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**Touchstones for Understanding Inclusion and Belonging at UD:  
A Study of Latino/a Student Experiences**

**White Paper of The Latino/a Research Project  
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## Executive Summary

The growing Latino/a population is quickly transforming U.S. classrooms and is coinciding with increasing efforts and demands to make universities more welcoming and responsive to students from historically underrepresented groups. In this paper, we report findings from a 2014 research study<sup>1</sup> focused on the experiences of Latino/as students, the largest group of historically underrepresented students at the University of Delaware (UD). Drawing on interview, focus group, and secondary institutional diversity data, we explore the nature and quality of Latino/a students' lived experiences. We describe four important touchstones that emerged from our findings and that shed light on Latino/as students' experiences, challenges, and opportunities as members of the UD community. We also describe the ways in which academic and social opportunities at UD promote engagement with, inclusion of, and learning from and about Latino/a groups. The four main touchstones include:

1. **Invisibility:** The Latino/a population and community at UD are largely invisible, unnoticed, and loosely dispersed.
2. **Within-group diversity:** Diversity within the Latino/a population leads to differences in how students perceive and navigate a predominantly white campus.
3. **Racial microaggressions and stressors:** Students experience and cope with race-related microaggressions and stressors on campus in their daily interactions with others.
4. **Limited scope of Latino/a community:** The Latino/a community at UD is largely experienced through the Latino/a centered registered student organizations, minimizing the opportunity for Latinos/as and Latinidad to be an integral component of the university.

Using data from our study, we illustrate these touchstones and argue that they lead to the shallow inclusion of Latino/as at UD and to limited opportunities for learning about Latino life, culture, and history in meaningful ways. Responding to the touchstones described in this report, we offer the following recommendations as action steps that the university should take to begin the process of moving Latinos from a shallow to a deep belonging and inclusion at UD. Briefly, our recommendations include: 1) establishing a Latino/a Affairs Center with adequate space and resources; 2) using several approaches to integrate the lived experiences of US Latino/as and the cultures and histories of Latino/a communities into the university's curricular and co-curricular offerings; 3) funding initiatives to increase and build a critical mass of Latinos/as across the student (graduate and undergraduate), faculty, and staff stratum in order to strengthen the Latino/a presence on campus; and 4) funding additional projects that gather information related to UD's and Delaware's Latino/a population so that ongoing campus decisions related to Latino/a students and affairs can be responsive to the strengths, assets, and challenges of this population.

Our study provides research-based findings on how to better understand and enhance the experiences of Latino/as on campus. Given UD's commitment to diversity, inclusion, and equity, our recommendations provide important insights for how to transform and create new touchstones to characterize Latino/a students' experiences and learning at UD in the years to come, which will improve UD's campus racial climate and benefit all students.

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**Introduction**

In the past several years, the University of Delaware (UD) deepened its commitment to sustain a diverse campus that reflects our nation’s demographic diversity and that seeks to nurture the experiences, engagement, and appreciation of diverse groups (University of Delaware, 2008, Path to Prominence). In its recent blueprint for the university (University of Delaware, 2015, Delaware Will Shine), UD outlined “value for diversity and inclusion” as a core belief that is essential to the pursuit of excellence and to the goal of educating global citizens. Some notable progress markers reflecting this commitment include the enrollment of UD’s most diverse freshman class in 2013 (Office of Institutional Research/UDEW), the establishment of a Center for the Study of Diversity in 2012, the appointment of Carol Henderson to a new position as Vice-provost for Diversity in 2014, and the drafting of a Diversity Blue Print in 2015. However, an area that needs further exploration and attention is how underrepresented students experience the campus climate for diversity and inclusion and how the campus nurtures their development and engagement. This study focuses on Latinos/as<sup>2</sup> who currently make up 7.4% of the student body, the largest UD ethnic-minority student group (see Table 1).

*Table 1: Latino/a Students at UD (2013-2015)*

	Total Latino/a Students Newark Campus	% of Undergraduate Student Body
Fall 2013	1,144	6.8%
Fall 2014	1,236	7.1%
Fall 2015	1,299	7.4%

Source: Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness, Retrieved from: <https://sites.udel.edu/ire/files/2015/12/21-ugdiversity-o55dx6.pdf>.

Attention to the experiences of Latino/a students is timely for several reasons. The growth of the Latino/a population continues to dramatically transform the cultural and linguistic tapestry of U.S. classrooms. In 2012, 1 in 6 school-age children were Latino/a; in the next fifty years, this will grow to 1 in every 3 school-age children, surpassing the number of white children in U.S. schools (United States Census Bureau, 2012). Hispanic enrollment in college has also increased by 200% between 1993 and 2013 (Krogstad, 2015). In 2012, Hispanics made up 19% of all college students, ages 18 to 24, up from 12% in 2008 (Lopez & Fry, 2013). Yet, while Hispanics have a higher rate of college enrollment than white students, they are also more likely to attend two-year institutions and less likely to complete a Bachelor’s Degree (Lopez & Fry, 2013).

Latinos/as also continue to shape and change the cultural, economic, and political landscape of communities both in Delaware and across the nation in powerful ways. Latinos/as bring important perspectives and assets as we seek to address pressing social challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Thus, if UD is to live out its core belief of diversity and inclusion, then we must understand how Latino/as are experiencing the campus. Ensuring the success and integration of Latino/a students into higher education institutions promotes the educational and social benefits of diversity for all students (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado & Gurin, 2002; Hurtado, 2007).

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<sup>2</sup> The term Latino/a is a pan-ethnic label that includes various ethnic sub-groups (e.g. Mexican, Dominican, Cuban). The term Hispanic is preferred by some members of this group. Participants in our study may include both U.S. born Latinos/Hispanics as well as international students or faculty from Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America, the Caribbean or Spain. In our study, we use the term “Latino/a” to refer to this diverse population.

Drawing on research conducted at UD in the Spring 2014 semester, this study explores the nature and quality of lived experiences of Latino/a students at UD and how these experiences contribute to campus diversity. We address the following research questions:

- How do Latino/a students describe their experiences as members of the UD community? What challenges do they face at UD? What opportunities do they bring to UD?
- In what ways do academic and social opportunities at UD promote engagement with, inclusion of, and learning from and about Latino/a groups?

### Method

Using mixed-methods, we conducted qualitative interviews and focus groups, and online surveys.<sup>3</sup> This paper focuses on the qualitative portion because it was more extensive and provided more nuanced and complex findings related to our research questions. After completing an online survey, students were asked to indicate their interest in participating in focus groups. All participants provided consent. We held four 60-75 minute focus groups with enrolled Latino/a students (N=13). We also conducted 45-75 minute interviews with students identified as Latino/a student leaders (N=10) and with Latino/a administrators, faculty, and staff or with administrators and staff who worked directly with issues of equity and diversity (N=14). Finally, we supplemented our findings with secondary analyses of relevant institutional data.

An independent transcriber provided transcripts of all interview and focus group data. Pseudonyms were created for participants and used in this report. Four research team members read transcripts individually and then met to identify emerging codes related to the research questions (open coding). We developed a coding dictionary to define each code and then coded and analyzed the data using Dedoose, a qualitative analysis web-based program. The final coding scheme included 16 codes organized under 3 main categories: being Latino at UD, descriptors of UD, and Latino community at UD. We then conducted a second reading of the data, reading by code instead of by transcript (axial and selective coding). We explored relationships between codes, compared emerging interpretations of the data to our research questions and to relevant literature, and developed the subsequent findings.

### Framework: Latino/a Touchstones

We present four major findings from our research, what we term *Latino/a Touchstones*. These touchstones provide important insights on the experiences of Latino/a students at UD and on the present climate for diversity work at UD. They also suggest implications for how the university might move forward in its effort to live out its core belief of valuing diversity, equity, and inclusion.

#### Latino Touchstone #1: Invisibility

**The Latino/a population and community at UD are largely invisible, unnoticed, and loosely dispersed.**

*When I first got here I didn't think, like, I didn't see not one Hispanic person. I was just, I was walking around campus, okay, I'm ready to see something new.* (Javier, UD student)

Latino/a students and faculty and staff reported that a Latino/a presence and community at the university was marginal or invisible. While Latinos/as constitute the largest ethnic-minority group at UD, Latino/a

<sup>3</sup> All Latino/a students (N=1186) at the time of the study were invited to participate in an online survey: 217 students responded and 159 completed the survey, yielding a 13% response rate. We also administered an online survey of non-Latino students (N=229) to explore their interactions and engagement with Latino students.

students remain underrepresented when compared to the population of Latinos/as in the United States (17.1%), in Delaware (8.9%), and in neighboring states that enroll a large portion of UD students, including New Jersey (19.3%) and New York (18.6%) (United States Census Bureau, 2014). As Table 2 indicates, the majority of Latino/a students are not Delaware residents; in the fall of 2015, only 2.6% of undergraduates on the Newark Campus were Delaware residents.

Table 2: Top 5 Home States for Latino/a Students, 2015

Home State	Total Latino students from given state	Percentage of the Latino Undergraduate Student Population (Newark Campus) from given state	Percentage of total Undergraduate Student Population from given state
Delaware	405	31%	2.6
New Jersey	380	30%	2.4
New York	267	21%	1.7
Pennsylvania	71	05%	.05
Maryland	52	04%	.03

Source: UD Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness

According to Marisol, a student, the university is not known for a strong Latino presence in Delaware communities and this is a barrier in attracting more Latino students:

*A lot of my friends and like my sister, she's looking to transfer to a criminal justice program. On purpose she did not choose UD because of the lack of diversity. Because there were not going to be a lot of Hispanics. [It's not known for being diverse] at least in the people I keep talking to in the immediate Newark, Wilmington area where you have the biggest concentration of Hispanics.*

In interviews and focus groups, Latinos/as repeatedly talked about issues of visibility and underrepresentation. Describing the Latino student population, Liana, a student, said: “It’s very, very little compared to the rest of them being Caucasian.” Francisco, an employee, said: “I think we’re on the low-end of the scale, both for Latino faculty and Latino students.” Enrique, a student, also discussed the low percentage of Latino/as on campus: “we’re not a very visual part of campus.” Briana, another student, expressed a similar statement: “... we go unnoticed.”

Many of the students and faculty reported challenges of isolation related to their invisibility. For example, a student, Alex, explained how underrepresentation made it difficult to build networks or to find people to relate to, crucial parts of helping students feel a sense of belonging in their university community (Walton & Cohen, 2007):

*It was harder for me to find people that I would directly relate to... Like, I feel that coming in, it’s really hard for Latinos to network, especially if they want to identify with somebody that they can relate to as much as possible... But I pretty much adapted, but I would say isolated is a good word.*

Like Alex, other students reported ways that they adapted and were resilient despite the challenges they faced related to their Latino/a identities. While a few Latino/a students mentioned that they rarely thought about their underrepresented status, most discussed challenges related to being underrepresented and feeling invisible. Xiomara explained:

*I came to UD and I was the only Latina on my floor, in my building, in my complex. And it wasn't something that I thought would bother me. But it did. And it did take getting used to, definitely... Especially freshman year or your first year at any institution, it's already such a crazy time. You're getting used to everything to begin with and then on top of that to have to get used to not knowing many people or anyone who shares your ethnic perspective.*

Like Xiomara, other students described experiencing solo status—being the only one or one of few underrepresented students in a social context (Thompson & Sekaquaptewa, 2002). Interestingly, some of the conversations about solo status were filled with qualifiers. For example, Claudia talked about not feeling lonely in her solo status, yet feeling like a token: “*I mean I made friends with everyone in the freshmen dorm so I was fine, I didn't feel lonely or anything. Then I also was the token Spanish girl.*” Steven also explained that solo status did not bring challenges; yet, he felt he had to change classmates’ notions of him as a token:

*I wouldn't say [I experienced] any challenges, at least I didn't perceive them as challenges. Just that you're introduced to people they automatically consider you the token Spanish kid or the token Latino kid or something like that. And they think of you like that for a while until you kind of wean them off that notion. I guess during my freshman year I dealt with that a lot. I didn't really have any big issues about it just because that stuff doesn't really bother me too much.*

Beyond finding other Latino/a individuals on campus, these feelings of being invisible, dispersed, and difficult to find across campus also extended to descriptions of the Latino community. Elliot, an employee, described the community:

*It's harder for me to come up with the positives because there are not as many opportunities to actually have experiences of community. They come at very specific times and they're not very regular, they're not predictable, they're not very frequent. It really depends on whether certain events are scheduled or not.*

The impact of the underrepresentation and invisibility of Latino/a students is also relevant to the experiences of non-Latino/a students. Eva, a student, explained that non-Latino/a students missed out on opportunities for building relationships with and learning from Hispanic people: “*I guess if students are not used to interacting with other Hispanic people they're not really gonna get to know them because they're not really going to see them because there isn't that many.*”

Critical mass, in diversity work, suggests that the number of students of particular underrepresented groups is important; there need to be sufficient numbers to promote feelings of adequate representation and belonging within an institution (Elam, Tratten, Hafferty, & Haidet, 2009). Rather than achieving critical mass and the associated benefits of diversity, the Latino/a population demonstrates a diluted dispersal. That is, the underrepresentation of Latinos/as at UD results in Latino/a students, faculty, and staff being loosely dispersed across campus. This not only makes it difficult for Latino/a students to connect with each other, to feel like they are visible on the campus, and to establish a presence as a community, but it also disadvantages students of other racial/ethnic backgrounds who consequently miss out on opportunities for learning about and from Latino/a students and a Latino/a community.

## **Latino Touchstone #2: Within-group Diversity**

***Diversity within the Latino/a population leads to differences in how students perceive and navigate a predominantly white campus.***

*The Latino culture is so broad within itself and then you have Latino students who may come from lower or lower-middle income families. And then you have others who identify as Latino but*

*come from higher-income families. We're all Latino but our journeys to get to this point are very different.* (Rafael, UD student)

The Latino/a students in this study were diverse in many ways. Some of the students' majors included theater, engineering, anthropology, wildlife conservation, political science, and education. We met students from a variety of states including Delaware, New Jersey, New York, California and students who were raised in other countries including Mexico, Ecuador, and Colombia. We met students who were first-generation university students and a few who were children of UD alumni. We met students whose primary language at home was Spanish and students who could not speak Spanish. We met students from affluent backgrounds and students who worked long hours and still struggled to pay for their university costs.

The racial and ethnic identities Latinos/as claim often involve multiple categories (i.e. white, Black, Latino/a, Latin American, Colombian, Mexican, etc.) and the ways they self-identify or are identified by others may shift across contexts and over time (Rodríguez, 2000). As Cesar, an employee, explained, varied experiences with cultural practices and a range of phenotypes among Latinos/as impact identification:

*The Latino community is a very mixed community. You could be ... phenotypically you could be white but identify as Latino, or at least be technically Latino for when you apply to the institution. That doesn't mean that culturally you identify or would seek that support group out.*

As Cesar pointed out, phenotype mattered because it influenced both how students self-identified and how they were identified by others. As Jessica explained “*you can't [always] walk down the street and tell that someone is Hispanic.*”

Related to the first theme of invisibility, Rafael spoke of how variation among Latinos/as in both phenotype and cultural identification impacted whether students on campus connected along some sense of shared Latino/a cultural experiences: “*You're telling me that the Latino population is increasing but I don't see these faces. Maybe it's someone that's on paper putting Latino but they don't necessarily identify with the culture.*” Similarly, Raquel explained that some Latinos/as “*say they're Latino but they don't know the culture.*” Some students acknowledged that their connections to their Latino/a heritage were distant and hoped the university would offer opportunities for them to strengthen these connections. Alex explained: “*I came to college wanting to understand more [...] I just wanted to learn more about being Latino.*”

Conversations with students revealed that the racial dynamics of their home communities shaped initial perceptions of the UD campus. Some students, like Claudia, came from predominantly white communities or high schools and were not surprised by the racial make-up at UD:

*My high school where I came from, feels like an exact [match] ... There was no difference [in the racial make up]. Walking around the halls in high school was the same as walking around campus here, there's no difference.*

For some students, these prior experiences in predominantly white environments helped them feel comfortable at UD or created an expectation that the predominantly white environment was the norm. Heather, a student, explained how the experience of being underrepresented became the norm:

*I noticed here that it's predominantly Caucasian. My friend group, a lot of it is actually a good amount of people that are Hispanic, but most of the people that I've met here are Caucasian so I've noticed that. But I also lived in an area that was predominantly Caucasian already so it*

*wasn't like a huge culture shock for me. I knew that college is supposed to be diverse; but at the same time, I guess I got so used to being the minority that it would be natural to be in the minority again.*

Miguel, an employee who worked closely with students, explained that assimilating into the white environment was sometimes a strategy used by Latinos/as who had ample experiences in predominantly white institutions:

*The problem with us Latinos is that most of the people that are here, they can pass by white. When I start talking to them, they don't know how to speak Spanish, you know, and they have assimilated into the community; like hey, it's better if I just act white. I know where I'm at, I'm gonna play this position [...] I would say they're just trying to survive here and they think that's the best way to do it. It's been working in grammar school, it worked in high school, let me make it work in college, you know.*

Other students yearned for ways to nurture their Latino/a cultural identities. Chantelle, an employee, explained that even students who were used to predominantly white environments could struggle in the absence of their families where they were used to receiving the Latino/a cultural familiarity or sustenance they needed.

*The Latino students they can deal with a lot of diverse communities... When they are in high school, what do they do? They go home to family, culture, food they know, music they know, different things that have shaped and developed them. Well, you think you can remove that kid graduated from high school, put them in a place like this and they don't need it somehow to sustain their energy or to make them feel comfortable?*

Some students expected that a large university would be more diverse and were surprised upon arriving at UD. Estela, a student, explained: “Coming here, thinking since it's such a big school, I figured there would be so much more diversity and we wouldn't be so much of a minority, like it would kind of be more equal, number-wise.” Gloria explained that she was from a diverse town and although she knew of predominantly white environments, she was not expecting this at UD:

*It wouldn't have been such a culture shock had I prepared myself, I guess; but, it was always ... You know, literally the town right next to us was predominantly white. For me, I would be, “wow, I'd hate to be in that town.” I like diversity. I like learning. I want to learn about different cultures. I want to do all those kinds of things, which I guess contributes to wanting diversity and liking where I came from; but then seeing that the town over was such a drastic change, I was like, “I would hate to live there.” But then coming here it's basically the same thing, but that's when the culture shock comes in.*

Students accustomed to a more racially diverse environment described a more drastic process of integrating into the campus. Javier explained that his high school was mostly Hispanic and Black and that coming to UD was “totally different.” Alex described UD as requiring “a big cultural shift, [be]cause the high school I went to was barely 50 percent white people.”

In addition to their varied levels of affiliation and experiences in both white and Latino/a communities, Latino/a students were somewhat diverse in terms of socioeconomic and college generational status. First-generation college students—those who are the first in their families to attend college—and working-class students most often commented on how their experiences differed from the majority dominant culture on campus (Lubrano, 2003; Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012), as demonstrated by Diego:



*At least for me being in college is, first of all, a very hard experience because I am actually a first-generation student [...]. My parents didn't go to college so I wasn't really aware of the things you need to do in order to do well in college. And I felt that was the biggest thing that struck me at first because I came from obviously a public education system in which you pretty much do the bare minimum and you still get great grades, you still get passing grades.*

In fall of 2015, only 1.1% of the total undergraduate student population (N=15,575) was Latino/a low-income and/or first-generation students. Belonging and inclusion for these students may be particularly precarious as they are not only underrepresented among the total undergraduate population but also among their Latino/a peers. Gloria, a first-generation student, explained that it was easy to question her ability because of differences in the resources, networks, and stressors between first-generation and continuing-generation (i.e., those with at least one parent with a college degree) students (Biu, 2002):

*I feel like it makes me want to question my ability in the sense that because I don't have the same resources they have, they can go to their parents and ask them for help. Or simply a vocabulary word, "Hey, mom, what does this mean?" I can't go to my mom and ask that. She doesn't know English... [Also] targeting on networks that their parents have built already [...] Because we are first-generation, we haven't built those networks. We haven't built specifically networks with other people and other families and companies and people that work for good companies [...] Just small stuff like that when it comes to career stuff, and then simply targeting the college experience, my mom did not know anything about the university. They didn't have any knowledge of the college process, how to apply. She still doesn't know how to fill out the FAFSA. I have to call her, remind her, and just tell her how to login, and still use the Internet. Just small stuff like that, that it's you don't have to worry about that with a lot of my peers, a lot of the students and their parents not having these kinds of problems or struggles.*

Gloria's discussion of language issues, networks, and knowledge of the college process highlights the intersection of ethnicity, social class, and college generational status for some Latino/a students. This intersection also impacted the sense of responsibility some Latino/a students felt toward their families or home communities and their sense of belonging as university students (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015a). Estela explained that, as a university student, she was challenging stereotypes about what Latinos/as can accomplish through educational advancement:

*I feel like all Latinos here are trying to change the stereotype [...] Since we are a minority, people typically think that we can't make it [...] I'm the first generation in my family to actually go to college, so I feel like we don't have enough money to afford coming to Delaware. Coming here is actually proving myself and my culture that we could actually get further and, I don't know [...] [You are] trying to prove yourself. I feel like everyone underestimates what you're capable of.*

The complexity in Latino/a identification is an important element that impacts UD Latino/a students and needs to be addressed for several reasons. This complexity in identification 1) highlights the diverse needs present within the UD Latino/a population; 2) influences Latino/a students experiences of belonging both to the UD Latino/a community and the larger student body; and 3) shapes how students experience their Latino/a identities across different campus spaces.

### Latino Touchstone #3: Racial Microaggressions and Stressors

*Students experience and cope with race-related microaggressions and stressors on campus in their daily interactions with others.*

*It's very polite racial tension here [...] At least my feeling is that as a culture, this is not a very hostile student culture. As a result, I think the polite racism really, in my observations, comes more from, "We'll keep these students on the margins. They're just not part of us." There's so many of the majority that it's just so easy to do that. I don't know that everyone's doing that intentionally, but I think that's definitely reinforced in the student culture. (Cesar, UD employee)*

Whether students felt comfortable or marginalized as members of UD's campus, experiencing microaggressions on campus was inevitably tied to feelings of exclusion. As Cesar explained above, polite racism was part of the campus culture and it could challenge Latinos/as' sense of belonging. This polite racism may not involve conscious acts of racial malice known as microassaults, but is instead perpetrated through often unconscious microaggressions that include comments or actions that stereotype, misrepresent, or demean the lived experiences of Latinos/as (Wing Sue, 2010). Stories of microaggressions and racial stress emerged as students spoke of their campus lived experiences. Claudia described:

*My sophomore year someone told me, we were really good friends at the time [...], she told me that I only got into this school because I was Mexican. She told me they circled some multicultural aspect on my application and she was like, "Yeah, that's why you got in." I was like, "Oh, wow." That was a very, very hurtful and very traumatic experience my sophomore year [...] I talked to someone in Admissions about it, I was like is that true, is that the way you do things here because it's not cool.*

Microaggressions could lead students to feel that others questioned their fit in the university, or given their underrepresentation on campus, to question their own belonging. That is, at times, some students experienced what the literature describes as imposter syndrome (Clance & O'Toole, 1988; Kolligan & Sternberg, 1991; Austen et al., 2009). Gloria illustrated this feeling:

*It's like you wonder, is this the only reason why I'm accepted to this college or any other college? Was it because I was Latina? Or was it because of my good grades? Was it because of the activities I was involved in? Those are just small things you start to question.*

Notions of who belonged on campus extended beyond admissions decisions. Rafael, a student, reframed stares he received as "positive attention," but they taxed emotional and cognitive resources as he worked to prove his merit and belonging at UD:

*[There's] frustration of constantly seeing how people in Wilmington are looked at negatively or the stereotypes that exist for Latino culture on campus and just seeing how differently they may perceive me. It's like, "Well, why do you continue looking at me like this?" I know for a fact I do get stared at a lot when I walk. Okay, maybe they're just looking at me, because I don't like to jump to conclusions. But then I'll turn and they're still staring at me[...] I'm a Latino male. I don't look like your typical business student[...] I feel like it draws attention in a good way rather than me conforming to what people are used to [...] You didn't expect that from me and now I showed you that I did it just as good.*

Students confronted microaggressions that perpetuated stereotypes about Latino/as. Jessica, a student, explained that she had to counter stereotypes that did not apply to her, such as the "sassy, sexy Hispanic woman." She explained that "I think a lot of it is that most of the contact the students here have with

*Hispanics is through the TV. It's not so much with real life students, with Hispanics.*" As Jessica points out, impressions of Latino/a individuals and culture often rely on the prevalent stereotypical or narrow representations of this group in mainstream media outlets (Fryberg & Townsend, 2008; Bender, 2003), which have negative consequences for intergroup relations among students.

For example, Heather explained that stereotypes led to jokes that students had to confront. Heather's Colombian heritage was sometimes associated with drugs: *"There's always the drug joke, like [about] cocaine. It's funny sometimes. You've learned to deal with it, but sometimes it's kind of like, all right, you need to stop. It's enough."* Diego also explained that he sometimes felt "weird" in classes explaining that he *"never felt racism or discrimination by any faculty member but there is a lot of stereotyping, I get that a lot by students. I mean when I'm with some of my buddies I am always getting Mexican jokes and stuff."*

Raquel explained, *"they generalize all Latinos to be one race, you know. Like, people ask me all the time if I'm Mexican."* Marisol also spoke of how she countered stereotypes and unconscious biases about Latinos/as by educating others:

*Everybody thinks everybody's Mexican. And I think what stems off of that is that everybody thinks you like spicy food.[...] But it's kind of something that you get used to[...] But what I do now is, I kind of blow it off and then sort of teach them. It's a moment for education. No I don't eat this. Or I eat a little bit of it. Or I am a little bit like this. Let me tell more you about that. Maybe ask them a little bit more about that themselves, so they feel valued[...] I think with everybody, you're gonna start off, you look a certain way. So people start thinking a certain way about you. Unconscious bias is what you call it. Which is sad but very true, very real. You try to cope with it. Try to be as positive as possible.*

Like Marisol, other Latino/a students sought to combat their classmates' lack of cultural sensitivity or limited experiences engaging with Latino/a individuals and communities by assuming the role of cultural ambassadors — teaching others about Latino/a identities and cultural practices. Javier, a student, explained:

*One positive thing [about being Latino/a] is that you teach people that don't know about Latino culture.. Like I made a friend and he knew nothing about Latino culture. We would hang out at my house during the break and he got a taste of what it was like.*

Raquel also had similar experiences:

*I think I bring some salsa to it. I know on my floor specifically we'll put Spanish music and they're like, "teach me how to dance". We'll teach them how to dance or bring them different foods, you know. Just bringing more culture to the community.*

Students played the role of cultural ambassadors in both social and academic spaces at the university. Sofia explained that *"in classes, if there's anything pertaining to Latino culture or traditions or history, if it's not correct I feel the responsibility to kind of set things straight."*

While students often mentioned that they appreciated their classmates' curiosity, they also found it frustrating to try to bridge the gap between their classmates' level of understandings and their own lived experiences as Latino/as. Marlene, a student, explained:

*I guess it's hard because they can't understand, because they're not in that place. It's completely fine that they don't understand because it's not their fault, but it's sometimes frustrating to try to*

*explain and you just get impatient. Well, not impatient, but frustrated, because you want them to understand where you're coming from.*

Roxanna also mentioned the frustration that came from having to take on the role of cultural ambassador in the face of microaggressions experienced with close friends.

*So this happened really recently, it really, really irked me. I was walking with two of my friends and they both happen to be from one of the wealthier parts of Logan town, [which is] predominately white. One of my friends was interested in this kid named Victor... And the other girl that was with us hadn't heard anything about Victor yet and she was like, "Oh who's Victor?" The other one is like, "Oh I swear he's not Hispanic." So, I said, "what's wrong with being Hispanic?" It's awkward, it's two of my close friends and I was taken aback so I just thought that they would put two and two together that I am present and you should not say that in front of me. And so I was like, "what's wrong with being Hispanic" and the girl who was interested in this Victor guy, "Oh no, I didn't mean anything by it." And the other one said, "she meant like Mexican." Just things like that where people just haven't been exposed to it before and they're not being exposed to it here so they just continue with a narrow-minded path.*

In response to this microaggression, Roxanna questioned her friends and challenged their assumptions. Yet, sometimes students lamented that they did not know how to respond to microaggressions. Raquel, described a microaggression involving a professor's stereotypes of Latinos and then said: *"I remember sitting in the car and telling my mom. She said, 'You should've told someone!' and I told her, 'I didn't know what to do with that.'"* Latino/a students expressed mixed feelings towards their roles as cultural ambassadors. They appreciated genuine efforts by non-Latino/a students to better understand Latino/a cultural practices, but they sometimes tired of this role or of trying to interpret whether interest in them was genuine or superficial. Furthermore, some student stories illustrated that the role of cultural ambassadors sometimes arose in direct response to the stress that came from racial microaggressions.

While UD is committed to a "zero tolerance policy" on racial bigotry and harassment, the reported experiences of racial stress and microaggressions highlight a need to also address the subtle, persistent ways that racism manifests itself for Latino/a students. Both the presence of microaggressions and the need for cultural ambassadors are rooted in a lack of awareness and knowledge about Latino/a life, history, and culture in the United States. Furthermore, limited intergroup relation skills and diversity competencies among the dominant student body can limit the strategies that members of the campus community employ in challenging microaggressions and other forms of racial stress. There were few stories by students of experiences with overt racialized experiences on campus that most people would denounce as racist. However, the racial stressors described by Latino/a students most often exemplified what Cesar, quoted in the beginning of this section, described as a *"polite racial tension."* These forms of racism manifest in subtle and thinly veiled comments and experiences that reflect contemporary forms of color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2009) that privilege dominant cultural ideologies and contradict the illusion of a positive, inclusive racial climate for all students.

#### **Latino Touchstone #4: Limited Scope of Latino/a Community**

***The Latino/a community at UD is largely experienced through the Latino/a centered RSO's, minimizing the opportunity for Latinos/as and Latinidad to be an integral component of the university.***

*For those students and those members of the community that need that connection to Latino/a culture and community, we do some things, but it's not enough. (Chantelle, UD employee)*

The concept of Latinidad accounts for the ways Latino/as forge community out of their diverse cultural practices and histories and emphasizes the pan-ethnic experience of having identities defined in

relationships to whiteness and to colonial histories (Aparicio, 2003; Chávez, 2009). Latinidad helps us discuss how Latino/a identities, cultural practices, and histories are taken up, expressed, and explored at UD in ways that promote a shared sense of community. In our study, we sought to understand how students felt or forged Latinidad, including the opportunities available on campus for students to learn about issues relevant to them or to Latino/a communities, or to expand their understandings of Latino/a identities, cultures, and histories.

When students were asked about a UD Latino/a community or opportunities for learning about Latinos/as, the conversation inevitably turned to Registered Student Organizations (RSO's). Rafael explained:

*All of us [Latino students leaders] are involved with HOLA or Campus de La Raza or something similar. I think that's our community. I would say MGC (Multicultural Greek Congress), HOLA and La Raza, that's the Latino community that I think of on campus because that's what I see most advocating for the Latino community.*

The RSO's served different functions for students including allowing students to feel a sense of pride, belonging, unity, and strength as members of a Latino/a community. Alex commented, *"really [I see] the cultural strengths, I go to these meetings of the student organizations and just seeing the pride that the Latinos have on this campus you can't really shoot that down at all."* For Gloria, HOLA provided comfort as she sought to get connected on campus:

*HOLA helped a lot, because right off the bat, coming in when we had the first day or two on campus, they do all these activities and stuff. They were handing out bags and I was like, "Oh, yes! Hispanics!" That was the first comforting moment I had at UD.*

Liana explained that HOLA was where she made her close group of friends and where she wanted to be involved because, *"I felt it was like my home."* However, there were several challenges with having RSO's serve as the primary site for establishing a Latino/a space where Latinidad was expressed. As Paloma, an employee, mentioned, the RSO's tended to focus on "lite" aspects of Latinidad.

*I know that there are organizations that focus on Latino issues, and they also for the most part tend to be stereotypical also. They talk about the lite cultural aspects of the Latino culture. They talk about the food, the music... I don't see anything political.*

As part of their mission to serve both Latino/a and non-Latino/a students, HOLA faced the challenges that come from having a broad agenda: promoting community among Latino/as and educating others about Latinidad. Eva explained the multiple goals of HOLA:

*They try to bring everyone together not just Hispanic people because they will have events that everyone can attend. [They] always say in their interest meeting email you don't have to speak Spanish to come to the meetings, so I think trying to promote their culture not just within their group but to everyone.*

Another challenge faced by Latino/a centered RSO's was limited funds. Alex explained:

*HOLA is like the biggest thing the Latino community has as far as funding, everybody else is just like one percent less including La Raza. So we might have great ideas but at the end of the day it might be a little bit harder to get the money for it, you know [...], you don't really have anything that's just solid.*

Members of Latino/a Greek organizations mentioned a similar struggle: they had the same expectations as other Greek organizations on campus that were larger in membership and had much larger budgets.

Students and faculty also mentioned that Hispanic Heritage Month provided opportunities for the university to highlight Latinidad. Yet, they yearned for both broader university participation at these events and for the inclusion of Latino/a speakers, events, or concerns into other aspects of university life. As Elliot, an employee, explained, UD did not provide enough opportunities for Latino/a students to explore their identities and histories:

*A Hispanic student here would have to work to be able to find a community where they could develop and understand better their Hispanic roots and heritage. They would have to work hard to find that.*

While Latinidad and a sense of community were present within the Latino/a RSO's, students did not describe any other ways that they saw or experienced Latinidad as integral to other aspects of university life. Eva explained that she needed to devote her time to pursuits within her major or her interests, but Latinos/as or Latinidad were rarely present in these venues:

*I guess there's not like a huge opportunity to meet other Hispanics if I'm not like involved in these organizations 'cause I don't have time, so I guess like if there was like more Hispanic people then I'd be able to meet them. [Be]cause I don't think there's one other Hispanic girl in my major, like in my grade that I know of or maybe there's a couple I don't really know. I don't really see any in my music RSO and stuff like that.*

Some participants expressed feelings of weariness because of the limited number of Latino/a students who took leadership roles in the Latino/a RSO's and they expressed frustration with the marginalization of Latinidad to special events. Robert, an employee, explained Latinidad as an everyday experience and argued that it be further integrated into multiple facets of university life, including academics — an area that Latino/a students rarely mentioned in our conversations:

*It would be great if there's a Latino literature class taught on campus, not through only languages, but through the English Department... I guess my thing is being Latino is an everyday experience. Being a white American, it's an everyday experience. I experience the same thing. It's not only designed for one month... We don't have these Anglo-American Heritage Month, so why do we have this? I understand why we have those, to recognize them, but it shouldn't be our only source of [Latino/a] diversity on campus.*

While UD has a Latin American and Iberian Studies (LAIS) program, the major emphasis is on the history, politics, and geography, anthropology and languages of Latin America<sup>4</sup>. There are limited courses<sup>5</sup> at the university focused exclusively on the historical, social, and cultural experiences of Latino/a groups and communities in the US. Rafael, a student, mentioned that Latino/a students “*maybe don't know as much about their own background but they know enough to understand that there's a rich history and to have a passion for it and defend it and want to preserve it and do things related to that on campus.*” One way to integrate Latinidad into the academic experiences of students is by representing

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<sup>4</sup> We did not examine syllabi of the LAIS courses. Some of the courses may include dimensions of the Latino/a experience but course descriptions suggest a dominant emphasis on the Latin American experience.

<sup>5</sup> Alvina Quintana from Women and Gender Studies formerly taught a course on Latino Literature but she has recently retired.

Latino/a culture and history in the curriculum. This affords students the opportunities to learn about their culture and history and fosters a sense of belonging (Fryberg & Townsend, 2008; Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015b). Yet, Latinos remain largely marginal or absent in the UD academic experience.

Beyond the academic sphere, there is also no physical space designated for Latino/a students or a place to serve as a resource for connecting with surrounding Latino/a communities. Some Latino/a students, particularly those in Latino/a leadership, saw the Center for Black Culture (CBC) as a resource to them. The CBC staff described outreach to the Latino/a community as part of their purpose on campus. Yet, for most Latino/a students, the CBC was primarily seen as an African-American center and not perceived as a Latino/a home base or as a place for Latino/a belonging. Rafael, a student, explained:

*I definitely do think the CBC is a very big help and a very large support system. I'm just trying to think of ways where the Latino population would maybe want to go more in there because it's meant to be a home away from home.... I never see Latino students in there. I don't know, I guess because it's the Center for Black Culture and many students feel they can't go in there. But, I always tell them a lot of things like when it comes to the Asian student events or Latino student events they are run out of the CBC. I think just because of the name people shy away from it.*

Students mainly focused on the Latino/a themed RSO's when describing a Latino/a community at UD because this is the predominant space for experiencing Latinidad on UD's campus. This approach, however, hinders the integration of Latinidad across multiple dimensions of university life and it limits opportunities for nurturing and sustaining a shared experience of Latinidad that builds on Latino/a interests, identities, histories, and cultural practices for both Latino/a and non-Latino/a students. In the absence of physical or academic spaces to address Latinidad, its expression and development remained largely dependent on Latino/a students themselves. This approach puts undue pressure on Latino/a students and leaves the campus diversity climate marginally impacted or transformed. As UD seeks to "vigorously foster an inclusive and culturally rich campus" (Delaware Will Shine), it needs to address how students are being asked to assimilate to an environment that does not adequately reflect and nurture a sense of Latinidad across the multiple facets of university life.

### **Recommendations**

*You can keep asking questions but if you do nothing it's kind of worthless.* (Marisol, UD student)

This study examined how Latino/as at UD described their experiences, challenges and opportunities as members of the UD community. Furthermore, the study explored how Latinos/as described academic and social opportunities at UD that promote engagement with, inclusion of, and learning from and about Latino/a groups. The Latino/a students in this study demonstrated a range of experiences and backgrounds; they were diverse in terms of their communities of origin, their socioeconomic and college generational status, and in the ways they construct and live out their Latino/a identities. These differences within the population importantly shape how Latino/a students negotiate their belonging and integration into a predominantly white university.

In the glimpses of university life that this study captured, we learned that Latino/a students share a feeling of invisibility related to their identities as Latino/a individuals and to their presence as a Latino/a community on campus. We also learned that the experience of Latinidad and Latino/a community is mostly concentrated in the Latino/a themed registered student organizations. Given the limited opportunities to learn about Latino/a identities, communities, cultural practices, and histories, we also found a greater likelihood for students to experience racial microaggressions or to feel a need to serve as cultural ambassadors, educating others about who they are and about Latino/a life in the United States.

As Marisol reminded us, students are eager for actions that will address their experiences as Latino/a students. What follows are recommendations that are responsive to the Latino/a Touchstones described above. In addition, we draw on suggestions provided by study participants for improving the experiences of Latinos/as and the Latino/a community on campus.

**Recommendation #1: Provide a physical space and resources for a Center for Latino/a Affairs**

A Center for Latino/a Affairs would provide visibility to Latinos/as and Latinidad on UD's campus. The center should have several goals including: a) provide a central homebase that nurtures and promotes a shared Latino/a community and that has staff dedicated to understanding and addressing Latino/a student needs or concerns; b) partner with other units on campus to provide proactive strategies for enhancing the racial climate of the university; c) promote programming of matters related to Latinos/as at the local, national, and international level so that all members of UD's community can grow their diversity competencies; d) establish and promote relationships and collaborations with UD Latino/a alumni and with local Latino/a communities; and e) create an intellectual space in which faculty, staff, students, and members of local Latino/a communities can collaborate in scholarship, teaching, or service projects of relevance to Latino/as and Latino/a life. While this center may be strategically housed in a Multicultural Resource Office, there should be a specific component and designated resources devoted to a Center for Latino/a Affairs.

**Recommendation #2: Integrate the lived experiences of Latino/as in the US and the cultures and histories of Latino/a communities into the university's curricular and co-curricular offerings.**

Given the rapid growth, presence, and impact of Latino/a communities in the United States, on the east coast, and in Delaware, it is imperative to provide academic opportunities for Latino/a students to learn more about their own Latino/a backgrounds and communities and for all students to develop expertise to work with Latino/a populations or on issues germane to this population. There are several possibilities for integrating Latino/a studies into UD's curriculum. At minimum, an introductory course on "Latinos/as in the U.S." or "Introduction to Latino/a Studies" should be offered at the university. The College of Arts and Sciences seems like a natural fit to house such a course. However, a plan should also be established for an expanded sequence of Latino/a Studies courses to grow into an interdisciplinary Latino/a Studies Program. Possibilities to explore would be the expansion of the Latin American and Iberian Studies Program or the Black American Studies Program to include a Latino/a Studies track as part of its curriculum or the creation of a new major and program focused on Latino/a Studies.

Initiatives that support faculty and teaching assistants in integrating Latino/a themes into their discipline-specific courses should also be supported. For example, a group of faculty and graduate students might work together to examine their syllabi for inclusion of works by Latino/a authors or attention to contemporary or historical Latino/a themes. Faculty and staff should also examine how co-curricular offerings such as, domestic study abroad options, leadership development programs, summer scholar projects, service-learning projects and other co-curricular opportunities partner with and draw on the assets found in local Latino/a communities. Integrating opportunities for learning about Latino/a communities, cultures, and histories would allow all students to potentially expand their knowledge base, lessening the pressure that students feel to serve as cultural ambassadors and extending the reach of the Latino/a community beyond the RSO's.

**Recommendation #3: Increase the number of Latinos/as across the student (graduate and undergraduate), faculty, and staff stratum.**

Recruiting and retaining a critical mass of Latino/a faculty, staff, administrators, and students is necessary to shift to a campus racial climate where Latinos/as and Latinidad are a visible and vibrant component of



all aspects of university life. As stated in the Diversity Blueprint, recruitment and retention initiatives need to outline specific plans of action, benchmarks, and systems of accountability, and they need to include various constituents from across the university. Specific to the Latino/a population, we recommend that, over the next 10 years, UD set an ambitious goal of increasing the Latino/a undergraduate student population to reflect and mirror the representation of Latinos/as in the United States and in Delaware. The attendance of Latinos in post-secondary institutions is on the rise (Lopez & Fry, 2013), indicating an opportune time for devoting resources to increasing the number of Latino/as at UD. Special attention should be paid to increasing the number of Delaware Latino/a students as well as to Latino/a low-income and first-generation college attenders. All three of these categories are severely underrepresented among Latino/as at UD despite the fact that Latino/a students nationally and in Delaware are more likely to be low-income and first-generation. Nationally, thirty-two percent of Latino children under 18 live in poverty (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015); of Latino children ages 5 to 17, 61% are potential first-generation college students (Baleman & Feng, 2013). Building intentional pipelines that facilitate access and enrollment between middle/high schools with high Latino/a enrollments and UD is necessary. Furthermore, relationships with Latino/a community leaders, UD Latino/a alumni and Latino/a community organizations need to be cultivated and nurtured in ways that make UD more welcoming and accessible to Delaware's Latino/a communities.

Initiatives should be undertaken to increase the number of Latino/as at the administrative, faculty, and staff levels and to explore and address the challenges that they face in their career advancement at UD. Increasing the number of Latino employees at the university and ensuring that Latinos are represented in leadership roles opens up opportunities for Latino/a students to form meaningful connections with similar, in-group role models, which ultimately impacts their sense of fit (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015b; Walton & Cohen, 2007) and performance (Marx & Goff, 2005; Marx & Roman, 2002). Similarly, current Latino/a faculty and staff can more easily build in-group networks of support on campus.

Faculty recruitment initiatives should include cluster hires of faculty with expertise and research interests in Latino/a Studies or whose work centers on Latino/a communities. In this way, the university can be a leader in knowledge production related to U.S. Latinos/as (see Recommendation 2). With appropriate Latino/a representation in critical roles on campus, all students with little exposure to Latino/a people and culture can become educated about the cultural diversity and contributions of Latinos/as.

**Recommendation #4: Continue supporting information gathering and research about UD's and Delaware's Latino/a population and use new understandings to inform campus decisions related to Latino/a students and Latino/a affairs.**

As our study revealed, the Latino/a population at UD is diverse. Projects should be funded to further explore the backgrounds and experiences of Latino/a students so that we may better serve their needs. From what high schools do our current Latino/a students come? What are their prior educational experiences? What are their academic and extracurricular interests? As we conducted this study, we found it difficult to put together a history of Latino/a students at UD. A historical analysis of the experiences of Latinos/as at UD and connections to Delaware's Latino/a history is needed. Information about UD's work with surrounding Latino/a communities is also needed. What work has already been conducted? What opportunities are there for research, teaching, and service work with Latino/a communities? Research models that produce results that the university can use in its diversity work or that center the experiences of local and national Latino/a communities should be promoted and funded by the university.

## **Conclusion**

Despite being the largest group of underrepresented students at the university, the inclusion of Latinos/as and Latinidad at UD is shallow. Both Latino/a and non-Latino/a students at UD would benefit from an expanded integration of Latino/a identities and Latinidad across academic, social, and physical spaces on campus. Rather than expecting Latino/a students to fit into the predominantly white environment, UD ought to change and adapt its campus climate to better embody an identity that reflects and is responsive to the demographic, cultural, and historical changes happening locally and nationally. Only through a deeper and more substantial inclusion can we achieve the benefits of diversity that come from having Latino/a students, faculty, and staff on our campus.

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