

Investing in Latinx Potential

Partnering with the Parent Institute for Quality Education to Advance Servingness for First-Generation Latinx Students at UC San Diego



By Frank A. Silva and Gloria Corral



Author Bios



Frank A. Silva currently serves as Associate Vice Chancellor and Chief of Staff for the office of the Vice Chancellor for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion for the University of California, San Diego (UC San Diego). Prior to his current role, he served in a number of teaching, administrative, and leadership roles within UC San Diego Health Sciences, including the School of Medicine's Hispanic Center of Excellence, where he was responsible for creating, implementing, evaluating, and institutionalizing a four-year longitudinal cultural proficiency curriculum for the UC San Diego School of Medicine. Since 2018, he has served as co-chair for UC San Diego's Latinx/Chicanx Academic Excellence Initiative (LAEI) and Hispanic Serving Institution Task force and workgroup. In 2022, for recognition of his many contributions to and resilient advocacy for the Latinx/Chicanx community at UC San Diego, he was awarded the César Chávez Faculty/Staff Award for exemplary service to Latinx/Chicanx students, staff, and faculty. He has over 20 years of experience administering and managing publicly funded health and social service programs in academic, clinical, and community-based settings.



Gloria Corral is the President and CEO of Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE). She has over 25 years of experience in education policy and program development expertise having worked at the Federal, State and local level during her extensive career. Prior to joining PIQE, Gloria led San Diego's Quality Early Learning efforts along with other key initiatives for children 0-5 and their families. At First 5 San Francisco, she also led the creation of California's first universal high-quality preschool system which has served as an exemplar of best practices. Her experience in K-12 and higher education includes work at the U.S. Department of Education, the House of Representatives and the Senate. Additionally, working at Educational Testing Services (ETS) and WestEd, provided state-level experiences. Her expertise in education policy along with her extensive knowledge of system integration is both from developing policy and implementing programs which has been informed by years of working with state departments of education, local and state non-profits, advocacy organizations and school districts. She holds an undergraduate degree from University of California, San Diego and a master's degree in Public Policy from the University of California, Berkeley.



Background: Investing in Latinx Potential

With 22% Latinx undergraduate student enrollment¹, UC San Diego can be classified as an “emerging Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI)” and as an AAU² member, is one of the nation’s leading public universities dedicated to ensuring high-achieving Latinx students thrive and graduate. As UC San Diego has embraced its emerging HSI status, the institution has made significant advances over the past seven years to develop and expand programs and services to increase student access and success in ways that center Latinx students. Towards this end, the Latinx/Chicanx Academic Excellence Initiative (LAEI) was launched in April 2019. LAEI is modeled as a collective impact initiative designed to ensure that Latinx student populations feel welcomed, supported, and are successful at UC San Diego.

LAEI’s work and activities are grounded in cutting edge research on Latinx students. For example, we ground our work in research that demonstrates that a significant proportion of Latinx students tend to be first-generation, bilingual, and more likely to attend low-resource schools (Buenrostro, 2018; CDE 2021; Ed-Data, 2021; Gandara & Contreras, 2009). Guiding our work is also research that highlights the significance and influence of family on Latinx

students’ college choice and how Latinx families—including parents, guardians, grandparents, aunts, and uncles—play key roles in students’ educational persistence (Marrun, 2018). From this scholarship we have learned that college knowledge can be limited for students and understanding how to navigate college may be challenging (Gonzales et al, 2015; Marrun, 2018; Perez et al, 2015).

In response to these findings, UC San Diego developed college-going and matriculation programming in a way that involves Latinx students’ families while also placing value and integrating their culture (Buenrostro, 2018; Covarrubias, 2021; Gandara & Contreras, 2009). As a means to improve educational attainment for Latinx students, the LAEI/HSI workgroup at UC San Diego recommended exploring partnerships with existing Latinx serving community-based organizations. To this end, UC San Diego partnered with the Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE) to exchange ideas, pool resources, and work collaboratively in the name of Latinx student success. This brief highlights UC San Diego’s ongoing partnership with PIQE and calls attention to the importance of involving community based organizations in the development of parent education and engagement programming to help R1 postsecondary institutions to increase their ability to serve Latinx students.

¹ Enrollment data was pulled from the College Senior Survey, Undergraduate Statistics, accessed on July 10, 2022. For more information visit the UC San Diego Office of Institutional Research website: ir.ucsd.edu

² AAU stands for Association of American Universities, a designation that includes 65 public and private research universities. For more information visit: www.aau.edu

Serving our Latinx Students: Integrating Family and Community through *Conexiones Familiar*

As a nonprofit and community centered organization, PIQE has provided culturally relevant, evidence-based, college-going programming to Latinx families for over 35 years.³ Like UC San Diego, PIQE is dedicated to achieving economic and social equality throughout the educational pipeline. To accomplish this, PIQE provides families with the knowledge and skills needed to ensure children achieve their full potential through post-secondary education. PIQE has longstanding trust with the San Diego Latinx community. This trust, combined with their expertise in Latinx family engagement and programming, addressed an institutional service gap while adding cultural relevance and increased impact to UC San Diego's existing programs. PIQE's signature programs have been studied by independent reviewers, and the results show success in increasing high school graduation rates and college attendance among families who participated in their programs.⁴

Building upon PIQE's existing work and the research on Latinx students, we understood that *familia* and *comunidad* are highly salient cultural values (Marrun, 2018, Covarrubias, 2021). Through this lens, we developed a pilot program called *Conexiones Familiar*, which aims to cultivate servingness⁵ by integrating these cultural values into UC San Diego's services. With PIQE, our goal was to develop trust and increase family and student social capital through repeated, high touch engagement throughout the entire pre-college, college transition, and matriculation process. At the same time, these efforts sought to reduce institutional barriers by coordinating delivery of existing outreach, academic preparation programs, and other college-going services to the families of students from a cluster of Latinx serving high schools located in the South Bay area of San Diego. The overall aim of the project is to center Latinx ways of knowing to improve post-secondary educational attainment of the largest ethno-racial group in California.

In partnership with PIQE, *Conexiones Familiares* seeks to:

1. Increase Latinx familial engagement and affinity with UC San Diego by imparting college-going social capital to families. Together we centered two values that are important to the Latinx community in a way that is culturally relevant. For this reason, we offered sessions both in English and Spanish and relied on bi-cultural, bi-literate staff who are

part of the community and have similar lived experiences to relay college information.

2. Establish within the students and their family's values of independence and interdependence that work together to develop culturally based strategies and mindsets that aid in their retention and success.

3. Increase the overall number of applicants from local communities by delivering a series of pre-college programs to a cohort of students from a cluster of schools within a predominantly Latinx K-12 system. The pre-college programming centers students' cultural capital⁶ by involving family in achieving higher education aspirations and focuses on increasing the number of students eligible in the local context for admission to UC San Diego/UC System.

4. Increase Latinx student utilization of UC San Diego pre-college programs and services.

5. Enhance coordination and delivery of UC San Diego pre-college and outreach programs to local Latinx community.

To meet these goals, the *Conexiones Familiar* program coordinates and delivers programming to high school students and their parents/guardians in a cluster of UC San Diego Early Academic Outreach and TRIO program high schools in the South Bay area of San Diego. As a cohort, parents complete a total of 24 weeks of instruction over three years. The program adapts three of PIQE's signature programs, which in sequential order are: Family Engagement in Education, Shaping the Future—STEM, and Bridge to College. All 24 weeks are offered in both Spanish and English by PIQE and UC San Diego's Latinx staff. The table on the following page illustrates the program's curriculum.

The program culminates in a parent/family graduation ceremony conducted in Spanish and English, with cultural food and music, held at the UC San Diego campus. The graduation is a traditional graduation with a student speaker, selected by the families, a UC San Diego leader as the keynote speaker, and the presentation of diplomas to families. The ceremony is followed by a tour of the campus and presentations about the university's services and programs.

³ See Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE) website for more information: www.piqe.org

⁴ Parent Institute for Quality Education Website. Accessed June 19, 2021: www.piqe.org/research-studies

⁵ The concept of "servingness" comes from Garcia et al (2019) and calls into the question how Hispanic Serving Institutions can "serve" Latinx students beyond enrollment.

⁶ Assets and strengths directly stemming from Latinx culture. See: Yosso, T., (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, Vol. 8, No 1, 69-91.

Conexiones Familiar Curriculum

Year 1: Family Engagement in Education

This is the first point of engagement with the families. This programming focuses on ensuring parents understand the requirements associated with attending university and how to advocate for their child within the K-12 system. It is adapted from eight to eleven weeks, with UC San Diego providing three additional sessions on UC San Diego Admissions, Financial Aid, and DACA/Undocumented student programs.

Year 2: Shaping the Future—STEM

This series is designed to support families in understanding STEM majors and careers in response to the majority of UC San Diego's Latinx students declaring STEM as a major. The series demystifies STEM degrees and careers and helps parents understand the support systems in place for their student to succeed in their major. This series is adapted from a four week into a six week series. UC San Diego sessions include presentations by the university's Latinx STEM faculty, STEM program staff, and Latinx STEM students. Faculty discuss their career, staff review STEM focused programs and services, while students share their personal experience, aspirations, research, and how their parents supported them.

Year 3: Bridge to College

This series is dedicated to helping parents understand how to assist their student in successfully transitioning into university life. The series is adapted from four to six weeks with UC San Diego covering two sessions on residential life, campus safety, and other specialized programs in place to support students.

The Importance of Staying Connected

UC San Diego staff and student employees are present for all courses to address questions and to make personal connections with the parents and guardians. In order to keep contact after each program listed above, parents and guardians are also added to a mailing list to receive:

- UC San Diego's Division of Extended Studies Parent and Caregiver Education program—a virtual program, offered in Spanish and English, that offers ongoing instruction as well as other educational opportunities for parents, grandparents, or other family members who are parenting.
- A newsletter that highlights UC San Diego's academic preparedness programs. This includes services such as SAT preparation, summer research experience, AP Courses, A-G Courses, general education about going to college, and Academic Connections—a residential experience for young scholars to experience academic and student life at UC San Diego.
- Information on three large college-going campus events provided by UC San Diego—*Adelante Latino*, *Adelante Mujer*, and *Comienza con Sueño*. The *Adelante* conferences are in partnership with the Sweetwater Unified School District (a Latinx serving district) and integrate Latinx culture (food, music, etc.). All three are conducted in Spanish and English and provide content for both the child and guardian with a majority of the presenters and speakers being Latinx.
- Targeted admissions outreach and events provided by UC San Diego's Admissions and Financial Aid office in partnership with UC San Diego's Raza Resource Centro.

Maintaining frequent contact with parents and guardians was a critical component of the program's efforts to ensure that Latinx students and their families felt well informed and cared for by UC San Diego. We wanted the Latinx community in San Diego to know that we understood that college-going is a communal effort and that families were encouraged to be a part of the process throughout.

Discussion and Recommendations

Because UC San Diego and PIQE have aligned missions, implementation of the partnership from inception to completion was easily accomplished through a collective impact framework. The partnership has proven to be a successful mechanism to reach local Latinx families whose children are also being provided college-going information, programming, and support through UC San Diego's outreach programs. As such, multiple, longitudinal family inclusive touch points were created between UC San Diego and prospective scholars. The partnership aids in ensuring parents are informed on college-going requirements and aware of and have access to pre-college services provided by UC San Diego; strengthening our commitment to access and educational equity through a culturally informed praxis.

Emerging HSIs can and should begin to invest in the transformation of their campus culture to advance institutional servingness while centering Latinx students' cultural capital. At times, this can be difficult for tier 1 research institutions as they may have cultural competency

practice gaps or lack deep and meaningful access to Latinx communities. Partnership with a trusted community-based organization, that has a similar educational equity mission and history in serving the Latinx community, like PIQE, may facilitate trust by providing a foundation for mutually beneficial collaboration to bring about long-term system change that strengthens servingness for the institution, adding value to the community-based organization's services, while helping to build a family focused reputation for the higher education institution in the community. Through the partnership with PIQE, UC San Diego integrated two key components of Latinx culture—*familia y comunidad* into student programming. Integration of *familia y comunidad* into student support praxis is essential to be a Latinx serving institution and critical in the academic success of Latinx students at UC San Diego. This integration signals to the students, parents, and family that their community and culture is valued. Moreover, doing so encourages and allows students to bring their intersectional identities, lived experiences, and strengths to the institution and thrive.

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