



Mentoring Experiences and Perceptions of Latino Male Faculty in Higher Education

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■ To better understand the role of mentorship in the professional growth of Latino male faculty members in higher education, it is necessary to identify a concrete understanding of mentorship through personal experience.

As the Latino/a population continues to be the largest and fastest growing population in the United States (Salinas, 2015b), more Latino/a students continue to enroll in colleges and universities. Yet, the number of Latino faculty members does not reflect the ratio of Latino/a students who enroll in higher education institutions.

A 21st-century portrait of higher education conveys a scene of changing student demographics. The scene is one of a continuous increase in undergraduate racial and ethnic diversity. In 2015, this increase represented an undergraduate student population that is 14% Black, 17% Hispanic, and 1% Native American (U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2016). In response to these demographics, institutions of higher education have put an emphasis on recruiting Faculty of Color as a means of helping to support and retain these students (Chadiha et al., 2014). During the same year, Black (6%), Hispanic (4%), and Native American (>1%) faculty accounted for only a little more than 10% of full-time faculty.

Despite efforts to bring diversity to academia, the number of Faculty of Color has not kept pace with the undergraduate student population.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to conceptualize, validate, and explore how Latino male faculty perceive mentoring both as a mentee and as a mentor, as well as how mentoring impacts their professional path and development. This study examined the intrinsic trends and motivators that influence how Latino male faculty perceive and value mentorship.

VALIDATING MENTORSHIP

By employing relevant and useful feedback, effective mentors present positive role models for their

mentees. The mentees in turn are likely to enact this behavior with their own students and, later, with junior faculty when the mentees themselves become mentors (Fountain & Newcomer, 2016). Mentoring is essential for the success of any new faculty member, but especially important for Faculty of Color (Ponjuán, 2011; Thompson, 2008).

The Role of Mentorship in Faculty Members' Experiences

Without appropriate support for Faculty of Color, acceptance and integration may become problematic (De Luca & Escoto, 2012). One solution to this challenge can be found through the guidance that is often associated with formal and informal mentoring opportunities. Coupled with a mentor from a similar ethnic or racial background, mentoring can prove to be a very effective support tool for Faculty of Color.

Cultural Taxation

In addition to meeting basic obligations, Faculty of Color often find an increased workload. This workload, when compared with their White colleagues, includes support for Students of Color and the excessive supervision of graduate students (Urrieta et al., 2015). Along with this, Faculty of Color find that they are expected to serve on diversity-related committees and teach diversity-related courses (Cargill, 2009). These additional expectations, which Padilla (1994) referred to as cultural taxation, creates a situation where the ability to pursue research, and to be productive, are more limited (Aguirre, 2000; Rabionet et al., 2009).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

The four phases to understand mentorship for Men of Color (Torrens et al., 2017) model reflects an intersection for the relationship between the stages of progression through the cycle of mentorship and the role of institutional leadership in supporting the mentoring process.

The first phase occurs when someone takes interest and invests the time and energy to mentor someone, and when “they experience quality mentoring,

they begin to model behaviors of their mentor in an attempt to develop professionally, academically, and psychosocially” (Torrens et al., 2017, p. 13). The second phase focuses on reflection and retention.

The third phase focuses on the conceptualization and reproduction of mentorship. Torrens et al. (2017) explained that this occurs when “reflection leads to a new idea or modification of an existing abstract concept” (p. 13)—for example, when one reflects on “how mentoring impacted their lives and begin to create their own mentoring identity” (p. 13). The fourth phase for understanding mentorship for Men of Color is active experimentation and motivation. This is applied when one adjusts “their mentoring identity by incorporating reinforcement or punishment from previous mentoring experiences” (Torrens et al., 2017, p. 13).

RESEARCH METHODS

This qualitative study is phenomenological as it seeks to capture the essence of how Latino male faculty members perceived mentorship both as mentees and as mentors, and how mentoring was significant in their socialization as a faculty member.

To explore the lived experiences of Latino male faculty members and how they conceptualize and validate their mentorship experiences, seven Latino male faculty members were interviewed. Each participant was interviewed three times.

FINDINGS

The findings of this study will be presented in three major themes, which emerged from the interviews: (a) mentorship is similar to the family culture, (b) mentoring within the higher education pipeline, and (c) an observation of the desire to pay forward what has been received in the form of guidance, leadership, and mentorship to others.

Family Culture Mirroring Mentorship

Throughout the interviews, each participant was asked about their formal education and when the concept of college was first considered. In each

instance, all seven respondents indicated that the opportunity of college was initially conceptualized at a very young age.

Very rarely did the participants self-identify a specific mentor when self-reflecting on their adolescent years. However, our findings support their current value of mentoring as Latino males is a by-product of the values instilled from Latino/a culture and family ties at a young age. It is clear that for these Latino males, their familial capital was part of experiencing and understanding mentorship and expanding their kinship networks.

Mentorship within Higher Education

Another most influential factor for Latino male faculty to decide to pursue an advanced degree of education was a specific relationship with a current or former faculty member. Participants were asked about the factors that encouraged them to continue their education careers. Common responses cited close family support, cohort connections, and, most commonly, a faculty or advisor serving as a mentor to them when they were students. Although participants of this study shared that their educational journeys were isolating for being one of the only Latinos and Students of Color in their academic programs of study, they received educational support provided by faculty mentors.

The Pay it Forward Initiative

Another evident theme that arose from the interviews was conceptualized as a phenomenon that has become commonly considered as “paying forward” the act of mentoring throughout higher education (Torrens et al., 2017). It was no secret that each of the participants spoke highly of the concept of mentoring. Each participant identified a key aspect

of their role as faculty throughout their professional career, in one way or another, was a responsibility to mentor students and colleagues, just as someone had done for the participants as they rose into the field and pursued their respective advanced degrees.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The findings of this study indicate that Latino male faculty are drawn to mentorship within higher education. Oftentimes, the culture within postbaccalaureate studies is similar to Latino culture. For example, connections and strong cohorts within academia could be mirrored to a Latino family at the level of support, validation, and sense of belonging they provide—as Latino families are very likely to provide support, validation, and sense of belonging to those closest to them. Latino male faculty often seek out mentors or role models to satisfy a validation or a new form of familismo. Findings of this study support the sense of value in mentorship instilled by many Latino males, and is appreciated and willingly passed to the next generation of Latino students.

Based on our findings, we offer the recommendations to departments, Deans, committees, and directors of academic programs to provide intentional support and mentorship for future and current faculty. To increase the sense of community of Latino males in higher education, a culture of advising that mirrors mentorship and familismo should be developed. Academic programs should support and celebrate the accomplishments of their Latino students, faculty, and staff.

AUTHOR BIOS

Cristobal Salinas Jr., Ph.D., is an associate professor in higher education leadership at Florida Atlantic University. His research promotes access and

equality in higher education and explores the social and political context of education opportunities for historically marginalized communities. Salinas is the Founder and Editor for the Journal Committed to Social Change on Race and Ethnicity. His research has been featured in CNN, CNN Español, NPR, and Good Morning America.

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