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1

Introduction

AS OTAVIO¹ waited in line for his next ride at Disneyland, his pocket buzzed loudly enough to snap him out of his daydream. He pulled his phone out, quickly wishing that the buzzing announced an email from one of the graduate school applications he had submitted weeks prior. He frowned when he saw that it was, in fact, only a text message. Seconds later, Otavio found himself openly weeping at the news he had just read. Kryzia, one of his cohort members, had texted to say she had just received an email inviting her to interview for admission to one of her top doctoral programs. Standing among strangers, busily eating churros, and kids impatiently waiting for their next ride, Otavio found himself overwhelmed, not because he still had no news for himself, but because of his sincere delight at Kryzia's update.

This moment captures something essential about the pathway to graduate school that most narratives neglect. While the stories of academic success frequently celebrate individuals' grit and achievements, the reality for many students is rooted in collective effort. Successful transitions through the postsecondary academic pipeline to join the university professoriate emerge

1. All names throughout are pseudonyms.

not from isolated brilliance but from networks of mutual support, shared vulnerability, and communal resilience.

Otavio's tears at Disneyland were about more than Kryzia's achievement. They were a cathartic release after months spent alongside Kryzia and eight other students at their public university in California, navigating the labyrinthine process of graduate school applications in the humanities and social sciences. Accompanied by a trove of faculty mentors and stewarded by a committed faculty coordinator for the HSI Pathways program, these students forged the essential emotional support infrastructure needed to persist. In the words of one cohort member, Uma, their work together offered them the space needed to "unload and commiserate" about what had been (up until then) the most academically demanding months of their postsecondary lives.

Otavio, Kryzia, and Uma are emblematic of the power of communal support in academic environments. Otavio, whose parents fled political violence in Central America, found through his HSI Pathways cohort a vocabulary to describe the patterns of oppression that his family had not named for him. Kryzia, whose family history had been erased from the textbooks of her private school education, found a space to begin exploring answers to her intellectual curiosity about her Latin American and Spanish heritage. Uma, a single mother who had dropped out of college years earlier, found a cohort where she learned how vulnerability could be a source of strength when shared with others navigating similar challenges.

Over the months together, their support extended beyond academic encouragement. When Kryzia was finalizing the number of graduate programs to which she would apply, her cohort helped her think through the implications of her decision-making. When Uma parented alongside her intensive

studies, her peers offered support rather than judgment. When Otavio fought to explain the significance of his interdisciplinary research interests to his family, his cohort became the audience that affirmed his capacity to pursue his intellectual passions while navigating difficult familial expectations.

Their intertwined stories through their graduate application process reveal the power and the vital need for collective support. Alongside their faculty mentors and cohort members, they tackled the overwhelming task of finding programs where they could pursue their emergent research interests.

The intensity of the graduate application season tested their bonds while strengthening them. As deadlines approached and pressures mounted, the tendency to focus only on themselves was gently tempered by the cohort's efforts to support one another. When Uma worried that admissions committee members might deem her experimental research interests too risky, her faculty mentors and cohort peers encouraged her to trust her intellectual instincts rather than play it safe.

By spring, their trajectories merged into a collective success story. Three Latine students who had started the year uncertain about their graduate school prospects were all bound to begin doctoral programs across the country. Their admission to multiple graduate programs was not the only marker of their success. They also showed that it was possible to participate in a tailored program that underscored the lasting impact of peer mutual support as they pursued their graduate school aspirations.

In the summer before their last undergraduate academic year, they met to participate in an intensive residential seminar for all ten cohort members. In their summer program, they focused on developing the skills they would need to transition to graduate school effectively, from reading with purposeful

efficiency to cultivating a written voice with scholarly authority. Importantly, their experiences in HSI Pathways underscored that their academic success did not require them to relinquish their communities or to compete with others from similar backgrounds. Instead, they explored how collective knowledge building and mutual accountability could create pathways that individual effort alone would rarely achieve.

This book emerges from these students' stories and the voices of nearly one hundred other undergraduates at three universities across the United States. We focus on how students can cultivate networks of care, knowledge, resource sharing, and creative support, as well as on a collection of university administrators and faculty. Like Otavio, Kryzia, and Uma, the students featured in this book did not succeed despite their identities and life experiences, or in isolation from their communities of origin. They succeeded because they deliberately built communities of support.

All too often, stories about students of color in academia follow a well-trodden script: An individual overcomes obstacles through talent, determination, and unrelenting hard work. While these three attributes certainly matter, this framing obscures how structural inequities shape educational experiences and how collective action can transform academia writ large. By centering on individual achievement, we inadvertently suggest that success is primarily about personal characteristics rather than about striving to improve overall conditions.

The stories in this book offer a different model. They help us make the case that sharing resources, mutual accountability, and collaborative problem-solving can create pathways that benefit academia rather than just exceptional individuals. We focus on how students' and faculty mentors' willingness to be

vulnerable with each other on a range of issues (e.g., impostor syndrome, financial stress, family dynamics) can instill a sense of safety nets that individualism alone cannot provide. As we narrate how these students prepared to enter graduate education, we seek to illustrate how their stories can help us invite institutions to create more inclusive spaces to ensure the vitality and future of academia.

This book advances three core arguments. First, success along the pathway to graduate school is fundamentally about relationships. Students persist and thrive not simply because of individual talent or determination, but because they are embedded in networks of peers, mentors, and institutional actors who actively support their progress. Second, community is not merely a feeling or sense of belonging; it is substantial and consequential. Community takes shape through structured cohorts, paid research opportunities, guaranteed mentoring, shared intellectual labor, and access to concrete resources that alter students' educational trajectories. Third, these supports are more than acts of benevolence; they reflect institutional responsibility. Institutions that recruit students into academic pathways have an obligation to provide the conditions necessary for their success.

Although students' experiences in HSI Pathways are the foundation for this book, the program itself is not the subject of our analysis. Rather, HSI Pathways is a research setting that enables us to examine, in sustained and systematic ways, how relationships, collective structures, and institutional commitments shape students' pathways to graduate school. The lessons we draw are not program-specific; they illuminate broader questions about what institutions owe students who aspire to academic careers.

Purpose of the Book

The journey to graduate school can be complex and daunting. Latine students often navigate structures not designed with their voices in mind. This book seeks to change the narrative. By focusing on the experiences and insights of students in the humanities and social sciences, most of whom are Latine, we offer grounded insights and strategies drawn from students' academic experiences and pathways to success in graduate school, while addressing systemic barriers.

More than just to guide, we seek, with this work, to transform graduate education itself. We propose actionable recommendations for faculty and administration, rooted in the experiences and realities of Latine students, to foster inclusive and supportive environments that genuinely honor their contributions. The voices within the pages of our book serve as both a testament to resilience and a call to action, demanding that we all rethink how graduate education can and should serve all students.

Our book does not offer a formula for success. It offers evidence-informed insights into the conditions that make success more likely when institutions take responsibility for students' academic futures.

The State of the PhD

As faculty at research-intensive institutions, we write from positions of relative security within an academic system that increasingly withholds stability from those it purports to train. We hold tenured appointments, have access to institutional resources, and benefit from professional networks that buffer us from many of the risks facing early career scholars and

graduate students. These positions shape what we see and what we may take for granted. At the same time, our proximity to students navigating these pathways and our long-term research on faculty pipelines and equity compel us to confront the ethical tensions of encouraging academic aspirations in a profession under immense strain.

Significant disparities across race, gender, and academic discipline mark the state of the PhD in the United States. In recent years, there has been a steady increase in the number of doctoral degrees awarded annually, with over 57,862 PhDs conferred in 2023 alone, according to the Survey of Earned Doctorates by the National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES, 2023a). While this growth reflects an expansion in the pursuit of advanced research and academic credentials, when we look closer, we see persistent inequities, particularly along the lines of race and gender.

Gender dynamics in PhD attainment have shifted in recent decades. Women now earn nearly half of all doctoral degrees, accounting for 47.5 percent of PhD recipients in 2023 (NCSES, 2024). Disparities, however, persist across fields of study. For example, women are underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) disciplines, earning just 33.8 percent of doctoral degrees in the physical sciences (WIA Report, 2024). Conversely, women are overrepresented in disciplines such as education and health sciences, where they make up the majority of PhD recipients (NCSES, 2023b). Although women have been well represented historically in the humanities, disparities persist in specific disciplines. For example, men continue to dominate philosophy, whereas women are more prevalent in literature and art history. This gender imbalance within specific disciplines exemplifies the broader challenges of representation across academia.

Racial disparities are even more pronounced. While white students still make up the largest demographic earning PhDs—accounting for roughly 55 percent of all degree recipients in 2023—students from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups continue to fall behind significantly. Black and Latine students, for example, earn just 7.4 percent and 10.4 percent of doctoral degrees, despite making up 13 percent and 19 percent of the US population (NCSES, 2023c). Native American and other Indigenous students are even more underrepresented, accounting for 0.4 percent of PhD recipients. This gap is not just about recruitment but also retention, as students of color face systemic barriers, including inadequate financial support, cultural isolation, and a lack of mentoring, all of which contribute to lower completion rates (Posselt, 2018a).

The disparities are especially stark in STEM fields; while Asian students are overrepresented in specific STEM disciplines, Black, Latine, Native American, and other Indigenous students remain highly underrepresented. In engineering, for example, Black students earned just 3 percent of PhDs in 2023, and Latine students made up only 9 percent of degree recipients in the physical sciences (NCSES, 2023c). These gaps highlight the ongoing challenges of achieving equity in fields critical to technological advancement and economic competitiveness.

Racial and ethnic disparities are also evident in the humanities. Black, Latine, Native American, and other Indigenous scholars are similarly underrepresented, even though the racial composition of the humanities is more diverse than the STEM fields. For example, Black students earned around 6 percent of PhDs in the humanities in 2023, an improvement over previous decades but still far from reflecting their social representation (NCSES, 2024). Latine scholars earned roughly 10 percent of

humanities PhDs, while Native American and other Indigenous scholars represent less than 1 percent. These racial and ethnic gaps have profound implications, particularly given the humanities' role in shaping cultural narratives, democracy, academic discourse, and the representation of diverse histories.

Overall, the state of the PhD reflects both progress and persistent challenges. While gender parity is closer than ever in some disciplines, the underrepresentation of women and students of color in STEM disciplines remains a critical issue. Addressing these disparities requires systemic changes, including improved access to funding, mentoring programs that cater to underrepresented groups, and efforts to dismantle the structural barriers that continue to hinder diversity in doctoral education.

The PhD Marketplace for the Humanities and Social Sciences

One of the most significant challenges facing the arts and humanities PhD pathway is the state of the academic job market. As universities increasingly prioritize STEM programs, funding cuts and the reduction of tenure-track positions in the humanities have left many new PhD students struggling to find stable employment. The precariousness of academic employment in the humanities has led to a growing cohort of adjunct faculty, postdoctoral fellows, and scholars pursuing careers outside academia (Donoghue, 2018).

Furthermore, funding disparities present an additional barrier for PhD students in the humanities. Unlike STEM fields, where external research grants and institutional support have been more readily available until the Trump administration's efforts to dismantle science, students in the arts and humanities often face limited financial resources to support their studies

(Newfield, 2025). This lack of funding disproportionately affects students from underrepresented racial and ethnic backgrounds, who are less likely to have access to personal or familial financial support. The lack of robust funding structures contributes to longer time-to-degree rates in the humanities, with a median of 7 years to complete from the start of their graduate programs, compared to a median of 5.7 years in science and engineering (NCSES, 2023d).

Despite these challenges, arts and humanities PhD programs remain essential for cultivating critical thinking, cultural awareness, and historical understanding. As the academic landscape evolves, there are growing calls for reform in how PhD education in the humanities is structured, emphasizing the creation of more interdisciplinary opportunities, the expansion of career paths beyond academia, and the inclusion of diverse contributions from underrepresented groups in doctoral programs. Strengthening these areas will ensure the continued relevance and sustainability of the humanities in academia and broader society.

But these realities raise difficult, unavoidable questions. What does it mean to encourage students into doctoral pathways when tenure-track positions are scarce and academic labor is increasingly precarious? How should faculty and institutions balance honesty about risk with commitments to intellectual growth and representation? These questions do not negate the value of a doctoral education, but they do demand greater transparency and institutional accountability.

The State of the Faculty

Despite increased attention to diversity and inclusion in prior decades, faculty composition in US higher education remains deeply unequal across race, gender, and academic disciplines

(Gasman, 2022). Further, current federal efforts under Donald J. Trump have regressed these gains. Improvements were made in some areas, particularly regarding gender representation and targeted hiring initiatives, but significant disparities persist. These disparities affect not only the academic workforce but also students' educational experiences, the intellectual diversity of institutions, and the broader goals of equity and higher education.

Racial diversity among faculty has seen minimal progress over the years, with faculty of color still significantly underrepresented, particularly in tenured and senior roles (D. Smith, 2024). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2023), white faculty made up 72 percent of all full-time faculty in 2022. By contrast, Black faculty represented 7 percent, Latine faculty 6 percent, Asian faculty 13 percent, and Native American/Indigenous faculty less than 1 percent.

Humanities and social sciences, while often perceived as more racially diverse than their STEM counterparts, also face significant racial gaps. The American Academy of Arts and Sciences (2021) reports that fewer than 10 percent of full-time humanities faculty identify as Black or Latine. The lack of racial diversity in these fields affects the scope of scholarship produced, the range of perspectives included in the research, and the experiences of students from underrepresented backgrounds (Gasman, 2022).

Gender equity among higher education faculty has seen measurable gains. Women compose 46 percent of all full-time faculty and are the majority in fields such as the humanities, social sciences, and education. Yet, women still face significant challenges in leadership positions, tenure, and STEM disciplines (Gasman, 2022).

For example, in STEM fields, women remain underrepresented, particularly in senior faculty roles. According to the

NCES (2023), women accounted for less than a third of full-time faculty in both engineering and computer science. In these disciplines, women also faced higher attrition rates and lower rates of promotion to tenured positions. A 2019 report from the American Institute of Physics found that while women made up 26 percent of newly hired physics faculty at four-year institutions, they accounted for just 10 percent of full professors in the field (Porter & Ivie, 2019).

Even in disciplines where women are better represented, such as the humanities and social sciences, they are often concentrated in lower-paying, non-tenure-track roles. The adjunction of faculty positions has disproportionately affected women, particularly women of color (Schneider & Bichsel, 2024). Women hold most part-time and contingent positions. These roles have fewer benefits, less job security, and limited advancement opportunities (Zheng, 2018).

The overreliance on contingent labor has led to fewer tenure-track opportunities, disproportionately affecting women and faculty of color. The Modern Language Association (MLA) report in 2023 noted that the percentage of tenure-track positions advertised in English departments has steadily declined, while non-tenure-track roles have become more common (Lusin & Hunt, 2023). This shift has undermined career stability and equity within these disciplines despite their higher diversity levels than STEM.

At the same time, professional and applied fields such as business and law exhibit distinct sets of disparities. While these fields often have greater racial and gender diversity among students, faculty diversity has not kept pace. According to the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, women represent only 24 percent of full professors in business schools, and faculty of color are even less represented, despite significant

diversity initiatives in place until the second Trump administration (Ruggs et al., 2023).

Despite these ongoing challenges, there were reasons for optimism before the current dismantling of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts across universities. Many institutions explored initiatives to increase diversity in both race and gender. Programs like cluster hiring, which recruit multiple diverse faculty members within specific disciplines, have shown promise in diversifying faculty. Additionally, some institutions revised tenure and promotion policies to better accommodate the needs and contributions of underrepresented faculty, including scholars of color and women (Gasman, 2022; D. Smith, 2024). These are important initiatives that need to be documented and acknowledged as critical strategies in response to current efforts to undermine the value of diversity in the academy.

The increase in interdisciplinary programs focused on race, gender, and equity studies has also helped attract more diverse faculty. Ethnic studies, gender studies, and African American studies have grown in prominence, creating more spaces for scholars from underrepresented backgrounds to contribute to the academic conversation (Gasman, 2022). All are currently under attack by the second Trump administration.

The state of faculty in higher education reflects both persistent inequities and areas of progress. While gender representation has improved in some fields, racial disparities remain significant, and the rise of contingent labor has disproportionately affected women and faculty of color. Moving forward, institutions must commit to more inclusive hiring practices, equitable tenure and promotion systems, and support structures that ensure all faculty can thrive across disciplines. These commitments must persist despite the current administration's onslaught of federal attacks on higher education.

The State of Higher Education

As faculty at research-intensive institutions, we must grapple with the ethical dimensions of writing a book about diversifying the professoriate, as the academic landscape is fraught with systemic challenges and the federal government is mounting an unrelenting attack on the social, civic, and intellectual fabric of the United States. The prospects for tenure-track positions in the humanities and social sciences are dwindling, the future of the academic profession remains uncertain, and support for humanistic and social science research has been diminishing. Given this context, the ethical obligation to address these issues is paramount, especially as we advocate for diversifying the professoriate and making higher education more equitable.

One of the most pressing challenges is the sharp decline in tenure-track positions, which has implications for diversity and the sustainability of academic careers. According to the American Association of University Professors (AAUP, 2022), the proportion of contingent faculty replacing tenure-track positions skyrocketed from 17 percent in 2004 to over half (53.5 percent) in 2022. Fields like English and modern languages have been particularly hard hit, with the MLA reporting that tenure-track positions accounted for only 29.4 percent of job ads in English and 20.4 percent in languages in 2020–21 (Lusin & Hunt, 2023). In 2021–22, there were 921 positions in English (an 80.6% increase from 2020 to 2021) and 837 positions in languages (a 68.8% increase). While a welcome recovery, these numbers are still well below the 1,000–2,000 positions advertised annually in previous decades for both English and languages (Lusin & Hunt, 2023).

While disciplines like sociology have seen some recovery in the number of advertised positions, this recovery is far from

reversing the broader trend of adjunctification and contingent labor plaguing academia (AAUP, 2022). These troubling realities require transparency from institutions and faculty, as students pursuing PhDs need to understand the current state of the job market.

Adjunctification directly shapes the diversity of the professoriate, and contingent faculty often need more job security, resources, and professional development opportunities to build long-term academic careers. In addition, underrepresented faculty of color are disproportionately affected, further complicating efforts to diversify higher education.

Along with the shrinking job market, stagnant or decreasing funding for research in the humanities and social sciences is compounding these challenges. As of this writing, the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) budget has remained relatively flat, with \$155 million allocated in 2020 compared to \$150 million in 2010. The prospects for future federal budgets for NEH suggest that these amounts will decrease, given the current federal administration's overt disdain for the humanities. Moreover, traditional funding sources for dissertation research periods, such as the Social Science Research Council, Ford, and Mellon, have seen reduced resources (Newfield, 2025). Coupled with these financial constraints is the declining enrollment in specific disciplines. For instance, the American Historical Association has tracked enrollment in history majors since 2016. It has shown a steady decrease, with the 2023 survey showing a 2.7 percent decline from the prior academic year (Brookins, 2024). These declines in undergraduate enrollment raise concerns about an oversupply of PhD graduates, driven by reduced teaching needs.

Graduate students pursuing PhDs face considerable financial challenges, particularly in the humanities and social sciences.

The earning potential for a humanities PhD is significantly lower than that of other fields. For example, the median salary in academe (non-postdoc) for humanities PhDs was \$58,500, compared to much higher earnings in fields like business (\$139,500) and computer and information sciences (\$100,000) (NCSES, 2023e). Given the importance of early career investments for long-term financial health, these financial constraints raise critical questions about the sustainability of pursuing a PhD in the current economic climate.

Another factor influencing the state of the PhD is the shifting public perception of higher education. A 2018 Pew Research Center survey found that 61 percent of American adults believe higher education is headed in the wrong direction, citing concerns about costs and job preparedness (Brown, 2018). This growing skepticism has contributed to a partisan divide in how higher education is viewed, with broader implications for public funding and institutional support. The erosion of public trust in the value of higher education underscores the need for universities and faculty to advocate more effectively for the humanities and social sciences and demonstrate their relevance to society (Brown, 2018).

While the current state of higher education presents many challenges, it also offers opportunities for optimism. Humanities PhDs, while earning less than their counterparts in other fields, still enjoy a 34 percent boost in median earnings compared to those with only a bachelor's degree. Additionally, job satisfaction among humanities PhDs is relatively high, with over 70 percent expressing satisfaction with their salaries, comparable to that of graduates from other fields (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2021). Furthermore, nearly 90 percent of humanities bachelor's degree holders reported overall

satisfaction with their lives, a figure that aligns closely with that of graduates from other fields.

Considering these dynamics, addressing the future of the PhD in the humanities and social sciences requires a multifaceted approach. While we advocate diversifying the professoriate, we must also address the structural issues that threaten the viability of academic careers. Declining tenure-track positions, stagnant funding, increasing public scrutiny, and federal attacks on higher education are among the growing structural constraints. By acknowledging these challenges and working toward systemic reform, we can build a more equitable and sustainable future for the humanities, one that continues to value the contributions of diverse voices to the intellectual and cultural life of the academy and society at large. One way to accomplish these goals is to establish programs that support students on their pathways to the professoriate.

HSI Pathways as a Research Setting

Students' experiences in HSI Pathways to the Professoriate are foundational for this book. We describe HSI Pathways here not as a model to be replicated, but as a context for studying how institutional investments, structured relationships, and material supports influence students' graduate trajectories.

The students who participated in the program were selected through a competitive application process at three Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs). HSIs are institutions that enroll at least 25 percent Latine students. Institutional representatives collaboratively designed the selection process. It used criteria such as overall and major GPA, potential to thrive as future faculty, articulation of specific academic interests, involvement

in cocurricular activities, and the potential to use HSI Pathways to transform their academic field. Upon acceptance, students are committed to prioritizing the program throughout their junior and senior years and their first few years of a PhD program. The students were supported by various individuals and initiatives, including partnerships with three HSIs—Florida International University, the University of Texas at El Paso, and California State University, Northridge—and five majority research institutions: New York University; Northwestern University; the University of California, Berkeley; the University of California, Davis; and the University of Pennsylvania. Academic staff assisted students in completing applications, securing housing, and navigating campus life; whereas faculty mentors were critical in guiding students through research projects, graduate applications, and career development.

The goals of the HSI Pathways program were to create vital pathways to graduate school for students at HSIs, connect student cohorts across institutions, develop rich mentoring opportunities, promote diversity in doctoral programs, and support institutional commitments to racial equity. The HSI Pathways Summer Seminar was a vital component of the initiative. The students participated in a six-week program on research methodologies, academic writing, GRE preparation, and professional skills development. This seminar provided students with stipends and essential preparation for transitioning from an HSI to a predominantly white institution (PWI). Additionally, the program offered postgraduate fellowships as seed grants for research, which students could use to continue their academic work either at their HSIs or in their PhD programs. These grants were contingent on students' acceptance into graduate programs.

The Rutgers Center for Minority Serving Institutions served as the central coordinating body for the HSI Pathways program, facilitating collaboration among institutions and conducting research on Latine students, faculty pipelines, and doctoral education. The center also directed the program, provided leadership, organized the program's components, supported faculty and student mentoring, and contributed to research and development efforts to foster pathways for Latine students to succeed in academia.

A Note on Language

We think it is important to share our decision to use *Latine* throughout this book, in place of other terms like *Latinx* or *Hispanic*, to refer to the communities of students whose stories we seek to amplify in these pages. We recognize how the terminology in this domain is neither settled nor static. As we elaborate in chapter 3, "Identities," the specific histories of terms like *Latinx*, pan-ethnic markers like *Hispanic*, and others are rich and contested. Among academics, *Latinx* has disrupted the gender binary embedded in Spanish, while also facing criticism for its inaccessibility in spoken Spanish and its limited uptake among the communities it purports to name. *Latine*, by contrast, has gained traction precisely because it works within the grammatical logic of Spanish and thus travels more fluidly across linguistic communities. It is, at this writing, the term that we believe best honors both the gender-expansive commitments that we hold dear and the linguistic practices we are witnessing.

Of course, we recognize that by the time this book reaches its audiences, the terrain may have shifted once again. Language is, by definition, ever changing. We do not offer *Latine* as

a final word but as our most considered one, grounded in the scholarship and values that animate our interests. As you will read, the students in these pages were themselves engaged in this kind of identity contestation. In this sense, we offer this book as a cultural artifact of its moment, written during a period of intense political and linguistic negotiations about who counts, who belongs, and who gets to name themselves. We trust and encourage readers to bring their own vocabularies to these pages, and we welcome the conversations that will invariably follow.

Overview of Chapters

In chapter 2, “Family,” we use the concept of *familismo*—the commitment to familial interconnectedness—to examine how Latine students’ family relationships influence their educational journeys, mainly as they transition from college to graduate school. Through students’ words, we unpack the complexities of familial dynamics, shedding light on the supportive and challenging aspects of relationships with parents, grandparents, siblings, and chosen family. We emphasize how these relationships shape students’ academic aspirations and trajectories, demonstrating their families’ pivotal role in motivating and supporting their pursuit of graduate education.

In chapter 3, “Identities,” we explore how Latine students navigate their complex and politicized identities within the academy. We demonstrate how their unique backgrounds enable them to ask innovative questions within the academic environment. Through personal narratives, we illustrate how students’ ethnoracial identities shape their academic interests and pursuits. The stories we share bring to life the diverse ways students’ identities serve as starting points for their academic

inquiries, enhancing their journeys and the broader educational community.

Chapter 4, “Mentors and Allies,” highlights the transformative impact of mentors and allies—from faculty advisors to administrative staff—on Latine students as they transition to graduate school. Through students’ voices, we explore the emotional, academic, and cultural support mentors provide and how these relationships can nurture a sense of belonging and educational growth. We also call for a more formalized mentoring structure that fosters deeper connections and offers more significant support to students and mentors.

Chapter 5, “Peers,” focuses on the powerful bonds Latine students form with their peers. We explore how peer groups are essential for academic and emotional support throughout students’ graduate education journeys. This chapter emphasizes the importance of community-building and cohort-based models, which foster academic success and create an environment of mutual support and resilience among students. Through the stories of students, we advocate for intentional peer networks that enable collective growth and academic achievement.

In chapter 6, “Mental Health and Wellness,” we address critical mental health and wellness issues faced by Latine students in academic settings. We discuss the various challenges they face, including administrative barriers, family dynamics, and the pressure to excel, all of which can hurt their mental and physical health. Drawing on research and student testimonies, we explore how the stress of academic marginalization leads to higher rates of depression, anxiety, and other mental health concerns. We argue that supporting the well-being of Latine students is essential for both personal and institutional success and call for a shift in academic culture to prioritize mental health.

Chapter 7, “Systemic Challenges,” explores students’ obstacles during their undergraduate years and throughout graduate school. We highlight the persistence and determination required to navigate these hurdles and explore how systemic inequities within academia exacerbate these challenges. The chapter is organized into two sections, reflecting challenges before and during graduate school while acknowledging their interconnected nature.

The strategies Latine students use to succeed in graduate education are the focus of chapter 8, “Strategies for Success.” We present various themes, including the importance of building professional relationships, effective time management, and organizational skills. Students emphasize the value of understanding theoretical foundations, selecting compatible advisors, and maintaining resilience in the face of rejection. By examining these strategies, we provide insights into the practical and emotional tools that enable students to thrive in their academic endeavors.

In chapter 9, “Pathways to Institutional Transformations,” we start by reflecting on the challenges and experiences shared by Latine students throughout the book. We then encourage readers to consider how higher education institutions can better support students, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, as they transition into and through graduate programs. We offer recommendations to transform the graduate experience, making it more inclusive, supportive, and responsive to students’ evolving needs and the academic landscape.

Stepping Up to the Challenges Ahead

As the higher education landscape evolves, it is time to ask ourselves: How can colleges and universities move beyond piecemeal diversity efforts and implement systemic changes that

truly support Latine students in achieving doctoral success? Representation is not enough if it exists within an unchanged structure that still marginalizes students of color. Let us suppose we are to truly diversify the professoriate. In that case, we must rethink how we support doctoral students—financially, emotionally, and intellectually—ensuring that success is contingent not on navigating barriers alone but on institutions actively removing them.

Ultimately, the question is not whether Latine students belong in academia but whether academia is willing to transform itself to accommodate their full potential. If higher education continues to operate as it has for decades, it will fail to reflect the rich diversity of knowledge, experiences, and perspectives that define our nation. This book is both a road map and a call to action—a challenge to institutions, faculty, and policymakers to break down structural barriers and create an academic environment where all students, regardless of background, can thrive. It is also a road map to students, building on the voices of successful students, to help them navigate the pathway to graduate school, even amid roadblocks and challenges.

We write this book at a moment when the future of academic work itself is under threat. As state governments dismantle tenure protections, the federal government challenges the legality of Minority Serving Institutions, and both restrict academic freedom, the pathways described in these pages are becoming more fragile even as they grow more necessary.

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