supplement that course that he would accept. And she actually got him to find another one at [another institution] that I could take online that would fit within my schedule, that was really awesome.

Many participants did not experience this level of flexibility from their advisors and were, instead, met with assumptions and lack of understanding. Serena, who had to balance work and expectations to contribute time, money, and energy to her family household with school, described this lack of resource understanding as, "My academic advisors just wouldn't understand why I couldn't do extracurriculars." Serena went on to share,

I, unfortunately, don't have the luxury where I can't afford to not work. So, I feel like I always think about, well if I didn't have a job, I can do all these extra curriculums and stuff, but I have to work.

While many participants expressed being challenged by rigid expectations about the resources they should have in terms of time and money, one participant experienced navigating similar challenges due to a disability which limits their energy level. Stephen shared:

There's a lot of things to consider that I think isn't always easy for advisors to consider as well. Like how comfortable I'd be with taking on difficult material, or how much time I have, or disability considerations. There's just a lot that you kind of have to advocate for yourself rather than expect someone to hold space for that.

This match and mismatch appear to be based on a culture built around particular socioeconomic assumptions. When Latino students, who often experience life at the intersection of being first generation and low income, enter educational institutions without the assumed resources levels, they appear to encounter a mismatch between the reality of their resource limitations and the expectations communicated by their advisors. There appear to be distinct actions and approaches utilized by advisors that contribute to students experiencing cultural match or mismatch within their advising conversations, including listening vs. presuming, advocacy vs. pressure, encouraging vs. discouraging, and networking vs. redirecting.

Theme 2, Subtheme 1: Listening Versus Presuming. An advisor's willingness to listen to the unique needs of their advisees, rather than presuming what the student needs, emerged as a contributing factor to whether a student experienced cultural match or mismatch in the advising session. Participants who felt that their advisors asked them probing questions, listened to their answers, heard their concerns, and adapted their guidance accordingly expressed appreciation for the advising interactions. Serena expressed her gratitude for advisors who engaged them in this process by sharing:

I have to work for rent and stuff, so they always tell me, ‘Oh, well you can do this because this can help,’ or ‘You can kill two birds with one stone and do this because then it counts as your volunteer hours [and as] your class hours and all these things.’ So I definitely do really, really appreciate the fact that they actually listen to you. They listen to your concerns.

Serena was one of few participants who shared a positive account of feeling listened to and heard by their advisor(s). Many participants experienced the opposite and expressed frustration in sharing stories in which advisors didn’t listen to and understand their concerns, and instead presumed what the student needed, wanted, or what was best for the student. Day shared, “I felt like when I met with the advisor that day, I think in her head, my priority was just getting, like, what the classes I was trying to get into were. But that wasn’t where my priority was.” There are two distinct contributing elements from participants that appear to contribute to advisors presuming what is best for a student, including insufficient probing and not listening.

Theme 2, Subtheme 2: Insufficient Probing. Participants who shared experiences of advisors presuming what is best for them, or what they might need, often expressed feeling unseen in the interaction. A common element of these exchanges is the students’ wish that the advisors had asked them more questions. Stephen shared their interaction with an advisor who chose not to engage in a conversation around how Stephen’s disability limits their capacity as:

If there was a concern I voiced where I was like, ‘Hey, I’m not sure I can handle that.’ It was a little but less of a conversation of like... okay, I’ll disclaim, I don’t expect it to be like a therapy session when I sit down with an advisor but... it was less of a conversation about, ‘Why do you think you wouldn’t be able to do that?’ and much more of a, ‘I kind

of think you could, but okay.’ So, I think I felt a little less seen in the small nuances of the conversation and the final results.

While Stephen’s description of not feeling seen because their advisors didn’t ask probing questions around their capacity, multiple participants expressed frustration around advisors not asking probing questions around the student’s decision-making process. Bella went to an advisor to discuss potentially changing majors and became frustrated by the advisor’s lack of questions around her decision to change programs. Bella shared:

I feel like they didn’t really show a reaction, like, they didn’t really ask why, they didn’t ask... yeah, they didn’t ask why, and I feel like that’s something maybe an advisor should ask, like, why don’t you want to do this anymore?

When an advisor does not ask a sufficient number of probing questions to fully understand the student’s unique circumstances and needs, the advisor appears to be more likely to make presumptions about what is best for the student, which then appears to negatively influence the interaction. A lack of probing questions from the advisors appears to translate to the students as a lack of investment in the conversation, lack of interest in the student as an individual, and results in insufficiently customized information and guidance.

Theme 2, Subtheme 3: Not Listening. While many participants expressed their frustration with advisors not engaging in asking questions to further the depth of conversation and to understand their circumstance, some participants shared that even when they did provide further information, the advisors they worked with were not engaged in actively listening to them. Day explained this is saying, “I feel like, as the semester goes on, it is harder to meet with advisors. It is harder to kind of get your point across and get answers to the questions you’re asking.” When advisors didn’t practice active listening, participants expressed feeling that their

reasons for seeking advising were often ignored or misunderstood, resulting in the student not securing the information, resources, or guidance they were seeking.

Theme 2, Subtheme 4: Advocacy Versus Pressure. An advisor's willingness or unwillingness to truly hear and understand a student's situation and concern appears to influence the sub theme of advocacy vs. pressure which contributes to the flexibility or rigidity of the subsequent guidance. Advisors who listen to and understand students' circumstances were often also described as those who engaged in advocating for their students. Felicia described her experience with advocacy as:

I think it is really helpful when you sit down with somebody who knows a little more about the graduation and all those course requirements and is able to work with you and your schedule and is able to email your department chair and ask them you know this student is juggling all this and they intend graduate and physics doesn't fit in their schedule, is there anything else they can do.

Participants shared stories of advisors advocating for them on topics such as negotiating contracts with faculty, reporting mistreatment of students, identifying alternative scheduling options, and creatively planning requirement completion in efficient ways. These advocacy efforts often centered on finding a way for the students to navigate institutional expectations within the context of their resources and means. All of these advocacy stories started with the advisor first being willing to hear and understand the students' experiences.

In circumstances where the students did not feel listened to or heard, they often experience pressure from advisors to conform to institutional norms rather than considering the uniqueness of the student's case. In one example of this, Day sought out an advisor's help to create a plan to graduate within three years, rather than four, in order to complete her degree

within her financial means. Instead of hearing, understanding, and working to develop a plan within Day's limitations, the advisor pressured Day to stay for four years and consider graduate study. Day described this experience as:

[The advisor] also brought in the upsides of spending another year. She was like, 'You can also get another minor, or you can choose to just enjoy that year care free with your friends.' But I thought it in my best interest, based off the information she gave me to only stay the 3 years and just graduate a year early because in my financial situation, I just can't afford to pay for a semester if I don't need it.

While Day decided to make enrollment choices that countered the pressure she received from an advisor, other participants conformed to the pressure they received. Stephen, for example, was pressured by their advisor to take more units than they were comfortable with in light of their disability. Stephen chose to take their advisors recommendation and, at the time of our interview, expressed nervousness and apprehension about the semester ahead due to the anticipated workload. Stephen described their thoughts on the pressure as, "I don't know yet how good or bad that will be, but it feels like a risk in a way, and I think if it turns out bad, that would definitely be... I would consider that bad advice."

Participants who experienced advocacy from their advisors reported being able to navigate the institution in a way that was manageable for them and within the bounds of their resources. Students who experienced pressure from their advisors to conform to traditional norms frequently expressed frustration and exasperation at being pressured to do something that didn't fit their circumstances, or which caused undue stress for them in the long term. These differences emphasize the importance of the advocacy vs. pressure dynamic in making advising relevant to Latino students.

Theme 2, Subtheme 5: Encouraging Versus Discouraging. Another element that emerged as influential in whether Latino student participants experienced cultural match or mismatch within their advising sessions was the choice of the advisor to encourage students to flexibility navigate their education to fit their circumstances vs. the advisor choosing to discourage students from deviating from traditional pathways and ways of navigating higher education. When advisors call out the unique strengths and value that a student brings to the educational environment, the student feels encouraged and reassured that they are capable of succeeding academically. Serena, for example, returned to higher education in her late twenties and entered the university as a transfer student approaching thirty. She shared a lot of her concerns around both being a non-traditional aged student and not having bandwidth to engage in extracurricular activities. Serena expressed carrying ongoing concerns about how her lack of extracurricular engagement may prevent her from accessing graduate programs. Serena described how her advisors' encouragement kept her motivated:

They would always give me that little push of encouragement or give me that little push to give myself a pep talk and give myself more grace. They would always tell me, 'You're doing really good. You made it onto the Dean's List. That looks really good. You're working. That looks really good. You're an older college student, you know, that could be very beneficial for grad applications.'

When advisors did not offer encouragement and, instead, chose to discourage students who didn't fit traditional norms, participants described adverse reactions. Mira, shared that she experienced a discouraging interaction with an advisor very early in her university experience during the orientation and onboarding process and the impact that interaction had on her as:

I always just go back to my freshman year orientation, just being told that a lot of students don't make it into the nursing program, and that we should just kind of quit while we're ahead and be a public health major. I think freshmen don't really need to hear that. I think they need all the motivation they can get. So yeah, that always was in the back of my mind, and whenever I would talk to other pre-nursing majors, we'd always go back to that too. . . it kind of made us feel that we weren't gonna get in.

In exploring the interactions between Latino students and their advisors which could lead to experiences of cultural match or mismatch, multiple elements of the interaction are influential. First, the degree to which students feel connected with their advisors includes their perception of how welcomed they are, the advisor's willingness and ability to make time for them, how well the student and advisor know each other, the degree of self-disclosure that occurs, the level of care the advisor expresses for the student, and the advisor's willingness and ability to leverage their professional network to serve the student. Second, the degree to which students perceive advisors as being helpful to them is influenced by how well the advisor listens to the student, the amount of advocacy an advisor is willing to do for the student, and the level of encouragement an advisor offers to the student.

Research Question 2: Making Meaning of Cultural Match and Mismatch

My second research question focused on understanding how Latino students make meaning of experiencing cultural match or mismatch during their advising interactions. Based on participant stories, it appears that Latino students experience cultural match or mismatch in their advising interactions on two fronts: relational versus transactional and flexibility versus rigidity. The type of mismatch the student experiences appears to influence their meaning-making process.

Theme 3: Perceptions of Advising

The stories and experiences shared by participants in this study indicate that Latino students do not enter higher education with an expectation that academic advisors serve as decision-making partners, or institutional guides. The common entering perception amongst participants was that the role of advisors is to impart factual information and aid in the technical processes of course planning. Ishmael described his expectations of academic advising as:

I kind of always go in not expecting much, but I'm expecting at least to know what classes I should sign up for. And at most, maybe getting kind of a schedule like, 'Hey, spring semester, you do this. Next fall semester, you should look into this, and this, and that.'

While these students enter the advising session with transactional expectations, what happens within the advising session appears to influence the student's meaning making around their advising experience.

Theme 3, Subtheme 1: Advising as Helpful. Students who experience academic advising sessions that are transactional and therefore present mismatch in terms of relational expectations, report leaving the session with their transactional and information-only expectations of advising in tact. These students continue to expect advising to be strictly about information sharing and enrollment accuracy and do not view advisors as individuals from whom they can or should seek decision-making guidance. When asked if they would go to an advisor for guidance or help processing a big decision, Lily replied with, "No. Definitely not. I mean, it makes sense though, because they can't make that decision for me." Lily elaborated on this response by sharing that she would go to trusted mentors who she has an existing relationship with to make a decision but would return to an advisor to create a plan to execute that decision.

Participant responses indicated that students who experience relational mismatch but leave advising sessions with the factual information they need describe advising as helpful to their educational experience in terms of outlining steps to a path forward. Unfortunately, these same students often describe their emotional state leaving advising session as overwhelmed with the number of follow-up tasks that need to be executed independently.

Theme 3, Subtheme 2: Advising as Pointless. In the event that the student experiences relational mismatch and receives inaccurate or incomplete information or flawed course planning from the advisor, their view of advising as transactional, yet helpful, is changed. Mira describes her perception of advising as, “It was kind of pointless because...they didn’t really help me out.” In cases of relational mismatch and incorrect or incomplete information, students begin to view academic advising as unhelpful. Participants who described experiences of cultural mismatch related to the flexibility vs. rigidity dynamic, similarly left the advising session with their transactional and informational expectations of advising in tack. However, these students described their departing state from the advising session more frequently as discouraged, lost, and unmotivated. Felicia clearly stated this in describing her post-advising emotional state as, “Definitely, definitely discouraged. Um... and just kind of lost ... unsure of what to do ... Usually when I get responses like that, I tend not to book with that advisor or just avoid advising as a whole.” As Felicia shared, students with these experiences continue to express that they view advising as necessary but also report avoiding it at times due to discomfort.

Theme 3, Subtheme 3: Advising as Valuable Guidance. Participants who experience cultural match in their advising experiences shared that their perception of the role of academic advising in their higher education journey changed. These students stopped seeing advising as a

transactional event and began to view advisors more as partners and people that they can turn to for support. Serena described the experience of beginning to lean on advising more as:

That helped me out a lot, going to advising. It made me feel more comfortable ... I feel like I used to only just make one appointment when it was mandatory. All of the different advisors that I've spoken with, they've all made me comfortable.

Felicia echoed Serena's sentiments in sharing:

I also think it is really important to meet with a lot of advisors and find one that you feel is helpful, that you feel comfortable going to and that will understand, you know, all the different aspects of your life and not just your academic life.

These student participants described their post-advising emotional state as comforted, calm, and expressed seeing value in advisors as individuals who can help to guide them. These findings indicate that advisors who wish to partner with their students and wish to be seen as guides, rather than as purely informational sources, must invest time and energy into creating a relational interaction which also honors the student's unique and complex circumstances.

Summary

Participants in this study shared multiple stories of academic advising interactions, from which two overarching themes emerged. These themes were relational vs. transactional and flexibility vs. rigidity. When students experienced relational connections with their academic advisors and when advisors offered the students flexible ways to navigate the institution, student stories pointed to experiences of cultural match, such as calm and confidence. When students experienced transactional interactions and rigidity in expectations for how they should navigate the institution, they shared stories which pointed to experience of cultural mismatch, such as overwhelm, stress, and confusion. Students appeared to make meaning of the cultural match or

mismatch they experienced with academic advisors by shifting their perceptions of what the role of an advisor is in their higher education journey.

Chapter 5 - Discussion and Implications

In Chapter 5, I contextualize the findings of this study within the current research literature on cultural mismatch theory. I also discuss the implications of these findings for academic advisors and higher education administrators. Finally, I close Chapter 5 with recommendations for future research related to cultural mismatch for Latino students, as well as other populations. This qualitative study explored how Latino undergraduate students attending a public higher education institution experience cultural match and cultural mismatch within the context of their academic advising interactions. During the interview process, I listened specifically for expressions of expectations coming from the student participants, as well as expectations communicated to the students by the advisors they met with. This study provides insights into cultural mismatch experiences for Latino students in response to the following research questions:

1. What features of, or interactions within, advising sessions create an experience of cultural match or cultural mismatch between Latino students and the academic advisors they work with?
2. How do Latino students make meaning of the cultural match or mismatch they experience through their academic advising interactions?

Summary of Findings

My findings from this study suggest that Latino undergraduate students experience cultural mismatch in their academic advising experiences. The cultural mismatches that my study participants described can be understood in two categories: relational versus transactional and flexibility versus rigidity. Whether the student experiences elements of cultural match or

mismatch appeared to strongly influence how the student made meaning of their advising experiences and the role of the advisor.

Relational Versus Transactional

Relational versus transactional is the first grouping I utilize to encapsulate the features or elements of academic advising experiences that appeared to lead to either cultural match or cultural mismatch between Latino students and their advisors. Participants described experiencing cultural match in their academic advising experiences when they experienced relational engagement with their advisors. Participants described multiple contributing factors to a relational advising experience including feeling welcomed, advisors making time for them, knowing and being known by their advisors, bi-directional self-disclosure, identification of shared life experiences, perceiving that the advisor(s) cared about them, and being connected with additional services through the advisors' professional networks. When students experienced these elements in the advising session, they expressed more willingness to take guidance from the advisors, to openly share more of their experiences and challenges, and saw advising as an important and valuable part of their higher education journey.

Participants who described their advising as transactional reported feeling unwelcomed in advising spaces, perceived their advisors as rushing through the session, described the interaction as impersonal, felt the advisor did not care about them as an individual, and reported being turned away or redirected to different resources. Participants who reported experiencing these elements of transactional advising saw the role of the advisor as simply imparting factual information about course selection and sequencing and reported being unwilling to share personal information with, or take guidance from, academic advisors.

Flexibility Versus Rigidity

I utilized the grouping of flexibility versus rigidity to encapsulate a second set of elements that appear to lead to cultural match or mismatch for Latino students. Within this grouping, Latino student participants described cultural match with advisors who supported the students in flexibly navigating the institution based upon the individual student's needs and resources. Per my participants, flexibility looks like the advisors truly listening to and understanding their needs, asking probing questions needed to gain clarity, advocating for the student with other institutional agents, and encouraging the student to persist in the face of challenges and constraints. Students who experienced this type of match saw their advisors as partners on their journey and expressed deep appreciation for the advising support.

Students who experienced rigidity described the experience as advisors holding firmly to and promoting traditional institutional norms. This showed up as advisors presuming what students may need or what may be best for the student without asking, failing to listen to the students' needs, questions, and circumstances, pressuring students to navigate the curriculum and institution in particular ways, and discouraging students when they were unable to follow a traditional path. Students who experienced this rigidity from advisors reported feeling that the advisors could not understand their circumstances and often left advising sessions feeling discouraged and avoided advising in the future.

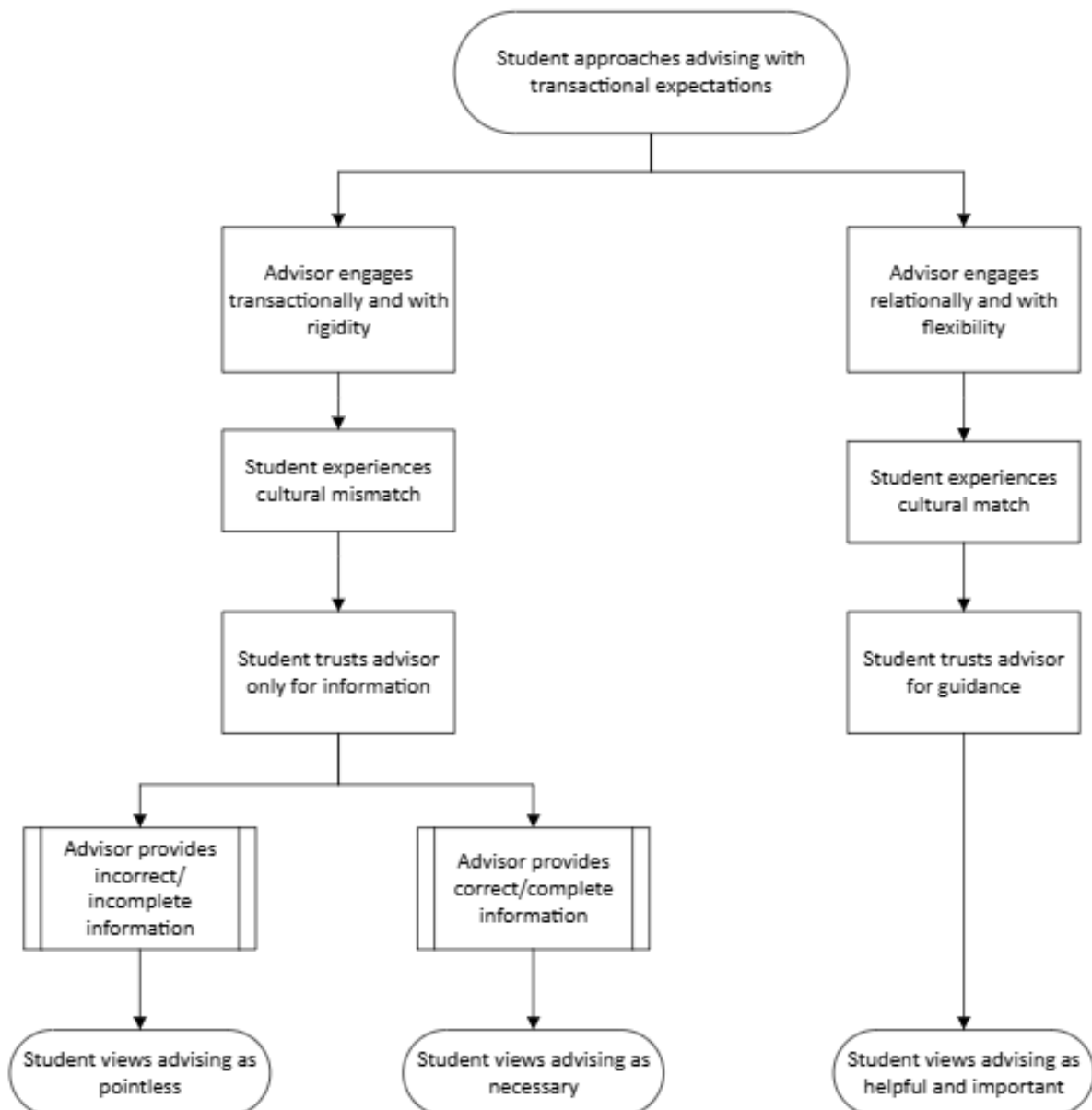
Meaning Making

The ways in which my study participants appeared to make meaning of the cultural match or mismatch they experienced in their academic advising interactions primarily impacted their view of academic advising, as visualized by Figure 5.1. All participants in the study reported entering the university with expectations of transactional advising in that they saw advisors as

individuals who were supposed to help them with course selection and planning and provide them with factual information. No participant described themselves as entering the institution viewing advisors as guides or partners in the academic journey.

Figure 0.1

Latino Perceptions of Culturally (Mis)Aligned Advising



However, when students encountered cultural match within their academic advising interactions, their perception of advising as transactional shifted. Experiencing cultural match appeared to result in students beginning to see advisors not only as information repositories, but as partners and guides whom they could trust to support them. These students reported leaving advising sessions feeling calm and confident.

Discussion

Cultural mismatch theory suggests that higher education institutions have and promote independent cultural norms and that students who enter these institutions from homes and communities which hold interdependent cultural norms may experience cultural mismatch with their institutions (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012). Some research on cultural mismatch theory suggest that cultural mismatch is created largely by differences in socioeconomic realities, with the idea that individuals from affluent backgrounds hold independent values and norms due to their ability to provide for themselves, while individuals from lower income backgrounds hold interdependent values and norms due to their need to often rely on community (Stephens, Fryberg, et al., 2012; Stephens et al., 2014; Vasquez-Salgado et al., 2015). Another perspective of cultural mismatch theory suggests that cultural mismatch can occur when ethnoracial cultural norms are mismatched between the student and the institution (Covarrubias et al., 2016; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020; Schell, 2023). My research with Latino students indicates that, within the bounds of academic advising interactions, both types of cultural mismatch occur.

Ethnoracial Cultural Mismatch

My findings suggest that Latino students experience mismatch driven by ethnoracial cultural norms when they are expected to trust, share personal information with, and receive guidance from advisors in the absence of established relationships that would make such

interactions culturally normative for them. When institutions utilize advising structures that require students to meet with multiple different advisors and do not facilitate ongoing advising relationships, connection is not promoted. In such cases, the institution is promoting a transactional norm of engagement and academic guidance. Latino students, however, enter the institution from a culture that normalizes accepting guidance or advice only when a personal connection is present, a concept known as *personalismo* (Glanton et al., 2020). Literature on the funds of knowledge concept also identifies this cultural norm which requires knowing someone personally before trusting them professionally (González et al., 2005). In this case, the advisor operates with the expectation that the student will take their advice and guidance upon first meeting, while the student operates with the expectation not to take advice or guidance from someone with whom they do not have a relational connection.

Socioeconomic Cultural Mismatch

My findings suggest that Latino students experience mismatch driven by socioeconomic cultural norms as well. This occurs when advisors expected students to navigate higher education institutions in a way that rigidly adheres to traditional norms of full-time enrollment and substantial extracurricular engagement in the absence of temporal and financial resources to support such engagement. This finding directly reflects the foundation tenant of cultural mismatch theory which states that students coming from working-class backgrounds will experience mismatch with the middle-class norms of American universities (Stephens, Fryberg, et al., 2012). In this case, the advisor operates with the expectation that academic and pre-professional development are the student's top priority, while the student operates with the expectation that they must work and support themselves as a top priority.

Effects of Cultural Mismatch

My findings suggest that students who experience cultural mismatch in their academic advising interactions depart those encounters with very different affective experiences than those who experience cultural match with their advisors. Participants who experienced mismatch in their advising interactions reporting feelings of frustration, stress, and overwhelm. Conversely, those who experienced cultural match reported leaving the advising sessions feeling calm and less anxious than they were upon entering advising. These findings parallel prior studies, which found that students who experience cultural mismatch experience increased negative emotions, particularly stress and anxiety (Stephens, Townsend et al., 2012; Talavera et al., 2019). The participants in my study who experienced mismatch also described avoiding particular advisors or advising as a whole, which has been noted in prior studies as resource avoidance (J. Chang et al., 2020; Schell, 2023).

Mitigating Mismatch

This study offers some unique uplifting findings in that it appears that academic advisors have the ability to minimize both types of cultural mismatch experienced by Latino students. Taking a relational approach to advising interactions with Latino students appears to mitigate the ethnoracial cultural mismatch these students experience. Similarly, taking a flexible, think-outside-the-box approach to institutional navigation appears to mitigate the socioeconomic cultural mismatch Latino students reported. Academic advisors, as agents of the institution, play a role in increasing or decreasing experiences of cultural mismatch between Latino students and their higher education institutions.

Implications for Policy and Practice

With the understanding that experiences of cultural mismatch lead to academic, social, physical, and mental health challenges, advising leaders must create, promote, and maintain campus-wide advising approaches and structures which center advisor-advisee relationships as a critical component of helping all students thrive. Findings from this study indicate that there are specific, intentional actions that academic advisors can take to decrease instances of cultural mismatch for Latino students within their advising interactions. While these actions may align with natural tendencies for some advisors, advising administrators should not assume that is the case for all advisors. Students would be better served if all advising units operated with the assumption that academic advisors need appropriate training and professional development opportunities to ensure they have the relational skills needed to build connections with their students (NACADA, 2017) and have correct and accurate information. However, advisor development alone is not sufficient to mitigate mismatch in academic advising.

Training and Professional Development Implications

The data gathered from participants in this study showed that Latino students are more likely to experience cultural match within their academic advising interactions when those interactions are relational as opposed to transactional. While it is common for advisors to view their professional role as being responsible for facilitating the student's decision-making process (Burton & Wellington, 1998), these Latino students do not appear to view advisors as decision-making partners or guides, in the absence of a relational connection. Participants in the study collectively expressed that there are multiple actions advisors can take to gain the student's trust as guides including engaging in self-disclosure, expressing care for the student, connecting the

students to resources via professional networks, asking probing questions, engaging in active listening, advocating for students, and encouraging students.

Self-Disclosure

Institutions and advising units that wish for their advisors to be able to serve Latino students in a culturally relevant way should ensure that advisors are trained and receive continued professional development opportunities to address the factors that create a sense of mismatch for these students. More specifically, intentional development of relational skills required of advisors is necessary. Within such training, advisors need to learn what constitutes appropriate self-disclosure in the advisor-advisee relationship (Carnegie, 2004). Self-disclosure provides opportunities for advisors and advisees to identify shared life experiences, building a sense of familiarity and trust with one another, but must be done in a way that does not cross professional boundaries.

Interview Techniques

Advisors should also be offered opportunities to learn interview techniques to ask appropriately framed and scoped probing questions. When advisors do not ask probing questions, they miss out on critical information that can be used to deepen the advising relationship and more effectively guide the conversation and subsequent decisions by the student. Advisors who did not engage in asking probing questions about students' situations and decisions were also perceived by participants to be uncaring and/or not invested in the conversation. However, asking appropriate probing questions is only one half of the equation. Advisors must also be trained to develop and practice active listening skills (Young, 2021). Multiple students in this study expressed the frustration that resulted from advisors not listening to their questions, concerns, or circumstances. When students felt unheard, they also expressed feeling unseen. In

these cases, students described leaving their advising sessions with unanswered questions and increased frustration and confusion.

Population Specific Cultural Norms

While training on culturally responsive advising techniques are not uncommon in higher education, I would advocate that advisors should be provided opportunities to learn culturally relevant advising practices specific to each their institution's prominent student populations. Culturally responsive training courses broadly teach advisors to consider that cultural norms differ between populations and encourage advisors to be intentionally aware of assumptions they may be making within their practice that would not apply to all students. While these types of training are a great start towards culturally responsive advising, they do not adequately teach the nuance of how different populations experience cultural mismatch in higher education. Offering training specific to the populations the advisors serve will further the advisors' awareness of more specific actions that can be taken to reduce mismatch, which can and do vary between student populations. For example, students from the Chinese diaspora experience cultural mismatch around topics including autonomy, student voice, academic exploration, passion, and socioemotional support (Schell, 2023). These are quite different topics of mismatch than the areas that emerged for Latino students such as the need to know and be known by advisors and expectations of flexibility in navigating the institution. Offering advisors culturally relevant training specific to their primary populations would better equip advisors to successfully support their unique populations.

Structural Implications

Participants in this study frequently mentioned the degree to which they felt welcomed into an advising space as something which influenced their overarching perception of the

advising interactions. Academic advisors who welcomed students to visit them frequently and clearly expressed their interest in seeing the students again were perceived to be more welcoming and, subsequently, more relationally oriented. While some students in the study defined the sense of welcome by the ways in which advisors greeted them, the majority of participants talked about feeling welcomed or unwelcomed into a space based upon how much time and energy the advisor was willing and able to offer them. Advisors who made time for students were discussed in much more favorable terms by the participants than those advisors who were perceived to be rushing appointments and those with whom it was challenging for students to make appointments. As multiple participants directly pointed out, the ability for advisors to welcome students into a space and make time for them is directly related to the advisors' workload and capacity.

Institutions of higher education, and advising administrators more specifically, should interpret these findings as evidence of the importance of establishing reasonable advisor to student ratios. Advisors who have manageable caseloads are more likely to be able to offer students scheduling flexibility and, within the confines of an advising session, will have more time and energy to offer the student (Bharadwaj et al., 2023). Results of the study indicate that these factors impact the degree to which students feel welcomed to engage in academic advising. Advisors who have caseloads that are too large often struggle to find time to meet the needs of all of their advisees, are forced to keep appointments short and concise, and have to turn students away from advising services in some cases. Students who experience advising as hard to access and rushed, express more dissatisfaction and frustration with the advising they receive. Further, the participants in this study clearly indicated that the strain of large caseloads on the advisor was visible to them and were outspoken about their concerns for their advisors' stress levels and

overall mental health. Outcomes of federal TRIO programs which support first-generation, low income, and historically underrepresented student populations support the call for lower advisor to student ratios. These programs are shown to have higher retention rates, graduation rates, and GPAs for students in the programs who are able to frequently meet and build ongoing relationships with their advisors, as compared to the general student population (Bennett et al., 2021).

In addition to establishing reasonable advisor to student ratios as a mechanism to improve the advising experiences of Latino students, higher education institutions should also consider the model of advising their campus has. The results of this study clearly showed that Latino students prefer to confide in and receive guidance from individuals with whom they have an ongoing relationship. In the absence of such a relationship, Latino students experience a cultural mismatch with the advisors' expectation that students should share their concerns and challenges in order for the advisors to guide them forward. The results of the study suggest that Latino students would be more likely to leverage their academic advisors as institutional guides if they had more consistent and ongoing contact with advisors. Institutions with advising models that require students to meet with multiple different advisors and those that utilize drop-in advising models don't allow the student to meet with the same advisor consistently, amplifying cultural mismatch and inadvertently promoting transactional advising. Advising administrators should examine how their advising structure could be modified to reduce student movement between different advisors and increase consistent contact with a particular advisor as a method of increasing relational advising experiences.

Boundaries of the Study

My study focused on the advising experiences of Latino undergraduate students at a regional, public institution that has a designation as a Hispanic Serving Institution. Cultural mismatch theory suggested that institutional type is a significant factor in the amount of cultural mismatch students experience, with more public/open access institutions producing less cultural mismatch as compared to selective/private institutions (Stephens, Fryberg, et al., 2012). Given that my research site sits squarely in the middle of the spectrum of institutional selectivity, it is unlikely that my findings capture the more significant instances of cultural match and mismatch that may occur for Latino students in alternative institution types.

In this study, I only included students who had completed at least two separate academic advising sessions at the institution in question. I established this requirement for participation in an effort to ensure that each participant had multiple advising experiences to speak to. However, there is potential that this boundary may have inadvertently prevented me from gathering information from students who experienced more significant and pronounced examples of cultural mismatch, especially if these individuals avoided advising after their first interaction as a response to the mismatch they experienced.

I conducted all research interviews for this study over Zoom. I selected this virtual interview method to ensure all students engaged in the interview in the same modality and to provide student participants as much choice as possible in where they felt comfortable engaging in the interview. However, this virtual modality may also have created a greater sense of separation, or lack of relational connection, in the interview which may have influenced participant responses. While all but one of my participants had their camera on for the interview, I may still have missed significant non-verbal communications that could impact my findings.

Also, given the finding that relational connection is highly important to this population, only interviewing each participant one time likely limited the information I collected.

Recommendations for Future Research

Cultural mismatch theory is still a relatively new concept in higher education research literature and exploration of cultural mismatch theory in the context of academic advising is especially sparse. There is substantial need for additional inquiry in this area, and future scholars can improve upon existing understanding of cultural mismatch for students of multiple backgrounds. At this point in time, cultural mismatch in academic advising has only been explored for two populations, students from the Chinese diaspora and Latino students. There is need to expand this research to additional student populations as each presents new opportunities to learn how academic advisors may better serve diverse populations of students.

Expanding understanding of cultural mismatch for Latino students in particular should start with conducting additional research with increased number of participants. This study included only 9 undergraduate Latino students, 7 of whom identified as female and 8 of whom identified as first generation college students. To gain better understanding into the nuances of cultural match and mismatch for Latino students in academic advising, more diversity in identity and experience within the Latino population is needed. Future researchers should seek to include more gender diversity and more generational diversity in their samples. Generational diversity in both student generational status and in generational status within the country are important to consider as cultural norms differ between generations.

Future research on cultural mismatch in academic advising for Latino students should also explore advisor types. My study was conducted at an institution with a multitude of academic advisor types including faculty advisors, staff advisors, paraprofessional advisors, and

support program mentors who also serve occasionally in an advising capacity. This study did not have enough participants to draw comparisons of cultural mismatch experiences between advisor types, nor did the participants appear to distinguish between advisor types. I would encourage scholars who engage in similar research in the future to investigate the nuances of advisor type and to be more specific regarding the definition of academic advising they utilize within their study.

Given what was learned for this study about the need for relational connection for Latino students to feel comfortable disclosing personal information, future research into this topic should engage each participant in multiple interviews, ideally in person. Multiple interviews will give the researcher time to build rapport with the participants, which may result in more detailed responses and participants' willingness to share more openly about their challenging experiences with academic advisors. More importantly, participants who engage in multiple interviews may also be more likely to share more information about their emotional and cognitive reactions to instances of cultural mismatch, thereby expanding collective understanding of students' meaning making around mismatch experiences.

Future research into Latino student experiences with cultural mismatch should explore the topic in different institutional contexts. My research looked specifically at Latino student experiences with academic advising at a regional, public institution on the west coast. My findings were influenced and even limited by both institution type and geographical location of the study. To better understand cultural mismatch for this population, it must be explored across diverse types of institutions including public, private, open access, selective, HSI, and non-HSI institutions. With expanded understanding about the nuances of cultural mismatch experienced by Latino students from various educational contexts and backgrounds, the development of a

survey tool to measure the prevalence of cultural mismatch in academic advising could offer higher education institutions a new tool to understand how well they are and are not meeting the needs of their students.

Conclusion

The findings of this study shine light onto the experiences of Latino undergraduate students as a growing, yet still marginalized, population in American higher education. Latino students experience cultural mismatch within their academic advising interactions when the advisors do not build connections with the students as individuals and when advisors pressure students to adhere rigidly to traditional ways of navigating the institution. The insights gathered from the findings of this study provide evidence that academic advisors as individuals, and higher education institutions as systems to be navigated, can invest in training and structure to minimize these mismatch experiences and support Latino students in more culturally relevant ways.

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SEEKING STUDENTS FOR PAID RESEARCH PARTICIPATION

Share your story



Get paid



Make a difference

Kylee Sharp, Doctoral Candidate at Kansas State University, is conducting a study to explore how Latino students experience academic advising at the university

You may be eligible if you:

- Identify as Latino/a/e/x or Hispanic
- Are a currently enrolled student at the university
- Have had at least two academic advising sessions

Participation Includes:

- Completing a brief interest survey
- Participating in a single 60-90 minute interview over Zoom
- Compensation of \$30 for interview participation

Scan to get started



Questions?

Contact Kylee Sharp
at
kdsharp@ksu.edu

Appendix B - Recruitment Email

Hello,

My name is Kylee Sharp, and I am a Doctoral Candidate at Kansas State University. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study I am conducting which will explore the ways in which Latino students experience academic advising at the university. Participation in this study involves completing a brief screening survey that is anticipated to take no more than 5 minutes. Based on your responses to the screening survey, you may be asked to participate in a 60 to 90-minute interview via Zoom.

There are minimal risks anticipated with your participation. Direct benefits of participation in the study include a singular payment of \$30, in the form of a digital gift card, for those who complete the interview process. Additionally, the information and insights you share will inform the literature on the role of academic advisors who serve Latino students. If you are interested in participating, you may access the screening survey at [URL redacted].

If you have any questions about this research, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Doctoral Candidate:

Kylee Sharp

[username redacted]@ksu.edu

Principal Investigator:

Dr. Wendy Troxel

wgtroxel@ksu.edu

Thank you,

Kylee D. Sharp

Doctoral Candidate

Kansas State University

Appendix C - Informed Consent

LATINO STUDENT EXPERIENCES WITH ACADEMIC ADVISING

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This is a research study. The goal of this study is to learn from Latino students about their academic advising experiences.

YOUR PARTICIATION

- If you would like to participate in this study, you will first need to complete a screening survey. The survey begins on the next page. It should take five minutes or less to complete the survey.
- Your answers to the survey questions will be reviewed. If you meet the study criteria, you may be invited for an interview. The interview will be held over Zoom and will last 60 to 90 minutes. The interview questions will be about your personal experiences with academic advising at the university.
- There are no direct personal benefits to you for participating in this research. However, your participation may help researchers and higher education institutions better understand Latino student experiences with academic advising, which may contribute to future improvements in academic advising professional practice.
- If you choose to participate in this study, you will receive a single payment of \$30, in the form of a digital gift card, as compensation for your time.

PROTECTIONS AND POTENTIAL RISKS

Screening Survey:

- You do not have to participate in this research study. If you choose not to participate, you will not be punished in any way. If you choose to participate in the study, you can end your participation at any time. If you decide to stop your participation, you may simply close the survey. If you have any questions about the study, contact Kylee Sharp at [username redacted]@ksu.edu. You may skip any questions you choose not to answer.
- There is a small potential risks of loss of confidentiality if you choose to complete the survey. Please be assured that all data files will be encrypted and kept in a secure location in an effort to prevent this risk.

Interviews:

- Your name, phone number, and/or email will only be collected if you want to engage in the interview. All personal information will be kept secure.
- There are some minimal potential risks if you choose to engage in the interview. Interview questions will be about your experience as a student. There may be some risk of emotional discomfort when talking about past experiences. You will be offered mental health/counseling resources if this occurs.
- Other risks of interviewing may include loss of confidentiality. Interviews will be recorded, with your permission. You may choose not to use your camera if you do not want to be video recorded. All interview recordings will be stored in password protected files. Once transcribed, the recordings will be destroyed. Participant information will not be shared with anyone at your university.
- Pseudonyms/aliases will be used to protect the your identity. You may choose to use the pseudonym/alias during the interview, as well.

- You will not be required to respond to any question(s) you do not want to answer. You may end your interview at any time.

FUTURE USE OF DATA

- Any identifying information will be removed from your interview answers. The data may then be used for future research studies. Interview data will not be shared with other researchers.

CONTACT INFORMATION

- This research is being conducted by a doctoral student at Kansas State University. If you have questions regarding this study or would like to be informed of the results when the study is completed, please contact the researcher, Kylee Sharp, at [username redacted]@ksu.edu or her Major Professor, Dr. Wendy G. Troxel at wgtroxel@ksu.edu.
- If you have questions or wish to discuss any aspect of the research with an official of the university Institutional Review Board, please contact:
- Lisa Rubin, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224, rubin@ksu.edu.
- Brad Woods, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan KS 66506, (785) 532-3224, comply@ksu.edu.

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

If you are 18 or older and agree to voluntarily and willingly participate in this research study, please indicate your agreement to participate below. Please save a copy of this form for your reference.

If you do not agree to participate, you may indicate your choice below or simply exit the survey window.

☐ I voluntarily and willingly agree to participate in this research / (4)

☐ I do NOT agree to participate in this research / (5)

Appendix D - Screening Survey

Are you a currently enrolled undergraduate student at [actual site location redacted]?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Are you 18 years old or older?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Do you identify as Latino, Latina, Latine, Latinx, Latin@, Latin*, or Hispanic?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Have you participated in two or more one-on-one academic advising sessions since enrolling at the university?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Are you interested in participating in a virtual interview for this research study?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Thank you for your interest in this research. You appear to meet the requirements for participation. The next step is to schedule a 60 to 90-minute interview. Please provide your name and contact information below and I will contact you to schedule the interview.

☐ First and last name _____

☐ Phone number _____

☐ Email address _____

☐ How would you like me to contact you (phone call, text, email)?

☐ What days/times are best to contact you?

Appendix E - Interview Protocol

Interviewer Name: Kylee Sharp

Length of Interview: 60–90 minutes

Location of Interview: Virtual via Zoom

Data Storage Method: All interviews will be recorded via Zoom. Recordings will be stored in the graduate student researcher's password protected files.

Opening Script

Hello and thank you for taking the time out of your schedule to participate in this study. My name is Kylee, and I am a Doctoral Candidate at Kansas State University, working towards a PhD in Leadership in Academic Advising. I also work full-time as an administrator in academic advising here at [actual site location redacted]

]. I'm conducting this research study because I'm interested in learning about and creating better understanding around how Latino students experience academic advising at this university.

My interest in this topic is partially driven by my work experience and partially driven by my personal life experience. While I identify as a white/Caucasian woman, I was raised by my stepfather who is Latino. I grew up very much in and around Mexican American culture and have a deep appreciation and strong affinity for both the culture and the people. Conversations with my dad and my own work, education, and life experiences have led me to recognize that Latino students often do not experience education and educational institutions in the same way that white students do. My hope for this study is that it helps to uncover some more of what

influences the Latino student experience, particularly in the field of academic advising, so that higher education institutions do the work to develop more equitable processes, programs, and spaces.

Consent Reminder:

I do want to take this opportunity to remind you that your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to discontinue your participation at any point in time without penalty. You are also free to skip any question I ask that you do not want to answer. Having heard some of the intent of this study and a bit about my background and positionality, are you still willing to participate in this interview?

Do I have your consent to begin recording?

Introductory Questions:

1. Participants are asked to select a pseudonym or alias for the study. What name would you like to use?
2. Can you tell me a bit about what motivated you to attend this university?
3. What is your current class level (first year, sophomore, junior, senior) and how long have you been attending this university?
4. How many generations of your family have lived in the United States?
5. Have any members of your family attended college and earned a bachelor's degree or higher?

Core Interview Questions:

1. Can you tell me how you first became aware of academic advising as a service that the university offered? When and where did you first hear about academic advising and how was academic advising described to you?

2. How many times have you met with an academic advisor at this university?
3. How do you know when you need to meet with an academic advisor?
4. How do you get in touch with an academic advisor when you need one?
5. Can you tell me about the first time you participated in academic advising?
6. Can you tell me about the topics that have come up when you've engaged in academic advising?
7. Are there certain topics that you've found advisors to be particularly helpful or unhelpful with?
8. Are there any particular topics you would not go to an academic advisor for help with? If so, what are they?
9. How would you describe your overarching feelings about meeting with academic advisors?
10. Do you have any additional thoughts about, or experiences with, academic advising that you would like to share?

Closing Script:

That concludes with the interview questions I have for you today. Thank you again for your participation. I plan to conclude this research by March 2026 and would be happy to share the results with you at that time if you are interested.

I'm going to go ahead and stop the recording, and we can move on to discuss arrangements for your \$30 participation payment.