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This chapter highlights the development of Project MALES (Mentoring to Achieve Latino Educational Success). At the center of Project MALES is a mentoring program that aims to cultivate an engaged support network for males of color at the University of Texas at Austin and across surrounding communities. Specifically, there is a discussion of the theories and framework that guided the creation of this mentoring program and its ongoing development.

Developing a Latino Mentoring Program: Project MALES (Mentoring to Achieve Latino Educational Success)

Victor B. Sáenz, Luis Ponjuan, Jorge Segovia Jr., José Del Real Viramontes

The long-term educational success for Latino male students and other males of color has become a recent focus of state and federal policy initiatives. While the number of Latinos attending college and attaining degrees has increased steadily in recent years, the proportional representation of Latino males enrolled in higher education continues to lag behind their female peers (Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009). In 2012, Latino males had the lowest high school graduation rates across all male ethnic groups, and more than 60% of all associate's or bachelor's degrees earned by Hispanics were earned by female students (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). These trends suggest that, compared to their peers, Latino males continue to face challenges in achieving critical higher education milestones.

In 2014 President Obama announced a new initiative called "My Brother's Keeper," which mobilized resources and support from public, private, and foundation organizations to address the persistent educational attainment gap for males of color. Until recently this educational issue had largely gone unnoticed or underexamined by policy makers and education leaders, with little to no focus on Latino males in spite of the shifting demographic trends across the country (Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2011). The lack of critical awareness about the challenges of changing student demographics, especially for Latino males, underscores the urgency of this issue. Ultimately, a lack of proactive efforts to address the unique needs of Latino

males in the educational system has untold implications for the future economic and social prosperity of the country and the well-being of the nation's fastest growing population segment, the Latina/o community.
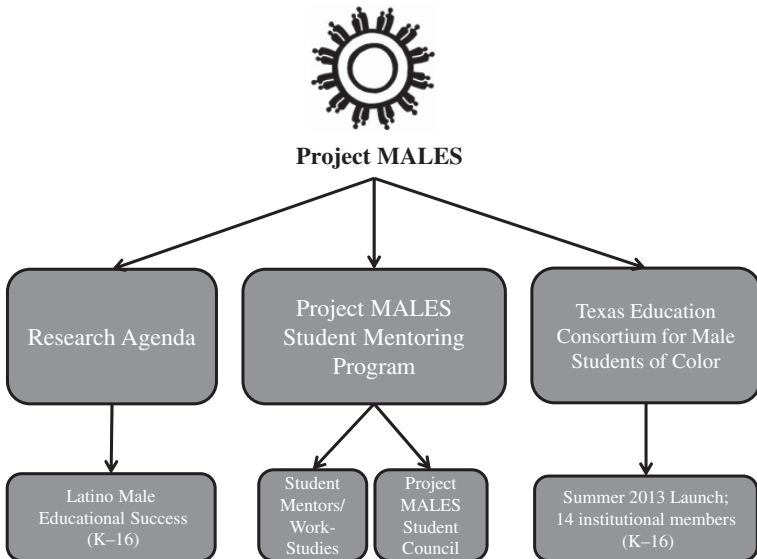
With these challenges in mind (and guided by our research), we conceived a mentoring program to help Latino males in local middle schools and high schools more effectively navigate their educational journeys. This provided the impetus for a research and mentoring program that focuses explicitly on Latino males in the education pipeline—it is called Project MALES.

Project MALES

Project MALES (Mentoring to Achieve Latino Educational Success) officially launched in the fall of 2010 as a new research and mentoring initiative within the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement (DDCE) at the University of Texas at Austin (UT-Austin). Project MALES encompasses three interrelated initiatives: an ongoing research project focused on exploring the experiences of Latino males across the education pipeline, a mentoring program that aims to cultivate an engaged support network for males of color, and a new statewide P–16 Consortium focused on leveraging shared strategies to ensure the success of male of color across Texas (see Figure 8.1).

Project MALES embodies praxis by fusing these initiatives through mentoring, research, collective impact, and dissemination to research and

Figure 8.1. Project MALES Programmatic Structure

Project MALES

Research Agenda	Project MALES Student Mentoring Program	Texas Education Consortium for Male Students of Color
Latino Male Educational Success (K–16)	Student Mentors/ Work-Studies / Project MALES Student Council	Summer 2013 Launch; 14 institutional members (K–16)

practitioner communities. For example, our mentoring model emerged directly from our research findings and our review of the mentoring literature; it highlights near-peer and intergenerational mentoring as strategies to leverage social capital among Latino males across multiple generations and in both secondary and postsecondary contexts. Project MALES is focused on the overarching goal of enhancing male student success throughout the educational spectrum. To this end, our chapter focuses specifically on the research and mentoring philosophy behind our Project MALES Student Mentoring Program.

The model is distinct for several reasons: it explicitly focuses on Latino males; it is largely influenced by best practices on mentoring males of color; it is informed by our ongoing multiyear research efforts on Latino males; and it highlights a unique collaboration between a public research university and several local educational and community partners. Our ultimate aim is to inspire others to take action and respond to the growing national imperative for Latino males in education.

Conceptual Theories and Models of Mentoring

The impetus for our Project MALES Student Mentoring Program is discussed through the examination of existing mentoring models and theories, especially those that focus on males of color. These models included *cross-age mentoring*, *intergenerational mentoring*, *natural mentoring*, *developmental mentoring*, *instrumental mentoring*, *community-based mentoring* (CBM), and *school-based mentoring* (SBM). Many of these were not specific to male students, but it was beneficial to understand the predominant theories and models of mentoring that would shape the development of our Project MALES Student Mentoring Program. In this section, we provide some of the characteristics and benefits for each mentoring model, and we also discuss the curriculum, practices, and programs specific to men that were important for us to consider as we designed our model. Whether it was *cross-age mentoring*, *intergenerational mentoring*, or *community-/school-based mentoring*, studying such models guided our development of a unique mentoring effort focused on improving educational outcomes for Latino males.

Cross-Age Mentoring.   *Cross-age mentoring* is described as a mentor of middle school or high school age (a youth at least 2 years older than the child being mentored) and a mentee meeting regularly, usually weekly, for a sustained, consistent period of time (minimally 10 times; ideally 20 or more times) to engage in conversations, play, or curricula/structured activities (ones that do not directly or solely teach information or skills in which the mentee has been found lacking) that help forge a close relationship in which the mentee experiences empathy, praise, and attention from the mentor (Karcher, 2014).

Intergenerational Mentoring.   *Intergenerational mentoring* is a mentoring relationship in which youths are mentored by adults 55 years of age

or older. This type of mentoring relationship is beneficial to both, seeing that for the older adult, this creates an opportunity to pass along skills and knowledge to the young person and at the same time validate his or her own life experiences (Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, & Taylor, 2006). Characteristics of successful intergenerational mentoring relationships include having frequent contact, and preferably lasting a year or more (Grossman & Johnson, 1999).

Natural Mentoring.   *Natural mentoring* is characterized as mentoring between youths and nonparental adults, including extended family members, teachers, or neighbors, from whom a young person receives support and guidance as a result of a relationship developed without the support of a program designed to connect youths and adults to form a mentoring relationship. One of the benefits of this type of mentoring model that the authors highlight is the organic nature of the relationship that the youth and adult mentor develop. This allows for the possibility of a longer-lasting relationship. In the long run, youths who engage in this type of mentoring relationship can develop the confidence and capabilities to engage with other nonparental adults, and can benefit from those relationships (Zimmerman, Bingenheimer, & Behrendt, 2005).

Developmental Mentoring.   In *developmental mentoring*, the focus is on the development of the mentee–mentor relationship, with the objective of promoting the social, emotional, and academic development of the youth. This form of mentoring is characterized by the mentor getting involved in recreational activities with the mentee, like playing games. In a developmental mentoring relationship, the mentor's goal is to develop the conditions in the relationship that would allow the youth's social, cognitive, and emotional development (Karcher et al., 2006).

Instrumental Mentoring.   *Instrumental mentoring* is characterized by a more structured mentee–mentor relationship where specific skills are to be gained, or specific achievements to be fulfilled during the term of the relationship. This relationship provides more guidance. Some of the tasks or goals of this type of relationship can be encouraging the mentee to engage in a predetermined task, including goal setting to achieve certain academic skills, or decreasing risk-taking behavior. In certain contexts, this type of relationship can be more beneficial in the youth's development (Karcher et al., 2006).

Community- and School-Based Mentoring Programs.   Hall (2006) describes two types of mentoring programs: *community-based mentoring* (CBM) and *school-based mentoring* (SBM) programs. Hall describes the CBM approach as traditionally bringing a mentor and mentee together for one-on-one mentoring. Mentor/mentee matching is usually based on race, cultural background, shared economic status, life experiences, spoken language, and gender. Hall reveals that children and adolescents who participate in CBM programs are less likely to engage in using illegal drugs, using alcohol, skipping school, and participating in violence; the CBM

programs help build their self-esteem and a sense of belonging with school, peers, and family.

Similarly, the SBM programs provide youths with safe and supervised surroundings where they may experience a sense of belonging through peer support and interaction. Through the SBM model, students learn both how to operate in their interpersonal world but also how to collaborate with others to develop strategies for dealing with their academic and personal issues. Since SBM programs are group-based models, this gives adults the opportunity to connect with more students at one specific time. SBM programs offer students additional adult support in the school environment. Students who participate in an SBM program may experience an enhanced feeling of belonging, higher academic achievement, a broadening of classroom knowledge, increased self-identification, and decreased levels of delinquency or violence (Hall, 2006, p. 13).

Mentoring Models Specific to Male Students of Color.   In regard to mentoring males of color, Reddick, Heilig, Marks, and Crosby (2012) suggest the use of two key theoretical concepts, *social exchange theory* and *mentoring networks*, to describe how these tools have translated into the success of Black males. They argue that each theoretical concept offers a benefit to mentoring Black males. For example, they suggest that in using social exchange theory both mentors and mentees must find mutual benefit and satisfaction in the relationship. They also suggest that mentoring networks allow the mentee to develop and utilize a network of supportive mentors versus having only one. This network of mentors provides the mentee with access to multiple sources of social capital. This research highlights the importance of understanding the delicate and dynamic nature of mentoring. We acknowledge and infuse these mentoring concepts in the ongoing development of our Project MALES Student Mentoring Program.

Mentoring Research Focused on Latino Students

We also reviewed research literature on adult mentors and role models and their relationships with Latino youths. Sánchez, Esparza, and Colón (2008) examined the role of *natural mentoring relationships* (NMRs) in the academic performance of Latino adolescents. Their study revealed that most of youths' NMRs were with immediate and extended family members. For these students, having a mentor translated into positive academic outcomes, including greater expectancy of success, higher educational expectations, fewer absences, and a greater sense of school belonging. In addition, having support from multiple mentors was also an important contribution to their academic success. In their qualitative interviews with 10 Mexican American adolescents, Sánchez, Reyes, and Singh (2006) identified four benefits as a result of strong mentoring relationships: *intrapersonal development*, *interpersonal development*, *school-related benefits*, and *behavioral benefits*.

We also were informed by mentoring research that described how youths selected and identified potential mentors and/or role models. In their study, which evaluated the social networks and help-seeking practices of Mexican-origin youths in San Diego, California, Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2003) revealed that, for these youths, certain developed criteria (e.g., *social class*, *racial status*, *ethnic status*, and *gender*) were important determinant characteristics when adolescents selected their role models. Another important characteristic they used to select mentors was validating messages from caring adults who had overcome similar obstacles.

An important period in determining the success of Latina/o students is when they transition from high school into college. Sánchez, Esparza, Berardi, and Pryce (2011) highlight the importance of having a supportive network or a natural mentor during the transition of youths from high school into college. Students who had mentors at both points (e.g., during and after high school) had a resource-high social network, which helped them with their transitions. In contrast, students who did not have a mentor at both points or had no mentors at all were described by the authors as having resource-limited social networks (usually immediate family only), which meant having limited and often vague support from fewer individuals in the transitions beyond high school.

Once in college, the importance of mentoring Latina/o college students continues to be critical in their degree completion (Bordes & Arrendondo, 2005). In their implementation and evaluation of a pilot mentoring program that focused on matching graduate students with incoming Latino college freshmen who were considered at risk for poor academic outcomes, Campos et al. (2009) reveal four areas of the short-term effects of the program: having an *increase of social support*, feeling that they had *increased general knowledge and awareness of the resources* that were available to them, an *increased awareness of their academic skills* (which are important for academic success and long-term educational/educational career options), and their *overall positive adjustment to college* (p. 171). A similar study (Phinney, Campos, Cidhinnia, Padilla Kallemeyn, & Kim, 2011) found that students who were mentored by upper-level students (i.e., third and fourth year) compared to those students who were not mentored did not display a decline in their academic motivation, were less depressed, and had lower levels of stress.

Finally, although not directly related to Latino students, Yosso (2005) offers a fundamental contribution to the development of the Project MALES Student Mentoring Program. She argues that communities of color have the potential to offer an "array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts" that can greatly benefit individuals from socially marginalized groups (p. 69). We embrace this conceptualization of "cultural capital" and suggest that student mentors of color can offer a wealth of support (e.g., tangible and intangible) to other students of color—especially Latino males—as they navigate their educational pathways.

Project MALES Student Mentoring Program

The Project MALES Student Mentoring Program connects Latino male undergraduate students from UT-Austin (and allies) with males of color in local area middle schools and high schools. The program operates with the following goals/objectives: (1) to develop and sustain a research-informed, culturally relevant mentoring program that is linked to the academic core of UT-Austin; (2) to increase year-to-year retention as well as graduation rates of Latino undergraduate students enrolled at UT-Austin who participate as mentors; (3) to engage with community partners to raise awareness about the unique challenges facing Latino males and males of color across the educational pipeline; and (4) to provide culturally relevant guidance to encourage lifelong learning for high school and undergraduate Latino males and other males of color.

In an effort to anchor our mentoring curriculum and training to the academic core, Project MALES requires all of its undergraduate student mentors to enroll in a service-learning course called Instructing Males through Peer Advising College Tracks (IMPACT). This yearlong course focuses on mentoring young men of color, and the course objectives are to enhance college student engagement and academic achievement by offering active and experiential learning opportunities through near peer advising and service learning for our undergraduate student mentors. This course helps our undergraduate student mentors build a robust knowledge base on mentoring research and gain important insights about the challenges facing males of color in education. We also use the course to deploy our mentoring curriculum and to engage in weekly reflections on mentoring activities. IMPACT emphasizes active learning in different environments, allows students to see and experience the relationship between theory and practice, and provides students with opportunities to use newly acquired knowledge and skills in real-life mentoring situations.

Once out in the field, our Project MALES undergraduate student mentors work with their mentees in an effort to improve the educational attainment and college-going competencies of young men of color while also providing a safe space for these students to discuss questions related to going to college. Mentors visit with local middle school and high school students most weeks throughout the academic year to mentor and discuss a variety of topics ranging from college preparation to financial literacy to the "soft" skills necessary to succeed in college and beyond.
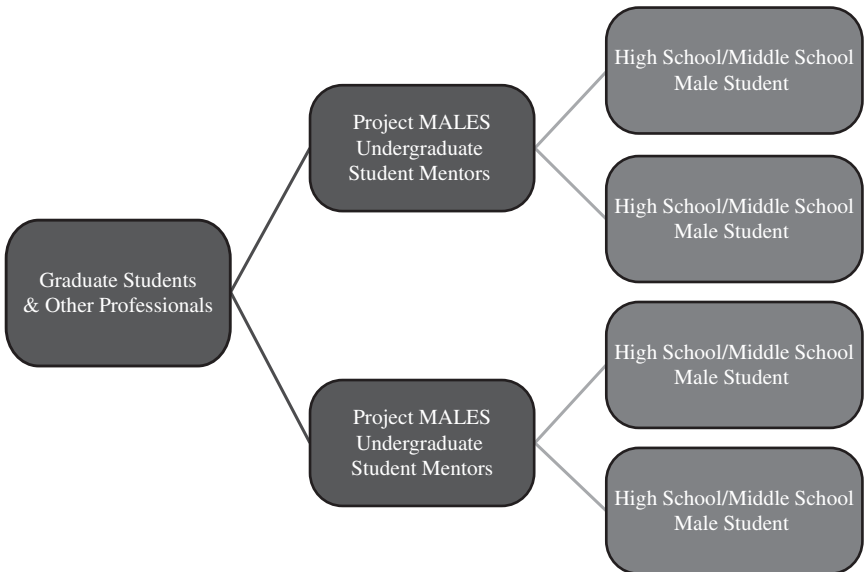
The mentoring program currently partners directly with the Austin Independent School District and serves four high schools and one middle school within the district, delivering over 1,600 hours of mentoring per year to over 50 males of color. Coupled with our many community engagement activities throughout the academic year (e.g., hosting campus tours, Feria Para Aprender, Explore UT), our undergraduate student mentors easily reach hundreds more young males of color across the state. We are also

fortunate to engage in joint programming with other male-focused initiatives in the region, such as the UT-Austin African American Male Research Initiative (AAMRI), the XY-Zone boys program (Communities in Schools in Central Texas), and LaunchPad, all of which also serve adolescent males with leadership and mentoring opportunities.

An additional mentoring component of our model that builds on the near-peer philosophy is the Project MALES Graduate Student Mentoring Program. This component matches undergraduate mentors with current UT-Austin graduate students or professionals to informally explore the unique differences between the undergraduate and graduate study experiences. Since mentoring is done in an informal fashion, graduate mentors visit with undergraduates, based on availability, to discuss topics ranging from the graduate school application process and requirements to how to support oneself financially as a graduate student to the soft skills necessary to succeed in graduate school and beyond.

Mentoring Structure.   The Project MALES Student Mentoring Program fosters discussion and relationship building among male students of color across various age cohorts—middle school and high school students, UT-Austin undergraduate mentors, and UT-Austin graduate mentors (see Figure 8.2). The basic structure entails *near-peer group mentoring* to allow for longer-term bonds to develop between our undergraduate mentors and male middle school and high school students of color participating in the

Figure 8.2. Project MALES Undergraduate and Graduate Student Mentoring Programs—Structure

mentoring program. Similarly, the Project MALES Graduate Student Mentoring Program has a basic structure that utilizes informal *one-on-one* or *one-on-two group mentoring* to allow undergraduate mentors an opportunity to connect with graduate students to explore differences between the undergraduate and graduate study experiences.

As mentioned in the discussion of the different mentoring models, Project MALES employs an *intergenerational* and *near-peer* approach to bring about increased achievement and retention of male students of color in both secondary and postsecondary settings. This model brings together three key groups: (1) males of color who are middle school and high school students, (2) Latino male undergraduate students and other student allies, and (3) graduate students and professionals. In this model, graduate students serve as mentors to undergraduate mentors, who in turn mentor male students of color in middle school or high school. This model is structured around a variety of experiences that focus on leadership development, community engagement, and service.

A brief overview of the types of mentoring activities of our Project MALES Student Mentoring Program reveals a depth and breadth of influence across different educational levels. There are many opportunities for students to engage actively in activities that benefit and shape their educational experiences. We propose that the Project MALES Student Mentoring Program offers a unique structure that allows students to engage in authentic and positive personal and professional relationships across generations.

Conclusion

To our knowledge, there are few research or programmatic efforts across the country that address the urgent crisis facing Latino males in education, and the lack of action or critical awareness comes at a time when the Latino community is driving significant demographic shifts across the country. The Project MALES Student Mentoring Program offers a model that can help address the unique challenges of Latino males in education. The model is very much in its infancy, but it is already receiving local and national acclaim for several reasons: it explicitly focuses on Latino males; it is largely influenced by best practices on mentoring adolescent youth as well as an ongoing multiyear research effort on Latino males; and it highlights a unique collaboration between a research-extensive institution and several local educational and community partners.

With a sense of urgency in the national discourse about improving educational outcomes for male students of color, we recognize that lasting change and impact must occur first at the local level. As such, we developed this mentoring model with a strong focus on research, leadership development, and service to our local community. Our goal is for the Project MALES Student Mentoring Program to serve as a model to others in their

efforts to enhance male student success across all levels of the educational spectrum.

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