



# Project MALES Faculty & Research Affiliates

## Transfer Conditions For LatinX Tejanx Community College Students

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Latinx students who graduate from high school are less likely than their White counterparts to start off at a four-year university and more likely to enter higher education through the community college system (Kurlaender, 2006). In Texas, an overall 53% of students chose community college as their entry point into higher education, according to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB, 2013); of those, 25% eventually transferred to a four-year institution within six years (THECB, 2014). The National Center of Education Statistics (2013) data indicate that 46% of all Latinx students in U.S. higher education are enrolled at a community college. However, Latinx transfer rates to four-year universities were disproportionately low among all transfer students (National Center for Public Policy in Higher Education, 2011). In fact, more than 60% of Latinx students in postsecondary education begin their college careers in the community college, but fewer than 1% transfer to four-year colleges and universities (Yosso and Solórzano, 2006).

### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This article contextualizes some of the issues that affect Latinx community college students' limitations, affordances, and experiences in accessing higher education, specifically those related to transferring to four-year colleges and universities in Texas. The aim of this brief is to draw attention to these universities' efforts to increase the access, retention, and graduation rates for Latinx community college students in Texas.

### SCHOOLING CONDITIONS THAT LEAD LATINX STUDENTS INTO COMMUNITY COLLEGE

According to Valencia (2002), Latinx student failure is often the result of historic school segregation and the consequent limitations in the learning opportunities afforded to African American and Mexican American students in Texas public schools. Using data from the Austin Independent School

District (AISD), Valencia (2000) demonstrates that segregated schools produce inferior schooling and diminish academic performance, evidenced by lower scores on high stakes standardized tests; an increase in the percentage of minority student enrollment in AISD schools correlated with an increase in the percentage of students who failed the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). In the same study, Valencia (2000) also found that students who attended high minority schools were more likely to be taught by noncertified teachers, who in turn were often more likely to teach in schools with lower test scores, indicating that there is a direct correlation between teacher certification and students' test performance. Given the sociopolitical context of education in Texas, Latinx/Tejanx students, especially those of low socioeconomic backgrounds, generally have limited opportunities for positive learning, making it difficult for them to be academically prepared for enrollment at four-year colleges or universities. Coupled with dwindling funding opportunities, Latinx/Tejanx students are often funneled to community college systems as their only option for entry into higher education.

### WHAT STUDENTS NEED FROM COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

In Texas, Lanaan and Starobin (2004) found that students generally believed their future success at the university depended on their community college improving their transfer articulation agreements because this would ensure that their prerequisite classes to transfer were completed. Students also identified the need to have supportive advisors to assist with the transfer process and, especially, the need to be introduced to the admissions office at the four-year college. Addressing the Latinx transfer gap, Núñez and Elizondo (2013) echo some of Lanaan and Starobin's (2004) findings regarding students' attitudes and behaviors around the transfer process. They make the following suggestions

RESEARCH BRIEF

MARCH 2020  
NO. 19

regarding areas where community college personnel can work to improve the experience for Latinx students during their time at the community college by (a) building relationships with community college faculty and staff; (b) providing access to critical information about how to navigate the community college/four-year university systems; and (c) ensuring that the community college is an affirming and welcoming environment for Latinx students with similar backgrounds.

### AFFIRMING TRANSFER MODELS

Researchers and practitioners have developed affirming transfer culture models in an effort to diminish the institutional barriers and strengthen the transfer function from community colleges to four-year universities for Latinx/Tejanx students (Handel, 2012; Herrera and Jain, 2013; Jain, Herrera, Bernal, and Solórzano, 2011; and Pérez and Ceja 2010). Two such models are the "Emerging Transfer Culture Model" by Handel (2012) and "A Latinx Transfer Culture Model" by Pérez and Ceja (2010). The transfer-affirming culture model mandates that four-year institutions recognize their role in the transfer function. It asks both the community college and the four-year university to make transfer commitments an institutional priority: by actively engaging students during the pre-transfer activities of the transfer process, by having high expectations, and by supporting students throughout the completion of their bachelor's degrees. The model outlined by Pérez and Ceja highlights the need to increase the number of Latinx faculty and staff in higher education, especially because they often reflect the cultural values of Latinx students and can become sources of support and mentorship (Urrieta and Méndez Benavidez, 2007).

### FINDINGS FROM THE SIX CASE STUDIES

The case studies at six institutions in Texas highlight promising efforts geared to assisting potential transfer students at six Texas universities. These universities

are the University of Houston, University of North Texas, University of Texas at Austin, Texas A&M University, Texas State University, and Texas Tech University. In general, each institution meets, to an extent, a transfer-affirming framework of shared responsibility, high expectations, support services, and includes transfer as an essential element of the university's mission (Handel, 2012). All six of the four-year institutions envision the transfer function as a shared commitment between themselves and their local and state community college partners. This is evident in both the articulation agreements and the joint admissions programs set in place at some of these universities.

Using Pérez and Ceja's (2010) Latinx transfer culture model, however, it becomes evident that the current transfer policy and practice efforts at these six public four-year institutions are not sufficiently increasing access, retention, and graduation rates for Latinx/Tejanx community college students. First, none of the outreach programming instituted by these universities has a culturally responsive component focusing on the specific needs of Latinx/Tejanx community college students, or racial or ethnic minority transfer students in general. Second, although all of the universities offered some type of financial aid and scholarships for transfer students, the awards are not specific to racial-minority transfer students, which includes Latinx community college transfer students.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Creating transfer policies and transfer student programming that focuses on Latinx/Tejanx community college student transfer culture in Texas is of critical importance. Failure to address these issues will result in the continuation of a disproportionately low rate of Latinx/Tejanx community college students transferring to four-year institutions and, more generally, to the lack of Latinx achievement and attainment in higher education. We conclude that public four-year universities, including the six Texas universities we profiled in this article, should develop transfer policies and practices specific to the needs of Latinx community college students. These might include: (1) the development of culturally relevant outreach programs focusing on the specific needs—including the financial needs—of Latinx community college students; (2) the development of guaranteed admission pathways into four-year universities for Latinx community college students; and (3) the development of programming specific to increasing the retention and graduation of Latinx community college transfer students. This should include financial aid awards and scholarships specifically for Latinx community college transfer students. The demographic imperative surrounding this issue highlights the urgency with which these access, retention, and graduation efforts must be advanced, especially in Texas.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**José Del Real Viramontes** is a visiting postdoctoral research associate in the Higher Education/Community College Leadership Program in the Department of Education Policy, Organization, and Leadership at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. As a former community college transfer student, his research focuses on exploring the transfer receptive culture for Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x community college transfer students at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) and highlighting how Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x community college transfer students develop their agency while confronting the ideological, material, and structural conditions of the transfer process to PWIs.

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