

Challenges and Promises: Latine Perspectives on Support and Community at the University of Washington

Chavez-Hernandez, F., Mendez-Covarrubias, A., Garcia, I., Garcia Rivera, N., Gonzalez, S., Jimenez Romero, J., Melgoza, D., Ocampo-Aguilar, L., Osorio L., Sierra, R., Wilsey-Bacso, L.

Faculty Advisor: Jose Antonio Lucero

ABSTRACT

This study seeks to explore the perspectives of Latine students at the University of Washington regarding racial representation within the institution. Do Latine students see their experiences and identities represented and reflected in university life? How do Latine students experience and perceive Latine representation (or lack thereof) in terms of the composition of faculty, student body, and community spaces at UW? This research project aims to uncover the realities, challenges, and promise of support and community on campus. Through interviews with Latine students and faculty, this inquiry will describe how students find support at UW and how they navigate their academic environment. To attain a comprehensive understanding, the research utilizes a combination of primary and secondary sources, incorporating interviews with Latine students and faculty at the UW to capture personalized and nuanced perspectives. By examining the lived experiences and perspectives of individuals directly affected, the study aims to thoroughly examine the complex dynamics at play. Exploring the lived experiences of Latine students, the study will contribute to the discourse on racial representation in academia and its impact on student well-being and academic success. The findings will inform discussions on how institutions can foster an inclusive environment that recognizes and supports the diverse backgrounds of all students. This research project has emerged from ongoing conversation and collaboration with the Washington State Commission on Hispanic Affairs. This research project will inform the community report that the Commission is preparing.

Keywords

Latine students, Racial representation, University of Washington, Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), Faculty representation, Student well-being, Academic success, Community support, Higher education, and Washington State.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the landscape of higher education, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) stand as uppermost principles, guiding institutions toward a more just and representative future. The University of Washington (UW), nestled in the heart of Seattle, exemplifies this commitment, espousing values that uplift the diverse voices and experiences within its academic community. Yet, despite the university's professed dedication to DEI, challenges persist, particularly in the realm of racial representation.

Within this context, the experiences of Latine students at UW offer a lens through which to examine the intricacies of representation and belonging within higher education. Latinidad encompasses a spectrum of identities, cultures, and histories, each deserving of recognition and affirmation within the university landscape. However, the reality for many Latine students often diverges from this ideal as they navigate academic spaces where their presence is overlooked, their voices marginalized, and their experiences invisible.

This research project seeks to uncover the lived realities of Latine students at UW, delving into the nuances of their experiences within the university's ecosystem. At its core, the inquiry seeks to interrogate the gap between institutional rhetoric and student experiences, shedding light on the challenges, promises, and complexities of racial representation on campus'.

UW, like many institutions, grapples with the legacy of historical and systemic inequities that have shaped the contours of higher education. Legislative measures such as I-200 and federal regulations like Title VI and IX have cast a long shadow over efforts to promote diversity and inclusion, constraining institutional action and complicating the pursuit of equitable representation.

Despite these challenges, UW remains positioned to lead the charge toward a more inclusive future. The university's initiatives underscore a collective commitment to fostering an environment where all students feel valued, supported, and empowered to thrive. However, the voices of Latine students and faculty reveal a dissonance between promise and reality, highlighting the urgent need for introspection and action.

Through this research endeavor, we aim to amplify the voices of Latine students and faculty, providing a platform for their narratives to be heard and their experiences to be validated. By centering the perspectives of those most directly impacted, we hope to catalyze meaningful change within UW and beyond, advancing the discourse on racial representation in academia and laying the foundation for a more inclusive future.

This research project emerges from a collaborative partnership with the Washington State Commission on Hispanic Affairs, reflecting a shared commitment to driving systemic change and promoting equity within higher education. By exploring the complexities of racial

representation at UW and envisioning pathways toward a more just and inclusive academic landscape, we aim to contribute meaningful insights and practical solutions.

II. METHODOLOGY

In our exploration of the perspectives of Latine students at the UW regarding racial representation within the institution, we adopted a blended approach of primary and secondary research methods.

Primary Research

We conducted in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, including Latine students and faculty at UW. These interviews provided personalized insights into the experiences and perceptions of individuals directly impacted by racial representation on campus. Through open-ended discussions, participants shared their perspectives on the visibility of Latine identities, the composition of the university community, and the availability of support systems.

Secondary Research

Complementing our primary research efforts, we conducted a thorough analysis of secondary sources. This included scholarly articles, institutional reports, and relevant literature on diversity and inclusion in higher education. Secondary research provided context and theoretical grounding, enabling us to situate our findings within broader academic discourse. Additionally, we explored successful practices and initiatives implemented in other educational settings, drawing insights from published literature, reports, and studies.

Integration of Methods

The integration of primary and secondary research methods allowed us to develop a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of racial representation at UW. While interviews provided firsthand accounts and personal experiences, secondary research validated and enhanced our understanding of the systemic factors contributing to racial representation dynamics. Through understanding insights from multiple sources, we generated a robust analysis that encompassed both individual perspectives and broader contextual insights.

By employing this combined research approach, we aimed to contribute to the discourse on diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education, informing institutional practices and policies aimed at fostering a more inclusive and supportive campus climate for Latine students at UW.

III. RESULTS

Identity and Composition at the University of Washington

As diversity becomes one of the foremost goals for the University of Washington, there have been different approaches to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion. Despite these efforts, Latines continue to be vastly underrepresented in these spaces.

With the implementation of Title VI, which prohibits discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in institutions receiving federal financial assistance, and Title IX, whose origin lies in the 1965 Executive Order 11246 prohibiting discrimination based on sex, race, color, religion, and national origin (OCR, 2024). The University of Washington has made certain attempts to promote policies based on anti-discrimination in efforts to increase diversity. They created the Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity (OMAD) in 1968, whose mission is to “create pathways for diverse populations to access postsecondary opportunities, nurture, and support their academic success, and cultivate a campus climate that enriches the educational experience for all” (University of Washington, 2024). However, this was only implemented through efforts of student-led activism on campus, students of color occupied the president's office to demand the university commit to increasing its diversity.

Similarly, they implemented The Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action (EOAA) whose mission is to uphold anti-discrimination laws and oversee affirmative action policies, creating equal opportunity in employment processes and admissions (UW Human Resources, 2024). The EOAA has pre-employment inquiries to ensure that individuals involved in the hiring process adhere to guidelines and review hiring procedures. However, despite their placement goals for underrepresented groups, **as of 2022, only 5.1% of the 4,800 professorial faculty members were Hispanic, while 64.4% were white.** Therefore, UW should continue focusing on faculty recruitment, development, and retention. Especially since research has shown that Latine faculty greatly impact the learning outcomes for Latino students, engaging students in the classroom, improving higher education retention, increasing degree completion rates, and enhancing campus pluralism (Luis P., 2013).

Another state law, initiative 200, prohibits affirmative action at public universities, making it illegal in 1998. In October 2000, the UW signed the first University of Washington Diversity Compact. This document emphasized the importance of recruitment outreach, to diversity campus and bring new students, faculty, staff, and community members. During the years 2002 to 2003, the UW's main objective was to increase minority enrollments. Therefore, they expanded outreach and recruitment efforts to K-8, high school, and community college students, through programs like GEAR, Upward Bound, EMPOWER, etc. (University of Washington, 2024). Despite this, many Latine students have voiced concerns about the lack of Latine faculty and how Latine culture can feel hidden on campus. In a student survey, they mention, “I feel most represented in the clubs formed by students and the community. I also feel represented at the ECC, but I feel underrepresented anywhere else. In my major, I am one of three Latinos in my class and the only woman... I also feel underrepresented when I think about my Indigenous identity as we are often overlooked in LSU meetings.” In these surveys, many students

mentioned the lack of Latine faculty at the UW. Many of the Latine professors that they encountered have been through their Spanish heritage classes or humanities courses. Outside of these departments, students expressed having difficulties forming similar connections in other classes. An anonymous student mentions, “I feel the most represented through the ECC and RSOs that exist on campus. I feel like there are many clubs that I can join and support that help me feel represented. However, academically, I feel underrepresented on campus. I feel like the number of students I see in my classes that are Latino is very minimal, especially in my STEM courses, which leads to feelings of imposter syndrome.” Representation is necessary to create a diverse educational environment, one that inspires Latine youth to achieve academic excellence. Racial and ethnic diversity in faculty, along with accessible resources for students demonstrates a commitment to creating a multicultural learning environment.

Student Enrollment Data

In 2021, the number of students enrolled at the University of Washington, both undergraduate and graduate, was 52,434. Out of these students, **4,295 identified as Hispanic or Latine, which is only 8.19% of students.** In contrast, 18,930 enrolled students are white, accounting for 36.1% of students. Additionally, only **1,176 degrees were awarded to Hispanic or Latine students, which accounted for 7.7% of students who were awarded degrees in 2021,** with the most common race/ethnicity group of degree recipients at the University of Washington-Seattle Campus being white with 6,350 degrees being awarded (Data USA, n.d.). This disparity in enrollment between Latine students and their white counterparts at the University of Washington helps to highlight the systemic issues that exist in higher education, despite the fact that Hispanic or Latine individuals account for approximately 19% of the U.S. population (Pew Research Center, 2023), and accentuates the need for targeted efforts to increase diversity and inclusion on campus.

Faculty Representation Data

Regarding faculty, as of October 31, 2022, 7% of all current employees across all locations identify as Hispanic or Latine. The percentage is also 7% at the Seattle campus, 11.5% at the Bothell campus, 11.8% at the Tacoma campus, and 6.8% at UW Medicine. The percentage of Hispanic or Latine-identifying employees across all locations who were terminated between July 1, 2021, and June 30, 2022, was 8.6%, while the percentage of Hispanic or Latine-identifying employees who were hired during this time period was only 7.8% (University of Washington, 2022). Additionally in 2020, **out of 1,085 tenured professors at the University of Washington, only 39 identified as Hispanic, which is only 3.59%** (University of Washington, 2020). This data helps emphasize that despite some representation improvements in faculty at various campuses, the overall presence of Hispanic or Latine employees remains notably lower than the proportion in the U.S. population. Disparities in hiring and termination rates, as well as the

proportion of tenured professors, suggest ongoing challenges in achieving equitable representation.

Student Responses

It is important to understand if students feel they are being represented on campus and in what areas. An important theme recognized in the responses to our survey is feeling underrepresented, specifically in STEM majors and classes. One student stated, "...I feel like the number of students that I see in my classes that are Latino is very minimal, especially in my STEM courses..." and another student expressed similar sentiment saying, "I like how there are so many opportunities to join Latine groups that help me feel like I belong. I feel underrepresented in my STEM classes as there aren't many Latine professors and TA's."

Additionally, there can be feelings of underrepresentation in the Latine community within various ethnic groups, with individuals from our survey identifying as Peruvian, Mexican-American, and Honduran, among others. This can contribute to a lack of community, with one respondent saying, "Felt underrepresented as there's no specific Peruvian clubs/events." Another respondent explained, "I think the best representation we have is the LSU (Latine Student Union) but even then, as a Latine from a non-Spanish speaking country, I still don't feel super represented to participate in that club." This was further emphasized by another response saying, "...I also feel underrepresented when I think about my indigenous identity as we are often overlooked in LSU meetings."

Furthermore, students explained difficulties that they have faced related to their racial or ethnic identity that contribute to a lack of community while at the University of Washington. A student respondent explained how they felt, stating:

"I feel at times it is difficult to interact with people who have such different backgrounds because I am so used to the small town where everyone knows everybody and has similar backgrounds. I come from the small town of Sunnyside, Washington, which is predominately Hispanic, so coming to UW is a very different experience from Sunnyside, but when you do meet genuine and kind people, it makes those challenges of fear feel less difficult to deal with."

Another student stated that they felt uncomfortable speaking up about different issues to leadership, like the Associated Students of the University of Washington (ASUW), which is predominantly white, because they do not feel heard. The student explained,

"All they do is talk about how they want our vote and how they will do good things for us, but at the Senate [a branch of the University of Washington student government, legislative process], they don't care about BIPOC students. I'm tired of white people (and ASUW) pandering for my vote just because I'm a racialized person on a white campus."

While there is a definite lack of support and challenges faced by Latine students, there are resources that exist that students are saying helps contribute to a sense of belonging and community. For example, when explaining where they felt supported on campus, a student stated “I do feel supported on campus when social issues arise as a Latine student...” and further explained that “the ECC does a great job at providing Latine student with resources and a community that we can rely on. I have used the ECC and the Instructional Center as a support service to my academics and social life.” The ECC stands for Ethnic Cultural Center and aims to provide resources and community spaces for ethnic individuals at the UW. The Instructional Center is a comprehensive academic support center for students to help with academic success at the UW by providing tutoring, mentoring, teaching life skills, and more for minority students. Another respondent touched on how they felt represented in these spaces stating:

“I will admit that it’s hard to find other people that share my same nationality, so oftentimes I’m missing those little moments where I can relate to people from my respective nationality. Of course, I understand that many Latine students in the US are from Mexico/Mexican origins, but it feels hard to truly fit in a culture that elevates the culture, norms, and values of one country and doesn’t pay as much attention to other countries. I don’t mean to come off as controversial, but there needs to be more done to ensure that ALL Latine students of all nationalities can feel comfortable sharing their different perspectives and cultures in a way that enriches and benefits other Latine students.”

This shows that while resources do exist for Latine students, there is still room for improvement in the representation of Latine culture on campus to ensure that all Latine students can feel comfortable and seen on campus.

Resources and Community at the University of Washington

Student-lead RSO

At the University of Washington, a big component to uplifting Latine students is through student organizations. This can include identity-based clubs such as the Latine Student Union (LSU), Indigenous Students of Latin America (ISLA), MEChA de UW, Unidas Seremos, Mariachi Quinto Sol en UW, and more. Students in leadership positions host weekly or biweekly meetings, do a variety of community service and advocacy, host events to raise cultural awareness, and bring a fun time to students. Most of these clubs meet in the Samuel E. Kelly Ethnic Cultural Center, a space created by the university for students of color.

Identity-based RSO’s are one of the biggest components to uplifting Latine student’s culture and identities. Because of this, students are often responsible for uplifting their own communities. For example, an anonymous interview from an LSU board member revealed their struggle to get the LSU going during and post-pandemic. They stated,

“Our RSO’s, of course, there’s like some... monetary lenience... given to us by the ECC... But other than that, it really is, fend for yourself. I remember, like, with LSU, we use a lot of our own money to try and get that RSO going and get some... little incentives like food and stuff to have people come.”

They claimed that there is a lack of institutional resources for Latine students, often putting all the work on RSO’s who already lack resources to keep their club going.

Institutional programs/services for students

The University of Washington also has made institutional attempts to care for and represent its Latine Students. This can be seen through the implementation of the Samuel E. Kelly Ethnic Cultural Center and the Office of Minority Affairs & Diversity, and more.

The Samuel E. Kelly Ethnic Cultural Center (ECC) is advertised as a home away from home for multicultural students including Latine-identifying students. Most of the Latine registered student organizations are organized within the Samuel E. Kelly Ethnic Cultural Center. However, our interviews revealed common criticism about having to enter the ECC to find diversity. In our anonymous student survey, students revealed that the ECC had a greater sense of belonging than the rest of campus. One student wrote, “I also feel represented at the ECC, but I feel underrepresented anywhere else.” Some students argued that having to enter a specific building on campus to feel represented is overall a barrier to their sense of belonging on campus. Faculty have also expressed this concern, as one professor in our anonymous interview said,

“If I want to see a community of Latinx students... I have to go to the ECC. And there's... something problematic about the fact that I have to get off campus to be able to find a community and a gathering of Latine students.”

A separate interview with a different professor revealed that this barrier motivated them in 2023 to host Day of the Dead in Suzzallo Library instead of the ECC. They stated,

“One of the things that I did last year, for instance, Day of the Dead... I know Day of the Dead was celebrated at the ECC... I was like ‘no we need to take this more to the center of the university.’ I formed a committee, a Day of the Dead committee, and I brought different departments to organize the Day of the Dead. And it was the first time we had it at the Suzzallo Library... So, I just wanted to be more visible, like, that we are here, so then just having our own students feeling like ‘oh my goodness, we’re celebrating this in the middle of the campus!’

From this, we can infer that many students and faculty find the ECC as one of the only spaces to feel represented on campus. This comes with a greater realization that concentrating diversity within one building exposes the lack of representation on the UW campus as a whole.

The Office of Minority Affairs & Diversity does a good job at recruiting students from diverse backgrounds, including Latine identifying students. Once students are admitted at the UW, OMA&D offers a variety of services for underrepresented students to access in order to ensure their success. Such services include academic counseling services, programs supporting STEM, health science majors, and students wishing to pursue grad school. These services are in response to low retention rates of underrepresented students at the UW (Beyer, Catherine, et al.). Despite OMA&D's efforts, the trend of these retention rates persist, and so does the question of how to make sure Latine students graduate. Some Latine faculty in other departments have already begun to tackle that question.

The Department of Spanish and Portuguese studies has a great impact on Latine students, whose cultures could be strongly tied to these languages. In the Spanish department, professors and faculty are making efforts to improve retention rates through its Spanish Heritage Language Courses. An anonymous interviewee from this department spoke about the effort faculty put into making an engaging curriculum for heritage Spanish speakers looking to take classes in Spanish. They stated,

“One of the things I’m really conscious about is that higher education was not created for students of color... every time we turn around, we feel like we don’t belong... It’s because of the system. So, then, with those things in mind, at the curriculum I implement in the heritage classes, I make sure that in one way we recognize what students bring into the classroom... One of the things that I do as well is that each class has a specific curriculum, for instance, in [Spanish] 314 we talk a lot about social justice issues like immigration, feminism, language discrimination, we talk about the violations of human rights. And in 315 we read *No Soy Tu Perfecta Hija Mexicana*, and then we start talking about mental health issues, and then in 316 we touch more about how to prepare for the content classes, cause I need to realize that after these classes people are going to go to content classes where they are going to be expected to know certain things. Most of the things are going to be about literacy studies, like genres and all that. So, then that class is designed to prepare students for that. So, even though within my curriculum I try for students to feel like they are seen within the curriculum, and that we are talking about issues that are relevant in our everyday lives, one of the things I try to do within the program at least once or twice a quarter, is I try to put all the heritage classes together for an event where we learn a little more about different cultures. For instance, we had an event about cumbia and we ate empanadas... But yeah, the importance of creating more spaces for students to learn about different kinds of cultures. Prior to that we also learned about Brazilian dance, and then this upcoming year we’re going to have, I know that everybody has a lot of different graduation parties and all that, so I want a specific graduation party for students who are finishing the 316 class and that are graduating this year. So, we’re going to throw a party, un baile, and then I’m also going to invite one of my colleagues who’s at Portland state, and he’s a book writer, so then he’s a Chicano so

students at UW can see representation even within the people we bring on campus. So, I want all around to pretty much tell you that I also try to create these spaces, for students to see themselves in the curriculum, in the different events and learn more about the different aspects of being Latine.”

Because Spanish-speaking students’ heritages span across Latin America, the Spanish Heritage Language Courses does its best to represent the wide range of cultures, and issues, that many Latine students experience. For students who had taken these courses, they reported feeling represented by them in our student survey. However, according to faculty in the Spanish and Portuguese Department in an anonymous interview, the university does not do a good job of promoting these classes to Spanish-speaking Latine students. Instead, academic advisors encourage students to worry about language requirements later in their academic career. As a result, students find out about the Spanish Heritage Courses later into their undergraduate career, when it may be too late to pursue the full heritage series or a minor in Spanish. The accurate representation and engaging curriculum within the Spanish Heritage Courses calls for a more accessible system of promotion by the university if its purpose is to improve community to increase retention and graduation rates. It is important to note that Spanish is just one of the languages that Latine identifying peoples may speak. Currently, the UW does not offer a Heritage Language Course for Portuguese speaking students or any language courses on any indigenous languages from Latin America and the Caribbean.

Other spaces where students might feel represented is in classes surrounding Latines or Latin America and the Caribbean, taught by Latine professors. One anonymous professor spoke to us in an interview, stating,

“One space with undergrads that, in particular, that I really enjoy, is when I teach my Latino politics class. That class is pretty amazing. On average. And then at UW, this is very unusual, but that class on average is somewhere between 75 and 85 percent Latinx identifying students. Um, yeah, that's a very different space and right. That's not a normal classroom. Like when I teach the Congress, it's nothing like that. Um, and so, you know, and I, having just taught it, I think, well, one thing that I absolutely love about it is. I'm sort of, like, unapologetic, and play lots of things like clips and other things that are in Spanish and make references to different things and talk about sort of variation in the group in ways that is not possible in a class in which there isn't that makeup of the student body. And people are very like referential to their own personal backgrounds and what's happened in say their communities, their families, their social networks, and they're using that as a lens. To understand and interpret the material, and it's just very rich and really generative in a way that doesn't happen in other spaces.”

Another professor specializing in Latin America & the Caribbean in a separate interview stated,

“I have noticed the larger number of Latino, Latine, um, young people coming into my classroom. Um, when I started 20 years ago, everybody was white... And now I have like, I would say two thirds of my classes are people of color. Um, I would say that about half tend to be Latino, Latina kids, uh, Latina young people... I love that I have so many young Latina kids. Uh, and also I have noticed that a lot of my Latina students, uh, are not just Mexican, which for a long time, it was just like, you know, it was all Mexican kids. It's like now I'm having like this new set of mixtures like Salvadorian Guatemala and you're like, what the heck is happening here? A few years ago, I had a Dominican... Brazilian from Eastern Washington. And I'm like, what? This never happens. Now I'm having Cuban students. I got Puerto Rican students. I have never, this is just, so there is a heterogeneity, um, among the Latino community, but also a different kind of mixtures that are also bringing new questions into the classroom.”

These different classes surrounding Latine people or Latin America and the Caribbean prove to be engaging for students. In fact, our survey revealed that the majority of students believe there is not an adequate number of classes of Chicano/Latin American and Caribbean Studies offered at UW. One student argued against the inclusion of more classes if it meant that the course would be taught by a non-Latine professor. This shows how important classes on Latines or in Latin American and Caribbean Studies is for Latine students and their success, and how valuable having a Latine professor teaching them is for them.

Different departments have their own struggles with ensuring Latine success. For instance, students majoring in STEM fields reported feeling underrepresented as they struggle to find other Latine students in their classes. While these departments are well funded, allocating more resources for student success, these resources mainly benefit other students. Other departments, like Arts and Humanities or Social Sciences, lack this funding. One professor in an anonymous interview stated,

“The university needs to put money into this. So I think they put money into recruiting people here... But I think like, We have to focus on like, well, then what do we do when people are already here? And what, how do we build a community and a space? Sometimes that's going to mean the university has to put a lot of money into that and they can't be expecting it to be funded externally through grants or donors. They have to decide that it's worth putting part of their budget into those things. So right now I've been trying to... what is basically a Latino social science... pipeline initiative... and generate... a really large amount of funding for it... part of it would be getting potentially federal funding for it. But, you know, it will involve the university having to actually support this initiative and decide this is important... if we want more Latino social scientists... what I'm arguing, you need to have a pipeline like this and you need to engage with undergraduates, graduate students, postdocs, you know, and professors and build a network and build a network, not just in this institution, but across other

institutions that are trying to build similar initiatives... but the university has to support that. And money is one way... physical spaces are another... And I think the university absolutely has to support those things because it's really hard to do it without their support.”

Latine students need to feel represented by their institution, and also supported throughout their undergraduate journey. Lack of institutional support for certain programs proves to be a barrier for students. Faculty do a great job at trying to represent their students, but UW as an institution can do better to ensure Latine success by funding initiatives that ensure they find their community and feel supported in their academics.

Institutional Faculty Support

The UW, as an institution that has advertised itself as a university that supports and actively promotes diversity within its school, but there is not always tangible evidence for that. Students and faculty of color can experience disappointment and find it hard to navigate vulnerabilities based on their Latine identity once they join the UW community. While faculty obtain paid and contract-binding positions with their university, that does not automatically grant them a safety net from facing an unstable work environment. BIPOC faculty members within UW, but even generally universities across the US, have brought much attention to the disparities surrounding professors who are granted tenure at their schools. Patterns in tenure acceptance have been disproportionately towards white faculty members, where many BIPOC professors, even with many years of experience, have been denied tenure at higher rates (Gonzalez et al., 2013). These are policies that are embedded within universities that may go unseen under the guise of diversity efforts. A professor in the Social Sciences field expresses, "I didn't have tenure so I felt incredibly vulnerable. I think some of that stuff still manifest now, but because I've had tenure for so long, it's not that I don't care about it, but I, it hurts me a lot less, A, because I sort of expect this stuff to happen, but B, you know, the ability for other people to harm me is more limited now than at earlier stages of my career”. Tenure provides a position of security that many Latine professors are not afforded, which can end up restricting their advocacy for students of color, other faculty members, and themselves.

It was also mentioned that there was not much support on the level of the UW to provide culturally aware events for students or faculty. The ECC has become a hub for many students of color to come together and share their experiences and cultures, but it has left out spaces for faculty. A professor expanded on this when discussing their experience navigating UW community spaces in an interview saying,

“And as a faculty of color I feel like that I can go to these places as I said, like I’ve been wanting to go to all the different events, but I am conscious those events are for students and I don’t want to take up space. As for OMAD, well there’s a lot of different resources,

but I need to be conscious that those are things for students. So, no, I don't feel like I can access those places”

The discrepancies between faculty engagement with culturally centered events and resources compared to students is shown to be lacking.

Having a strong support system as a Latine professor, maybe as the only one in your department, is critical. Departments under STEM or Business have seen to receive sufficient funding that has been able to be allocated towards providing mentorship opportunities, that may include tenure workshopping. The Foster School of Business at UW has partnered with other universities to encourage faculty members in the department to attend a conference that provides resources and space for discussion of obtaining tenure (Tenure Project, 2024). This program, although not directed to BIPOC professors, discusses issues that come up with tenure among BIPOC communities. The lack of clarity in who the program is for could create a barrier for BIPOC professors to benefit from it. These programs, while not offered year round, can display a supportive environment and basic acknowledgment of the disparities that exist in gaining tenure. There may be push back of not looking into changing the policies around tenure as it is not easily reversible, but that has allowed for extension of racist rhetoric to feed the selection process which pushes Latine and other BIPOC faculty away from secure work.

Faculty-Led Support

While representation has not been an active effort throughout the UW, faculty within their own department have found groups that center incoming BIPOC faculty. Most of the faculty-led groups witnessed in interviews were from professors in the Social Sciences departments, while STEM professors recounted stronger one-on-one support. In an interview, a professor stated,

“They put all the faculty of color that came with me in a cohort, and we’ve been able to support each other, provide resources for each other, so that has been really welcoming in that aspect. So, I know that’s not something that has been common for many faculty of color, but I’ve been able to find really good allies through that program.”

This set up eased the process of joining the faculty team as first-generation, and they received information and training that took into consideration her experiences as a Latine person. A faculty-led group made up of women of color professors called WIRED was mentioned as a community and support network between colleagues with sharing similar struggles within academia. In these setups, it is the labor and vigor of faculty members themselves that are building their interpersonal relationships in order to continue on in their profession.

Latine professors have felt responsible for creating a welcoming and culturally enriching environment within their classrooms. Service work, which can be building community extending beyond a classroom, invigorated connections between professors and students (Gonzalez et al.,

2013). Throughout our UW Latine faculty interviews, there was a consistent pattern of wanting to be a support for their Latine students who at times make up the minority in their classes. Low class makeup of Latine students has been noticed to be changing. A professor describes witnessing this when saying,

“I have noticed the larger number of Latine, young people coming into my classroom. When I started 20 years ago, everybody was white. Everybody was from the Jackson School. A large majority were men. And now I have like, I would say two thirds of my classes are people of color.”

Faculty can be a primary connection for students to a wider professional and supportive community that can be helpful when students feel lost in pursuing a certain career or feeling comfortable in a new space. Some of their efforts have been being more vulnerable about their day-to-day as well as expressing their identity to connect with students and make it more comfortable to reach out. An interview notes that while faculty can provide these spaces, there needs to be more institutional support in terms of funding, as well as providing these spaces where students can feel comfortable in the general UW community. A professor reminds us when stating, “higher education was not created for students of color you know, and the system that we are expecting to engage in always reminds us that we are imposters in this system. And that’s not something that is our responsibility to take away.” As a professor, she works diligently to actively reach out to students, but it has been overburdened with lacking DEI efforts at an institutional level. These efforts are critical to providing a space where Latine students can thrive and engage more easily with academia as a space that has not been built for them. This calls for institutional response to relieve this disparate equity work by truly enforcing representation and support systems that truly target the uniqueness and nuance that comes with Latine identity.

Impacts of a Lack of Representation

Mental Health Implications

Programs like OMAD or the ECC at UW have been able to cultivate community spaces for Latine students, but it is the only way students can connect with their community. Latine students have struggled to find their community outside the multicultural programs and organizations. When it comes to the majors they are in, the classes they take, or faculty, Latine students find it hard to find people that look like them and cultivate those connections. As a result of this lack of representation, it has led for Latine students to deal with various mental health implications throughout their journey in college. These include things like psychological distress due to the isolation and sense of insecurity they experience in this institution. One student shared, "The lack of Latine presence in my classes often makes me feel invisible. It's mentally exhausting to always feel like an outsider, and it seriously affects my mental health." As various spaces do not have enough representation, it also leads for Latine students to face more discrimination and microaggressions that also take a huge toll on their mental health. This all creates negative

experiences for Latine students as they have to endure feeling no sense of belonging, and low self-esteem while also continuing their academic journeys. Having to navigate an institution that feels unwelcoming contributes to feelings of isolation and unworthiness that Latine students have to face.

Imposter Syndrome

Imposter syndrome can be defined as feeling like a fraud among others in addition to having self-doubt and insecurity with one's self (Abdelaal, 2020). This condition impacts individuals' ability to fully succeed as they continuously feel like they do not belong or are not capable of doing certain things. It can also be characterized by certain features such as fear of failure, having a hard time accepting praise, and underestimating one's personal strengths (Doughty & Martin-Parchment, 2023). The correlation between minority students in college and imposter syndrome tends to be a common topic since they are most likely to experience imposter syndrome the most. Although various factors can trigger this condition, the lack of representation among historically marginalized groups of students tends to precipitate imposter syndrome among them most often.

Various Latine students at the University of Washington have expressed dealing with imposter syndrome due to the lack of representation outside of multicultural organizations and programs. This can be seen through the student population in different courses and within faculty. This has had an immense impact on their college experience due to their inability to feel seen and worthy while trying to achieve a higher education. As an example, a UW Latine student had expressed their experience with imposter syndrome on a conducted survey due to not seeing enough representation of themselves in their classes. They stated, "Academically, I feel underrepresented on campus. I feel like the number of students that I see in my classes that are Latino is very minimal, especially in my STEM courses, which leads to feelings of imposter syndrome." Additionally, another Latine student, explained how they had experienced a lot of culture shock when she first came to UW, and that she had to learn to adapt to a non-Latine environment as she also missed speaking Spanish. Not being able to feel seen in certain spaces, like in a classroom, is what generates the feelings of insecurity and no self of belonging that occur because of imposter syndrome. Students feel like they cannot express who they are fully, as they are unable to do things like speak one's native language as there are no other students within their own community to connect with.

As a result of not seeing enough representation in certain community spaces, like the classroom, it has created negative experiences that have enhanced the condition of imposter syndrome among Latine students. Most frequently, they tend to feel excluded from certain group projects or assignments, which enhances those feelings of no sense of belonging (Doughty & Martin-Parchment, 2023). It is also most likely for them to face things like discrimination and racism, which eventually becomes a threat to their self-esteem. Having to deal with things like

putting up with insensitive comments being made by other students also takes a huge toll on their mental health (Cokley, 2013). Especially as imposter syndrome interconnects with minority status stress which comes from unique racialized stressors (Cokley, 2013). These racialized stressors tend to happen when Latine students and other minority groups of students have experiences with discrimination and isolation in their campuses. Additionally, the more Latine students feel excluded from spaces on campus, it leads them to have a more difficult time establishing relationships with peers and access on-campus social support (Doughty & Martin-Parchment, 2023). Not having enough representation in certain spaces nor representation of Latine faculty makes it harder for Latine students to feel comfortable being themselves or find people they can rely on.

As imposter syndrome tends to impact Latine students continuously, it also leads to their academic performance being affected as a result of the toll these experiences take on them. Imposter syndrome has the ability to prevent these students from achieving their full potential, as they are also unable to internalize accomplishments (DaLuz, 2022). Another UW student had also expressed how lack of representation in their classes impacted them internally by saying, “In my stem classes, especially as I progress to the higher level courses, I feel like I see less and less of a Latine student body. This lack of representation has led me to feel imposter syndrome and lack of confidence.” This shows how the less these Latine students see of themselves throughout campus communities, the more they are exposed to these negative feelings like a lack of confidence. This enhances their experiences of dealing with low self-esteem, which may only impact their academic motivation and engagement (Doughty & Martin-Parchment, 2023).

Microaggressions

In predominantly white institutions (PWI's), the lack of representation in classrooms often results in a significant portion of the student body, particularly white individuals, lacking a firsthand understanding of the experiences of people of color. This knowledge gap can lead to the perpetuation of microaggressions, where seemingly harmless actions or comments from white peers or faculty members may make students of color feel marginalized or unwelcome (Nadal et al., 2014).

As a consequence, students of color may experience a heightened sense of isolation and alienation within the academic environment, exacerbating feelings of not belonging or being understood (Hernandez, 2023). Feelings of not being understood stem from the observation that individuals belonging to dominant groups may not interpret such comments as discriminatory (Tynes & Markoe, 2010). Justifications that white individuals use to explain racial discrimination directly contribute to downplaying the lived experiences of people of color, and they negatively impact their mental health.

In a research study exploring how students' reactions to pictures of a “racial theme” party on social media correlate to color-blind racial attitudes, findings revealed that European American

participants and people with higher levels of color-blind ideologies were more likely to belong to the “not bothered” reaction group (Tynes & Markoe, 2010). Microaggressions can happen in social settings, even online, and they contribute to undermining a student's sense of belonging; they leave a deep and lasting impression on the targeted individual, as if they were hurt twice (Harwood et al., 2024). First, by the microaggression they experienced and second, by the denial of the reality and harm they endured.

This emphasizes the significant emotional toll that comes with these experiences, which contributes to feelings of marginalization and exclusion. These experiences impact an individual's psychological well-being, potentially leading to anxiety, depression, and even feeling confused. The subtle and sometimes subconscious nature of racial microaggressions can create confusion for people of color, leading them to question whether they are overreacting or genuinely experiencing a form of racism that is less obvious (Harwood et al., 2024).

This phenomenon was highlighted in an interview with Latine identifying faculty, where they explained that microaggressions can be both academic and personal. They experienced instances where colleagues questioned their competence and expertise. Despite their credentials, including graduating from the top program for Latin American history in the United States and being mentored by leading scholars in the field, they still frequently faced doubts about their ability to teach beyond their specialization (Faculty interview).

Intersectionality plays a significant role in understanding how various aspects of a person's identity—such as race, gender, and ethnicity—intersect and influence their experiences. The faculty member mentioned their intersecting identities and how they played a role in intensifying the effects of the microaggressions they faced, quoting that when they were younger, male students often disrupted their classes, undermining their authority by interrupting, arriving late, not completing assignments, and challenging their perspectives by accusing them of having a political agenda, making them more complex and damaging.

The impact of negative experiences extends beyond academic spaces, affecting students' and faculty's overall mental health and well-being. The stress and pressure of navigating an unwelcoming environment can become overwhelming, leading some students to contemplate dropping out or, in extreme cases, even harming themselves (Gwayi-Chore et al., 2021).

Isolation and Alienation

The unwelcoming environment that is a PWI for students of color comes from several factors. The phenomenon known as “white blindness,” where individuals, often unconsciously, prioritize white perspectives and experiences while disregarding those of people of color (POC), impacts the well-being of students (Lewis et al., 2000). This phenomenon contributes to feelings of alienation for students of color.

When their voices are ignored, it reinforces the message that their perspectives are less important or unworthy of consideration. This can lead to feelings of frustration, anger, and further isolation from academic spaces. These feelings of anger have lasting effects on students' well-being, making them feel like they do not belong and making imposter syndrome more apparent.

A lack of representation on campus can lead to feelings of isolation and alienation in minority students (Hussain & James, 2021). Examining the feelings of isolation and alienation from other students is important for reasons beyond feeling a sense of belonging with other students on campus.

When examining the reasons that led to students dropping out of school, the reasons differed from white students to students of color. Studies found that academic factors primarily influenced thoughts of dropping out among white students, while students of color were often influenced by feelings of sociocultural alienation, such as lack of support and socioemotional dissatisfaction, in addition to academic factors (Loo & Rolison, 1986).

Studies have shown that issues associated with a lack of representation, such as isolation and alienation, at the institutional level can be mitigated through positive interactions with peers of diverse cultural backgrounds. Through engagement with other students of similar backgrounds, students will gain a better sense of belonging, which will encourage them to initiate social interactions and form better relationships on campus (Hussain & James, 2021).

Inadequate Resources

The UW has made efforts to build more infrastructure to advance the representation of all ethnicities and backgrounds. Many individuals on campus have pointed out the limitations of existing resources. A lack of intentionality, funding, and representation of decision-makers has resulted in inadequate resources, not only for latines on campus but also for other historically minoritized students.

The Samuel E. Kelly Cultural Center (ECC) opened its doors in the fall of 1972. It was meant to be a temporary structure on the West campus, with plans to move later to the Central campus. After 50 years of being open, the ECC remains in the same location as a “home away from home” for students of color. The ECC has an ongoing commitment that includes cultivating and expanding an inclusive environment at UW to support students and foster academic success. Housing over 160 affiliated registered student organizations, the ECC takes pride in being the largest stand-alone multicultural center on a college campus in the nation. While these accomplishments are a source of pride for UW, concerns remain about the ECC and representation on campus following in-depth interviews and surveys with latine students and staff. When asked in an interview if they believed there was an adequate amount of representation of latine culture and identity in community spaces at the UW, a faculty member said no, later stating,

“If I want to see a community of Latinx students, um, I have to go to the ECC. And there's something about; there is something problematic about the fact that I have to get off campus to be able to find a community and a gathering of Latine students.”

The ECC is within walking distance from UW's Red Square, which has been the setting for many community gatherings ranging from the RSO fair and the late-night carnival during Dawg Daze to settings of protests going back as early as the 1930s. Nonetheless, it is two blocks from the main campus, and if one doesn't live on West Campus or finds oneself in buildings that are further away, one may never come across the building. With less direct on-campus visibility, it has been up to students and faculty to create and sustain community spaces on campus, specifically in the ECC. Through a survey, many responded positively when asked if students felt represented on campus, stating other student-led efforts were creating safe spaces. However, they also said they felt a lack of support from the institution; some of the responses include:

“It's mostly because it's Latine Students who are leading in the creation of programming, rallies, and advocacy projects with RSOs. It just doesn't feel like we have that many people on our back.”

“I will say that... Latine-based organizations have done a fantastic job in creating a community and providing resources for Latine students, but I feel very underrepresented in the academic and overall campus scene at UW.”

Similarly, when interviewing faculty, one faculty member responded that existing spaces are due to their own efforts to create those spaces. They stated, “...whatever spaces are there for me, I have created them.”

Many RSOs struggled to recover from the pandemic, and when interviewing a student, we found that a lack of funds perpetuated the difficulties of returning to a gutted community. The student stated that the ECC was able to give some support through its outlined resources on its website, but most of the funding to get the RSO running again was through the RSO officers' personal money and efforts.

“We use a lot of our own money to try to get that Rso going and get some, you know, get like little incentives like food and stuff to have people to come. ... So sometimes for LSU, too, we had to argue a lot for our spaces. Because we have such an influx of students this coming year. We just didn't have the resources for it.”

RSOs are not the only place where insufficient funds for starting or maintaining programs exist. As a result, students, faculty, and staff suffer from a lack of access to programs that would elevate their experience here at the University of Washington. When asking a faculty member if there was any support they would like to feel from the university, one faculty member mentioned that they would like to start a program here at the university, but at times, when trying to start

initiatives, people who wanted those programs needed to come up with the funds instead of there being some sort of institutional support from the beginning. Both faculty and students in interviews have shared that the university should be at the forefront of creating and supporting spaces for historically underrepresented and marginalized individuals.

“... It doesn't have to be that RSOs or students have to make these RSOs for an identity to get the resources they need right like the university should be doing it already right off the bat. ...Although there are some resources for the latine identity, that's because the students wanted that, not the university. The university has to do better on that.”

“[creating an initiative for Latines in social sciences] Um, but the university has to support that. And money is one way, but even physical spaces are another, like meeting spaces and like, office spaces, and other types of resources. And I think the university absolutely has to support those things because it's really hard to do it without their support.”

The UW has well-established campus resources for its students of color. In a survey asking students if they used any support services on campus, many cited OMAD and its different resources, such as the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) and the Instructional Center (IC). Students use those spaces as their first point of contact when addressing any situations that may arise for students. However, some students have also said they sometimes feel disconnected from the latine perspective in those spaces and/or are unaware of how to get involved, hindering them from using said resources. Some student-led initiatives have also asked for improvements, specifically concerning Latine students on campus. The Latine Student Union released its *Demandas* in the spring of 2023, where they requested changes regarding accessibility, cultural competency, more funding, and other Latine-focused issues. Investigating the implementation of LSU's *Demandas* and addressing existing gaps within the current resources offered at UW would improve the existing support systems for latine individuals and other minority students on campus (LSU *Demandas*, 2023).

VI. IMPLICATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN WA STATE

Importance of Representation in Higher Education

The University of Washington has always strived for diversity and inclusion. But when you take into account Latine faculty and students, the reality is that they lack representation within the institution. In the Latine student survey conducted, students showcased a variety of feelings towards UW and the way they manage representation. They expressed having feelings of invisibility and isolation within the predominantly non-Latine educational environments, which exacerbated imposter syndrome and hindered their sense of belonging. Through interviews conducted among students and faculty it was revealed that there is a common sentiment of underrepresentation in classrooms and campus spaces, highlighting the need for increased

visibility and support. As previously stated, representation will always be an important aspect of education and being able to have those spaces where students and faculty feel comfortable is crucial for creating a more inclusive and welcoming environment for everyone. As we navigate the complexities of our rapidly changing society, it becomes imperative for universities to prioritize efforts aimed at increasing representation and implementing robust support systems in order to ensure the success of all students, faculty, and staff. Hence why funding should be allocated towards these necessary areas where representation is needed. A prime example of showcasing this need is when LSU created demands towards the University of Washington. Their demands were composed of 10 principles, all of which highlighted the needs of Latine students. In their caption on their instagram post where they shared these demands, they said:

“For far too long, the unique experiences and needs of the Latine student community at the University of Washington have been inadequately prioritized and disregarded. Instead of valuing our identity as an integral part of the university's fabric, it has been reduced to a mere checkbox for diversity, devoid of the equity and visibility we deserve on campus. We have tirelessly worked to address these disparities by holding meetings with fellow Latine students, collaborating with Latine RSOs, and conducting extensive research to pave the way for meaningful change. We have invested countless hours and efforts into formulating demands that exemplify the pressing issues faced by the Latine identity within our university community. These demands serve as a powerful representation of our collective experiences and aspirations, urging the University of Washington to acknowledge and rectify the systemic neglect we have endured. We call for substantive changes that foster inclusivity, raise awareness, and provide equal opportunities for all students, regardless of their cultural background. It is now the responsibility of the university to take action and respond to the voices of the LSU and the broader Latine student community. We have diligently laid the groundwork, highlighting the urgent need for transformation. By wholeheartedly embracing and upholding these demands, the University of Washington can demonstrate its unwavering commitment to social justice, inclusivity, and a campus environment that celebrates the richness of our diverse student body. This is a pivotal moment for the university to take a principled stand, aligning its values with actions, and working collaboratively with the LSU to create an inclusive and empowering campus for all.”

Additionally, this raises the question of who is actually responsible for creating these welcoming environments. While Latine student-led organizations play a crucial role in providing support and fostering community, they often operate outside of the institution's already limited resources and institutional recognition. This places a disproportionate burden on Latine students and faculty to create and maintain these inclusive spaces, which often leads to feelings of frustration and exhaustion. A student in one of these organizations mentioned:

“...Honestly, it's been more negative these past couple of years. And I think it's because after Covid, the decline in resources was extremely drastic and a lot of resources for the Latine community just stopped. For example, LSU completely stopped and that's why we tried our hardest to bring it back. So we could have that safe space for Latines...there's no institutionalized resources for Latines. It's mostly just RSOs and most of it is just student work, which is different because it's actually the students having to raise money from other students to help create these safe spaces, not the university...They don't make it their responsibility to help the students that they admit here. It's really disappointing...”

Moreover, the lack of institutional support hinders the effectiveness of these organizations in addressing the diverse needs of the Latine community. Recognizing the importance of these sustainable support systems is what fosters success and belonging, which is why it's important to implement strategies into institutions like UW and across Washington State higher education institutions in order to improve success.

Although UW has existing initiatives like the ECC, OMA&D, and other various Latine RSO's and organizations, their physical separation and limited funding hinders effectiveness for further growth. In the interviews we conducted, a student in one of these organizations mentioned:

“Everything is money. If you don't have the money you're kind of screwed...cause you need the money for your RSO. To get it going. You need incentives to have people come over. You need to start networking with other people, which is so difficult because the Latine identity is already so sparse in the university. It's not easy. You can't easily find another Latine person here.”

Outside of these spaces, there is a visible disparity that the institution doesn't showcase. Increased funding could provide the much-needed resources that students and faculty need. But to foster these diverse and inclusive spaces, universities must address these gaps between their ideals and actual reality. Systems like targeted outreach programs, scholarships, mentorship initiatives, and cultural centers can attract and support underrepresented students. While inclusive hiring practices and diversity training for staff can build a well-rounded faculty, integrating diversity into the curriculum fosters cultural competency across the entire campus community. These efforts create a welcoming environment that enriches the educational experience for everyone.

With that being said, Latine faculty have been shown to take action, a professor mentioned how UW has been “offering engaging curriculum for heritage Spanish speakers”, but despite this the promotion of increasing these services is still lacking. A professor mentioned:

“...what I still don't see the university doing, is that they're not doing a good job in retention. I still think that there is more work that needs to be done to support our students. Um, I see that many of my [students] Latine kids arrive and they're really lost in

this huge, enormous campus and they need more guidance, and I think that that guidance is not strong enough here. We need more resources for students.”

Additionally, the professor mentioned that the university needs to have retention programs, interventions, and resources. But they also need to recognize and acknowledge this in order to move forward.

“But in general, we shall have a Latine study center at this university that is able to actually say, because we do have one in public health. But that's what they do, public health only. It's public health Latine public health. That's it. That's what they do. I have never been there and I've been there for 20 years, you know, but so we, we, we need that as a place where we can bring, uh, An intellectual community that engages undergraduate students, graduate students, and that is interdisciplinary, you know, there's so much work that is done in Latin America and among in the United States, you know, Latinos in the U.S. So that can be, you know, that that needs more. More support and that needs to be recognized that needs to be visible too, you know. So, those are some of the things that I wish we had.”

A student who agreed but added said:

“...offering a variety of classes that aren't just limited to certain types of countries and certain kinds of Hispanics. Cause like yes we're all Hispanic, but also..diving deeper into those roots...I think just offering more opportunities for people of color to come together and also advertising it more than just like oh you have to know someone to find out about... I think just more classes definitely, like more opportunities and programs for not just people who are Hispanic to get involved but other people to get involved so they're aware of what our [Latine] culture is.”

Therefore there needs to be a dedicated Latine social science pipeline that could improve access and success rates. Our research has shown that promoting Latine faculty achievements and showcasing Latine events helps strengthen the Latine identity on campus, and being able to allocate targeted financial aid for Latine students helps establish a designated physical space for community building, demonstrating a commitment to their success. Being able to develop a program that helps support students especially in social sciences, fosters a thriving Latine academic community. This is substantially important for those in the social science departments because they aren't recognized or supported as much as those in STEM related fields. Professors and students alike have noticed the differences in support from other departments and how it's unfair to those who aren't in those fields, because no matter what, education and representation go hand in hand, as they are both important matters to address.

A student in our survey mentioned how they feel mostly underrepresented in their sciences classes, “Just looking around the room there seems to be a lack of Latine students in these types

of classes. There already is a small population of Latine students at UW, but at least in some of my other classes there seems to be a bit more representation.”

Another student mentioned how the university needs to invest into recruiting people, because even though, “The college access program is like amazing...but we have to focus on like, well, then what do we do when people are already here? And how do we build a community and a space?”

By acknowledging the disparity in representation and actively working towards increasing it, UW can cultivate a more inclusive and supportive community. As mentioned earlier, this can positively impact Latine communities' mental health and well-being. It is imperative to consider the broader institutional framework. This includes promoting diversity in administrative leadership, involving Latine voices in decision-making processes, and prioritizing funding for initiatives that support Latine representation and inclusion. Further research with a larger sample size and exploration towards the best practices at other universities can provide more valuable insights on how to make our institution a better place for both students and faculty.

The tireless efforts of our Latine community-students and faculty- deserve to be recognized and supported. Only then can UW fulfill its promise of diversity, equity, belonging, and inclusion for all.

Strategies to Bridge Gaps in Representation and Support

The representation of Latine identities in higher education, particularly within faculty and administrative roles, is not merely a statistical target but a critical factor influencing student well-being and academic success. The underrepresentation of Hispanic or Latine faculty at the University of Washington, as reflected in their low percentage, has tangible effects on Latine students' mental health and academic experiences. The presence of faculty who share or understand their cultural background can significantly mitigate feelings of isolation and imposter syndrome among Latine students. Moreover, adequate representation fosters an inclusive academic environment where all students feel seen, respected, and valued.

Enhanced Recruitment and Retention Programs

To address the underrepresentation of Latine faculty and staff, universities must implement targeted recruitment strategies. This involves proactive outreach to Latine scholars and professionals and creating pathways for their career advancement within the institution. Retention programs are equally important and should include mentorship opportunities, professional development workshops, and resources tailored to the unique challenges faced by minority faculty. These measures not only attract Latine talent but also ensure their long-term success and integration within the academic community.

Intentional Efforts to Navigate Legal Challenges

Despite legal constraints such as I-200, which prohibits affirmative action in public institutions, universities can still promote diversity through innovative DEI language and strategies. This includes creating programs, events, scholarships, and support systems that cater to all students while emphasizing the benefits of a diverse and inclusive environment. For example, scholarships can be based on socio-economic status or first-generation college status, which indirectly benefits students of color. Additionally, universities can sponsor cultural events and workshops that highlight diverse perspectives, fostering a sense of belonging and community among Latine students.

Strengthening Community and Support Systems

Latine students often find community and support through identity oriented student organizations (RSO's). Universities should ensure these organizations receive adequate funding and institutional support to thrive. These RSOs play a crucial role in providing a sense of belonging and cultural affirmation. Furthermore, creating and supporting BIPOC networks can enhance the overall campus climate. These networks should facilitate mentorship, peer support, and professional development opportunities tailored to the specific needs of Latine students and staff.

Educational and Curricular Innovations

Incorporating Latine studies and perspectives into the curriculum is essential for fostering an inclusive academic environment. Universities should expand course offerings that explore Latine histories, cultures, and contributions, ensuring that these courses are taught by faculty who can authentically represent these perspectives. Additionally, all faculty should receive training on integrating DEI principles into their teaching practices. This approach not only enriches the educational experience for all students but also validates the experiences of Latine students.

Support for Latine Scholars and Research

Encouraging and funding research that addresses issues relevant to the Latine community is vital. Universities should create grants, fellowships, and research opportunities specifically for Latine scholars. Highlighting and promoting the achievements of Latine researchers can elevate their visibility within the academic community and beyond. This support fosters a robust academic network that benefits both the scholars and the institution.

By implementing these strategies, the University of Washington and other higher education institutions in Washington State can significantly improve their support for Latine students and faculty, ultimately leading to a more inclusive and equitable educational environment.

VII. CONCLUSION

This research paper aimed to explore the challenges and promises of support and community for Latine students at the University of Washington. Through in-depth interviews and surveys with Latine students and faculty, this study highlighted the significant impact of racial representation on student well-being, academic success, and sense of belonging.

Key Findings

Lack of Representation

Latine students at UW often feel underrepresented in their academic and social environments. This lack of representation is evident in the composition of the faculty, the student body, and community spaces. Despite efforts by UW to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion, Latine students still struggle to see themselves reflected in the institution.

Mental Health Implications

The lack of Latine representation contributes to various mental health challenges, including feelings of isolation, imposter syndrome, and psychological distress. These issues are exacerbated by microaggressions and the broader phenomenon of "white blindness," where white perspectives are prioritized while those of people of color are marginalized.

Student and Faculty Experiences

Latine students and faculty have expressed that their experiences at UW are often marred by a sense of invisibility and a lack of institutional support. Faculty members face additional challenges, such as difficulties in achieving tenure and navigating a predominantly white academic environment. Despite these challenges, both students and faculty have made significant efforts to create supportive communities and advocate for increased representation and resources.

Importance of Community Spaces

The Ethnic Cultural Center (ECC) and student-led Registered Student Organizations (RSOs) play a crucial role in providing Latine students with a sense of community and belonging. However, these spaces are often physically separated from the main campus, limiting their accessibility and visibility. Additionally, the burden of creating and maintaining these spaces falls disproportionately on students and faculty of color, highlighting the need for greater institutional support.

Need for Institutional Action

The study emphasizes the importance of institutional commitment to increasing Latine representation and support. This includes targeted recruitment and retention programs for Latine faculty, improved funding for RSOs and cultural centers, and the integration of Latine

perspectives into the curriculum. Moreover, universities must address the broader systemic issues that contribute to the underrepresentation and marginalization of Latine students and faculty.

Implications for Higher Education

The findings of this study have significant implications for higher education institutions in Washington State and beyond. To create a more inclusive and supportive environment for Latine students and faculty, universities must prioritize efforts to increase representation, provide robust support systems, and foster a sense of belonging for all students.

Enhanced Recruitment and Retention Programs

Universities should implement targeted recruitment strategies to attract Latine scholars and professionals and create pathways for their career advancement. Retention programs should include mentorship opportunities, professional development workshops, and resources tailored to the unique challenges faced by minority faculty.

Strengthening Community and Support Systems

Adequate funding and institutional support for identity-oriented student organizations and cultural centers are essential. Creating and supporting BIPOC networks can enhance the overall campus climate and provide Latine students and staff with mentorship, peer support, and professional development opportunities.

Educational and Curricular Innovations

Incorporating Latine studies and perspectives into the curriculum is crucial for fostering an inclusive academic environment. Universities should expand course offerings that explore Latine histories, cultures, and contributions, and ensure these courses are taught by faculty who can authentically represent these perspectives.

Support for Latine Scholars and Research

Encouraging and funding research that addresses issues relevant to the Latine community is vital. Universities should create grants, fellowships, and research opportunities specifically for Latine scholars, and highlight and promote the achievements of Latine researchers.

By implementing these strategies, the University of Washington and other higher education institutions in Washington State can significantly improve their support for Latine students and faculty, ultimately leading to a more inclusive and equitable educational environment. The tireless efforts of the Latine community—students and faculty alike—deserve to be recognized and supported. Only then can UW fulfill its promise of diversity, equity, belonging, and inclusion for all.

VIII. REFERENCES

- Abdelaal, G. (2020). Coping with imposter syndrome in academia and research. *The Biochemist*, 42(3), 62-64.
<https://portlandpress.com/biochemist/article/42/3/62/225249/Coping-with-imposter-syndrome-in-academia-and>
- Beyer, C., et al. UW Undergraduate Retention and Graduation Study, University of Washington Office of Educational Assessment, June 2014,
depts.washington.edu/assessmt/pdfs/reports/OEARReport1401.pdf.
- Cokley, K., McClain, S., Enciso, A., & Martinez, M. (2013). An examination of the impact of minority status stress and impostor feelings on the mental health of diverse ethnic minority college students. *Journal of multicultural counseling and development*, 41(2), 82-95. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/j.2161-1912.2013.00029.x>
- DaLuz, F. (2022). Finding “your” people: The impact of mentoring relationships in overcoming barriers to academic achievement in underrepresented student populations. *Studies in Technology Enhanced Learning*, 2(3).
<https://stel.pubpub.org/pub/02-03-daluz-2022/release/1>
- Doughty, K. N., & Martin-Parchment, M. (2023). Imposter phenomenon and experiences of discrimination among students at a predominantly White institution. *Journal of American College Health*, 1-5.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07448481.2023.2198021>
- González, Juan Carlos; Vaquera, Gloria S.; Bejarano, Cynthia; and Portillos, Eduardo L., "Un Camino Solitario! / A Lonely Road!: Chicana/o Faculty Storytelling and Counterstorytelling in Academia" (2013). *Sociology*. 30.
<https://collected.jcu.edu/soc-facpub/30>
- Gwayi-Chore, M.-C., Del Villar, E. L., Fraire, L. C., Waters, C., Andrasik, M. P., Pfeiffer, J., Slyker, J., Mello, S. P., Barnabas, R., Moise, E., & Heffron, R. (2021). “Being a Person of Color in This Institution Is Exhausting”: Defining and Optimizing the Learning Climate to Support Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at the University of Washington School of Public Health. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 9.
<https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/public-health/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2021.642477>
- Hussain, M., & Jones, J. M. (2021). Discrimination, diversity, and sense of belonging: Experiences of students of color. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 14(1), 63.
<https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2019-22454-001>

- Hernández, R. D. (Ed.). (2023). *Diverse Experiences of Latinas in Higher Education: Chingonas on their Own Terms*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003387886>
- Lewis, A. E., Chesler, M., & Forman, T. A. (2000). The Impact of “Colorblind” Ideologies on Students of Color: Intergroup Relations at a Predominantly White University. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 69(1/2), 74–91. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2696266>
- Loo, C. M., & Rolison, G. (1986). Alienation of ethnic minority students at a predominantly White university. *The journal of higher education*, 57(1), 58-77. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/00221546.1986.11778749?casa_token=rh3b-zIRs2sAAAAA:q3zZ9wccIIEcs_XVoTVGPF0Q8eoU9VnVH2zzJZtH2vzfigwu-g8bHeMgJUeHZB7g6vsA_mTJPvm
- LSU. (2023). Latine Student Union Demandas. Instagram. @uwlsu. Retrieved May 26, 2024, from https://www.instagram.com/p/CsVoOgBu2nA/?img_index=1-10
- Nadal, K. L., Wong, Y., Griffin, K. E., Davidoff, K., & Sriken, J. (2014). The Adverse Impact of Racial Microaggressions on College Students’ Self-Esteem. *Journal of College Student Development*, 55(5), 461–474.
- Stacy A. Harwood, Margaret Browne Huntt, Ruby Mendenhall, & Jioni A. Lewis. (2024). *Racial Microaggressions in the Residence Halls: Experiences of Students of Color at a Predominantly White University*. Journal of Diversity in Higher Education.
- The Tenure Project*. (2024). Foster School of Business University of Washington. <https://foster.uw.edu/faculty-research/tenure-project/>
- Tynes, B., & Markoe, S. (2010). The Role of Color-Blind Racial Attitudes in Reactions to Racial Discrimination on Social Network Sites. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 3, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0018683>