

2019

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Keywords

Diversity, faculty, community colleges, Ethnic Studies, race-related service, emotional labor

Disciplines

Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education | Community College Leadership | Higher Education

Comments

This is a manuscript of an article published as Doran, Erin E., and Paul S. Hengesteg. "Advocating for Mexican American studies in whitestream community colleges: A focus on faculty efforts." *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* (2019). DOI: [10.1037/dhe0000157](https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000157). Posted with permission.

Advocating for Ethnic Studies in Whitestream Community Colleges: A Focus on Faculty Efforts

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The Journal of Diversity in Higher Education

Doran, E.E., & Hengesteg, P.S. (2019). Advocating for Mexican American studies in whitestream community colleges: A focus on faculty efforts. *The Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*. Advance online publication. doi: 10.1037/dhe0000157

Abstract

Ethnic studies programs have recently been the target of positive and negative scrutiny in both the K-12 system and in four-year institutions. There is a critical disconnect in the research on ethnic studies in community colleges, which serve a large proportion of racially minoritized students. Moreover, studies tend to ignore how ethnic studies courses impact faculty. Using a case study approach, this study focuses on the activist actions and emotional labor (Gonzales & Ayers, 2018) of community college faculty to sustain Mexican American Studies programs on their campuses across Texas. We frame these efforts as a type of race-related service (Baez, 2002), laden with significant emotional labor, that faculty members take up to redefine the whitestream space of the college (Urrieta, 2009) and to help the college better reflect its student population. Attention is paid to the ways these faculty work within the system to advocate for programs that reflect the Students of Color who attend these colleges, often leaving them exhausted with racial battle fatigue (Smith, 2004). Further research should consider how ethnic studies courses provide meaningful curricular experiences to students who enroll in these courses while also supporting the faculty who execute these impactful teaching and learning experiences.

Key words: Diversity; faculty; community colleges; Ethnic Studies, race-related service, emotional labor

Advocating for Ethnic Studies in Whitestream Community Colleges: A Focus on Faculty Efforts

At the K-12 level, Mexican American Studies¹ (MAS) has been a polarizing issue as a field of study, particularly in Arizona and Texas, both states with large Latinx populations. The research on ethnic studies programs in the K-12 sector (e.g., de los Ríos, 2013; Sleeter, 2011) and in four-year institutions (Acuña, 2011; Fong, 2008) is growing. The creation of MAS programs of study at community colleges in Texas was the result of legislative action. In 2003, the Texas Legislature passed Senate Bill 286, which added the following text to the Texas Education Code:

The governing board of a public junior college district located in one or more counties with a substantial and growing Mexican American population shall evaluate the demand for and feasibility of establishing a Mexican American studies program or other course work in Mexican American students at one or more junior colleges in the district. With approval of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, the governing board may establish a Mexican American studies program or other course work in Mexican students at any of those colleges if the governing board determines that such a program or course work is desirable and feasible.

Within two months after the bill's signing, El Paso Community College announced a feasibility study to explore this new option (Meritz, 2003).

By the Fall of 2004, Houston Community College (HCC) offered its first MAS courses and expanded its curriculum to include 15 hours of MAS-focused courses in literature,

¹ The authors acknowledge that the name Mexican American Studies is problematic because it ignores the full diversity of Latinx students, particularly around their or their families' countries of origin. In Texas, the most common name for ethnic studies programs focused on the Latinx population is "Mexican American Studies.

humanities, history, politics, and Spanish. HCC began its MAS program at its Southeast campus, chosen specifically because of a higher concentration of Latinx students (Perez, 2004). The first Director of the MAS program, in speaking to the local press, noted that the college was, “trying to broaden its curriculum to reflect the culture of the Latino group, to promote cultural diversity” and that the program received interest from students across demographic groups (Perez, 2004). The Director communicated her hope that the MAS program would engage the community through events and would encourage the recruitment, retention, and transfer of Latinx students at the campus.

The connection of the MAS program with the local community and with efforts to boost the long-term success of Latinx students was a common thread to explain and support the establishment of these programs in various colleges. In 2008, Del Mar College in Corpus Christi offered a course on Mexican American politics that taught students about the ties the local community had with the broader Chicano Movement given that it was the birthplace of Dr. Hector P. Garcia, an influential activist and one of the founders of the American GI Forum (“Course would please Garcia,” 2008). Both the American GI Forum and the League of United Latin American Citizens, two significant Latinx advocacy groups, were founded in the same city as Del Mar (Marquez, 1989; San Miguel, 1983). By 2011, Del Mar expanded its MAS offerings from a single course to a major (Villarreal, 2011). That same year, South Texas College opened a Center for Mexican-American Studies to augment the MAS major that had been offered by the college since 2007 (Morton, 2011). For one of the Center’s co-directors, Victor Gomez, the creation of the Center tapped into the same trajectory MAS programs at four-year institutions followed to expand its footprint on its campus (Morton, 2011). On following those footsteps,

Gomez remarked, “We’re happy to tap that activist motivation to get more and keep more Mexican-Americans in higher education today.”

However, there is a lack of research on ethnic studies programs in the community college sector. Although MAS programs had been present at larger, more prestigious four-year institutions in Texas since the 1960s, the community college districts could not claim the same. Action was taken to remedy this in an effort to serve more people, especially the large Latinx population, and to diversify the academic pipeline across institutional types. However, as the article illustrates, the creation and sustainability of MAS programs in community colleges in Texas has not always been smooth, and has had personal costs for the people who run them.

The purpose of this study is to present data on MAS programs located in Hispanic-Serving community colleges in Texas. Specifically, this study focused on the faculty who founded and nurtured these programs and fought for their legitimacy as a field of study within their institutions. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What led to the creation of MAS as a field of study for community colleges in Texas?
2. What challenges do MAS faculty encounter in creating and sustaining these programs?
3. What is the emotional labor of faculty associated with advocating for MAS programs?

The place of MAS programs in community colleges, especially in majority-minority states, is notable for several reasons. Despite the reality that the two-year campuses that offer MAS programs in Texas are Hispanic-Serving Institutions, simply having such a program does not equate to “serving” Latinx students. Instead, it is important to look at where MAS programs and broader ethnic studies programs interact with other parts of the institution (Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015). Harper and Antonio (2008) suggest a balance of four forms of diversity that institutions need to consider when creating an inclusive environment for students. First is structural

diversity, which focuses on “the extent to which a student population is racially and ethnically diverse” (p. 6). This is often accomplished by tracking the numbers of people in each category and reporting these findings in fact books. The second is interactional diversity which involves physical interactions with those whose identities are different from one’s own. Third, cocurricular diversity is identifiable as the multitude of events, workshops, trainings, lectures (and similar) that foster important learning outside the classroom. Finally, the fourth form of diversity is curricular diversity, which are academic courses, programs, or content that focus on diversity-related topics.

As the model offered by Harper and Antonio (2008) indicates, there is more to “doing diversity” than simply enrolling more Students of Color. Rather than focusing exclusively on the numbers behind structural diversity, institutions need a balance of four different types of diversity, including curricular diversity: “Simply enrolling a diverse student body is not enough. Scattering the campus with assorted diversity programs is also insufficient. Inattention to the entire campus effort is likely to yield, at best, mixed results” (p. 9). Moreover, they indicate that being intentional and coordinated in diversity efforts is vitally important, especially if institutions say they are committed to diversity and, by extension, serving, racially minoritized students in meaningful ways. Finally, the authors indicate the weak institutional commitment to diversity efforts is glaringly obvious to students.

Literature Review

Since the Great Recession of 2008, community colleges have received increased attention from the Obama Administration as places for vocational and technical training and as a lower-cost means of attaining some kind of postsecondary credential (White House Higher Education, n.d.). Community college training would then have positive ripple effects throughout the

economy, creating jobs for a more highly trained workforce (Lewin, 2012). Often cited for their open-door admissions policies (Bragg, 2001), their reputation for offering an inroad to postsecondary education for students who would not otherwise have the chance make community colleges attractive and feel within reach (Dougherty, 1998; Rose, 2012). However, researchers have questioned whether or not the community college is truly a democratizing force in higher education that provides access to higher education to those who may not otherwise go to college (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Dougherty, 1994; Schudde & Goldrick-Rab, 2015). However, this sector is the most important entry point into higher education for Latinx students.

The overrepresentation of Latinx students in the community college sector is well documented (Hagedorn, Chi, Cepeda, & McLain, 2006; Llagas & Snyder, 2003; Melguizo, 2009). Latinx students choose to attend community colleges for a number of reasons, their lower costs (Kurlaender, 2006) that enable students to live at home or close to home and contribute to their families (Núñez, Sparks, & Hernández, 2011). They also view the programs and curricular offerings in this sector positively and view community colleges as a positive place to start their college careers (Harper-Marinick, 2016). On the other hand, it is also well-documented that Latinx students do not transfer to four-year universities or complete their degree or certificate programs at comparable rates to other racial groups, and they may have negative experiences in the community college including cultural mismatch and discrimination that may keep them from completing their degree or credential programs (Arbona & Nora, 1996; Crisp, Nora, & Taggart, 2015). Providing MAS programs and classes may be one way to counteract these negative experiences in college (Núñez, 2011). Though her study took place on a four-year campus, Núñez (2011) found that Chicax students enrolled in MAS courses felt less isolated after taking classes with other Chicax students, they developed a deeper awareness of their cultural heritage

that gave them a larger sense of empowerment, they formed stronger relationships with faculty members, and learned how to form better connections with others who did not share their cultural background. In all, the experience of taking Chicana Studies enhanced students' academic experiences and gave them a better sense of their selves as they made the transition to a large university.

Similarly, Hurtado (2005) also confirmed the benefits of MAS programs and courses are tangible and transformative. In addition to providing important visibility to Latinx students, these courses and their content can offer opportunities for an insider's view on topic at hand. In turn, this plants the seeds for revolutionary scholarship by breaking the bonds of epistemic hierarchies (Grosfoguel, 2012). Courses like these, as will be noted in our findings, create opportunities for unique pedagogical practices that yield researchers, teachers, administrators, and activists inside and outside the institution who are dedicated to social change.

Community Colleges as Whitestream Space

Despite their overrepresentation in community colleges, we argue that when Latinx students enter the community college, they enter what Urrieta (2009) referred to as a "whitestream" space. Throughout the K-12 literature, researchers noted that Students of Color, including Latinx students, have endured systematic discrimination and trauma in an educational system that was not built to serve them (e.g., Valencia, 2010, 2015; Valenzuela, 2010). To counteract this oppressive environment, Urrieta (2009) called for the increased representation of Chicana teachers in the K-12 system. In short, "Because whitestream curricula and pedagogy in U.S. schools does not nurture ethnic/racial minority identities, K-12 schooling is in need of more Chicana and Chicano activist teachers and their allies with social justice agendas" (Urrieta, 2009, p. 155). In Arizona, this type of activism manifested itself as a Mexican American Studies

elective added as a high school elective in the late 1990s in the Tucson Unified School District (Lundholm, 2011). The district became a galvanizing site of advocacy and resistance for Chicana/Latina educators from 2010 through 2017 when the state banned ethnic studies courses and a legal fight ensued. Scholarship from the Arizona context (e.g., Cammarota & Romero, 2014) demonstrated the potential power of these programs in promoting the retention and graduation of Latina high school students who completed MAS courses. Cabrera, Jacquette, Milem, and Marx's (2014) quantitative analysis found that the achievement gap between low-income Latina students and their White counterparts virtually disappeared when Latina students took MAS courses in high school, and the likelihood of their success increased with the number of MAS courses they took.

Urrieta (2009) also argued that, "Chicana and Chicano activism is important at all levels of whiteman schooling" (p. 155). This importance extends to the postsecondary level. Núñez (2011) found that Chicana Studies classes at a public four-year institution provided first-generation Latina students with countervailing space to process discrimination they may have felt on campus, to develop a sense of pride in their racial/ethnic heritage, and to form a greater sense of community with students and faculty on campus. As Sealey-Ruiz (2012) found in her first-year seminar course at a community college, developing racial literacy is necessary. Within her mixed-race composition course, her students "found a platform from which to work out how they felt and what they believed and understood about race and racism as enacted in society and playing out in their lives" (p. 395). As such, the positive outcomes of MAS courses and programs – developing pride, establishing community, processing discrimination, writing about societal concerns, fostering racial literacy – are available to Students of Color and White students alike. To date, there is very little research that examined the place of ethnic studies programs in

community colleges specifically, a sector of postsecondary education where Students of Color, especially Latinx students, are overrepresented. More than anything, researchers have noted the presence of ethnic studies programs in community college without much more detail (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Piland, Piland, & Hess, 1999). It was noted that the number of ethnic studies and women's studies programs in community colleges decreased between 1975 and 1991 and rebounded by 1998 with 26% of community colleges offering such programs (Piland, Piland, & Hess, 1999). Swayze (1994) disaggregated data on ethnic studies programs more precisely and indicated that 29% of two-year institutions nationally offered courses focused on Mexican American Studies. This study contributes to this gap in the literature by providing a case study analysis of ethnic studies programs, more specifically Mexican-American Studies programs, across six community colleges in Texas and focuses on the challenges of the faculty leaders who manage these programs to create and sustain them. While their place on community college campuses does not have the longevity as their four-year counterparts, their foundation is built on the advocacy of the Chicana Movement.

The Birth of Ethnic Studies Programs

The birth of ethnic studies was a result of the tumultuous social movements of the 1960s, especially the Civil Rights Movement, the Chicana Movement, the Women's Movement, anti-Vietnam War protests, and other student-led actions (Boren, 2013; Fong, 2008). More Latinx students, predominantly students of Mexican and Mexican American descent, were enrolled in colleges around the country in the 1960s than ever before (Rosales, 1997). In 1968, a five-month long protest at San Francisco State College (now San Francisco State University) led to the first ethnic studies program in the country (Acuña, 2015; Fong, 2008). Throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, Latinx and Chicana students, families, and community-based organizations participated

in protests that demanded equity in educational access in K-12 and higher education and the establishment of MAS programs (Acuña, 2015; San Miguel, Jr. & Donato, 2010). Ethnic studies programs, including African American Studies and Asian American Studies, spread throughout the 1970s and 1980s, predominantly at public institutions in the western part of the United States (Hu-DeHart, 1993).

Decolonizing higher education. Acuña (2010) argued that the purpose of Chicana Studies program was to combat the staggering lag in Latinx educational attainment rates as well as to increase Latinx representation on higher education campuses. This sentiment was expressed in *El Plan de Santa Barbara*, a document produced in 1969 which outlined a mission and action plan for Latinx organizers for higher education. The Plan stated:

We recognize that without a strategic use of education, an education that places values on what we value, we will not realize our destiny...For these reasons Chicano Studies represent the total conceptualization of the Chicano community's aspirations that involve higher education (Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education, 1969, p. 9-10).

Among other key points, the Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education (1969) called for "a curriculum program and an academic major relevant to the Chicano cultural and historical experience" (p. 10).

As noted above, the need for a curriculum that reflects the student population is well-documented, especially for Latinx students. Previous research (Nora & Crisp, 2009; Rendón, 1994) has noted that Latinx students may struggle to acclimate to college, especially when they do not see themselves in the curriculum. One way of connecting students' personal lives with

their academic lives is through ethnic studies programs that enable students to relate to course material in transformative ways that boost their academic success (Sleeter, 2011).

The Underrepresentation of Latinx Faculty in Postsecondary Education

As pointed out by Townsend and Twombly (2007), community college faculty are critically understudied in the higher education research. The argument can be made that the experiences of faculty of color are even more under-documented considering how small their numbers are compared to their White counterparts in both the two-year and four-year levels. Despite the presence of large numbers of Students of Color across racial/ethnic groups across the country, the faculty ranks of community college do not reflect the students they serve (Bower, 2002; Isaac & Boyer, 2007).

It is important to note that the gap in degree attainment between Latinxs and other racial/ethnic groups is even more pronounced beyond the bachelor's degree level. While the number of Latinx students entering master's and doctoral degree programs has increased since 2003, only 3% of Latinx graduates report a master's degree as their highest degree and less than 1% of Latinx graduates hold a terminal degree (Santiago, Calderón Galdeano, & Taylor, 2015). Only 5% of community college faculty nationally were identified as Latinx (Provasnik & Planty, 2008). Given the Whiteness of the community college space, Latinx faculty may take up the establishment and support of MAS programs as a sort of race-related service within their institution, or what Baez (2002) defined as a means to "redefine oppressive structures through service, thus, exercising an agency that emerges from the very structures that constrain it" (p. 363).

Theoretical Framework

This study drew on two ideas related to the work of community college faculty: first, Urrieta's (2009) work on working within whitestream schools and second, on the emotional labor of community college faculty (Gonzales & Ayers, 2018).

Whitestream Spaces and *Tranzas*

Urrieta's (2009) work on Chicax educators in K-12 settings in Arizona was applicable because it specifically focused on how these educators moved within predominantly White spaces in order to change them through *tranzas* (transactions). *Tranzas* are those actions that activists make in order to become part or move within a system in order to advance themselves or a cause. Despite their underrepresentation in the educational systems, Urrieta's ethnographic study of Chicax teachers in Arizona revealed that they exercised a good amount of activist agency that was embedded in their daily practice. Early on in his study, Urrieta admitted that he felt that the Chicax teachers he observed had capitulated to a racist, oppressive system and chose to assimilate. After spending more time with them, he found that instead that these teacher/activists were "playing the game":

Playing the game can be seen as a systemic *tranzas* that Chicana and Chicano activist educators engage in or try to subvert the injustices of the whitestream and also the malestream system. Playing the game is a conscious choice that individuals make to participate in (individually or in the collectivity) the game, knowing full well that there is the possibility of winning or losing. In order to strategize or play in the game, individuals have to study the game first, decode power, and devise strategies to resist and subvert power. Power is never fully demonstrated. There are spoken and unspoken rules, and the basis to maintain

power lies in the fact that rules can, and often do, change to maintain the status quo or to limit access” (Urrieta, 2009, p. 169-170).

What is compelling about this work and its application to the present study is the acknowledgement of power through people, policies, and institutional structures and the formal and informal ways that educators work to resist and dismantle them. We argue that the actions taken to build and support ethnic studies programs in community colleges have the same intention.

Emotional Labor

This activist and resistance work is not without its personal and emotional tolls. Gonzales and Ayers (2018) argued that a limited number of community college faculty serve a vital role in the connection of a student to the institution, often serving in roles beyond that of professor, such as counselor, advocate, and role model. For underrepresented students in particular, community college faculty are often the lynchpin to the success of students transferring to four-year schools. These faculty are always emotionally available to their students and are expected to expend such emotional labor without compensation, logically yielding dissatisfaction, burnout, and turnover. As Gonzales and Ayers (2018) described, “Community colleges (and likely other public higher education organizations) rely upon faculty members’ emotion—particularly their sense of commitment to serve—to compensate for insufficient fiscal resources” (p. 457). As such, faculty members may be expected to teach extra classes or take on heavier advising and mentoring loads of underrepresented students in fulfillment of their college’s mission without the expectation of workload adjustments (e.g., a course release to free up time to advise) or additional salary.

Mahoney, Buboltz, Buckner, and Doverspike (2011) defined emotional labor to be a series of internal and external states-of-being, behaviors, and expressions that comprise the

reflexive awareness and response to (positive and negative) stimuli. They articulated that the management of one's feelings covers a spectrum of fake and genuine feelings and responses that create dissonance on a daily basis. The research on emotional labor has focused on various service industries, but its focus in education has not yet been fully explored (Gonzales & Ayers, 2018). This study adds to the body of literature, and focuses specifically on those faculty in the community colleges.

Though not directly addressed under the title "emotional labor," we observe that there are connections between the emotional labor described by Gonzales and Ayers (2018) and Smith's (2004) concept of racial battle fatigue. From a holistic perspective, the concept of racial battle fatigue focused on the many physical, physiological, and behavioral responses one can have due to race-related stress from encountering microaggressions continually in a work or educational space (Franklin, Smith, & Hung, 2014). In their study on Latinx college students, Franklin and colleagues found that racial battle fatigue caused a number of responses including a lack of sleep, physical pain (e.g., back aches), and mood changes.

It is not only faculty in MAS programs that experience hardship in challenging teaching environments. In her study with 51 gay and lesbian teachers in K-12 classrooms in California and Texas, Connell (2015) found that these teachers were always under the microscope of judgement because of their sexual orientation. As a result, teachers in the study navigated a personal/professional dialectic, that is, being stuck between taking pride in one's self and taking pride in one's job, even though the narrative of "professionalism demands a classroom presentation of sexual neutrality, which...is actually not neutral at all but rather a sexually *normative* presentation of self" (Connell, 2015, p. 9, emphasis original). Although the present study does not investigate sexual orientation, we draw a parallel between what is considered

“professional” pedagogy or curricular content for an ethnic studies course and the personal lived realities of the people (faculty and students alike) who engage with class. To borrow Connell’s notion of *normative*, the structures in place at the community colleges in our study suggest a desired White-washing in order to either adhere to the dominant narrative of Latinx history (at best) or an outright elimination (at worst).

Methods

This study utilized a holistic, multiple-case study methodology to focus on the actions of the MAS faculty coordinators who created and currently sustain these programs across six two-year community colleges in Texas. Case studies analyze a real-life event, context, or phenomenon (the “case”) within a bounded system (Yin, 2014), and here the bounded system is Mexican American Studies programs at Hispanic-Serving community colleges in Texas. A holistic approach to this method was used in order to hone in on MAS programs across multiple sites in order to look for commonalities, points of departure, and overall, a more macro-level perspective of how these programs operate in their colleges.

Data Sources Case studies call for the collection and analysis of multiple data sources (Hays & Singh, 2012; Yin, 2014). The bulk of the data from this study came from a larger project where interviews with a total 18 faculty members across multiple community college campuses dispersed across Texas. In order to participate in the larger study, faculty members had to be 18 years of age or older and teach in the MAS program on their campus. For this present study, the interviews from 8 faculty members who were past or current coordinators or administrators of their respective MAS programs were included to focus on the leadership aspects of these programs. All the participants in the current study identified as Latinx or Chicanx. Table 1 presents information on the participants in this study.

<<Insert Table 1 here>>

To recruit participants, the first author contacted faculty who teach courses in the MAS programs as well as other faculty and staff members listed as sponsors of student groups related to the academic programs who could connect the first author with more faculty members who may have previously taught in the program. Interviews took place at a time and location according to each participants' preferences. The first author audio-recorded the interviews and used a semi-structured interview protocol to discuss: the inception and development of the MAS programs; how these programs were supported by the campus; and the experience of teaching MAS courses to community college students. The interviews ranged in length from one to two hours. Interviews were transcribed, and transcripts were provided to each participant in order to solicit participant feedback on their accuracy.

Additional data were collected for this project to round out the researchers' understanding of the complex context of MAS programs in Texas. These data include Texas legislative documents, program documents (e.g., recruitment materials, strategic plans), and websites from the participants, and news clippings (print, online, and television) dating back to 2000. In all, these data helped set the context for how and why colleges developed their programs, how they recruited students, and how they communicated to broader audiences (e.g., administrators, community members) the importance of MAS programs. Most of these sources were collected online; others such as recruitment materials and strategic plans were provided to the first author by the participants.

Institutional Context. It is worth noting that while the campuses where participants taught are dispersed geographically throughout Texas and differed in their levels of

urbanity/rurality and their proximity to the United States-Mexico border, all the colleges in this study are Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs). HSIs represent a federal category of two-year and four-year postsecondary institutions that have a student body that is at least 25% Latinx (undergraduate, FTE; Núñez, Hurtado, & Calderón Galdeano, 2015). On average, Latinx students comprised approximately 73% of the population on the campuses represented in this study (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2018). Despite the aforementioned lack of representation in postsecondary faculty, previous research noted that two-year HSIs tend to have a higher concentration of Latinx faculty members (Laden, 2001). While their presence does not disrupt the “whitestream” nature of community colleges as a sector of a broader postsecondary system that has historically served majority students, there is a correlation between the proportion of Latinx students in each institution’s population and the willingness of the participants to teach at their institutions and to take up the work of building MAS programs. We posit that the presence of this faculty represents a more local disruption, and their efforts to create MAS programs is a way to infuse content into the college curriculum previously left out. For diversity efforts in higher education to be sustainable, Harper and Antonio (2008) argued that they

must be thoughtful, intentional, proactive, coordinated, and comprehensive. Simply enrolling a diverse student body is not enough. Scattering the campus with assorted diversity programs is also insufficient. Inattention to the entire campus effort is likely to yield, at best, mixed results” (p. 9).

Data Analysis

Reflexive journals were kept throughout the data collection and analysis process to make sense of emergent themes. In the first round of coding the interview transcripts, initial coding

techniques (Saldaña, 2009) were used to get a sense of the emerging themes from each participants' interviews. Axial coding was used in the second round (Saldaña, 2009) in order to help develop themes (e.g., "support from administrators," "legitimacy"). Closely related themes were consolidated for better organization, and several preliminary themes are discussed below.

Trustworthiness

Several trustworthiness measures were employed to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings in this study. The aforementioned reflexive journals provided a space where emergent findings could be noted, but they also provided space where the first author in particular could bracket her feelings or assumptions during the data collection process. Second, the researchers sent copies of individual interviews to each respective participants so they had the chance to provide feedback on their accuracy and to redact any parts they felt uncomfortable with. Finally, the researchers used participant feedback by sending drafts of this full article with aggregated findings to several participants. By doing so, the participants were able to weigh in on the final conclusions of this work and the plausibility of the findings.

Researcher Positionalities

The first author identifies as a multiethnic woman who identifies strongly with her Mexican American heritage and who was born, raised, and educated in Latinx-majority spaces in Texas. Despite having graduated from a large four-year HSI, she was unaware of the presence of MAS classes at her school until she was a doctoral student. Her curiosity in MAS programs in community colleges piqued in 2015 when MAS students from these programs became involved in activism at the Texas legislature in favor of these programs. The second author is a doctoral student studying higher education administration with a graduate minor in women's and gender studies. His primary research interests include LGBTQ+ faculty and social justice education,

among other topics. As a gay man, he is reflexive about the ways his identities have and will influence his teaching and scholarship.

Limitations

No study is without limitations, and this study is not an exception. First, we note that despite efforts to contact faculty across all institutions in Texas that offer MAS programs, not all colleges (and by extension, geographic areas in Texas) are represented in this data. For example, the researchers were unable to recruit participants from the Austin and Dallas/Fort Worth areas. No Spanish or government/politics instructors agreed to participate in this study, so these disciplinary perspectives are missing. As a result, the faculty participants in this study do not represent all the disciplines of the MAS field of study in Texas.

Findings

The bachelor's degree program in ethnic studies was established at the University of Texas at Austin in 1970 (THECB, n.d.), but community colleges could not offer degrees in MAS until the field of study was authorized by the Texas Legislature in 2003. As is reflected in the findings below, MAS programs were established in Texas community colleges once the state Legislature acknowledged the growing presence of Latinx students enrolling in that sector and authorized the state's community colleges to establish such programs if they saw fit to do so. From there, faculty at individual colleges were tasked with building these programs up, a process often filled with emotion and campus politics.

“If it's not one thing, it's another”: The Struggle to Build Up MAS Programs

A notable commonality from all these MAS coordinators was that of a struggle—that the fight for survival and legitimacy was simply a part of *la lucha* (the fight). Borrowing from the

language of the Chicano Movement, *la lucha* here refers to the struggle to create a community college curriculum that reflects its student demographics.

Administrative obstacles. Six of the participants discussed the support MAS programs received in the form of lip service—and not much else. For example, nearly all the program coordinators noted that MAS classes tended to make (or meet their enrollment requirements to run for the semester) much later than other courses within the core curriculum like general U.S. History or American Literature courses. Josefina gave details of the constant effort to recruit and convince students to enroll in MAS courses and noted that when given extra time before the semester to enroll students, the courses would typically make. However, a change in college administration meant that this cushion was not always promised, and if classes were canceled, the ability to recruit students into more courses within the field of study diminished. What faculty needed were *tranzas* in the form of more lenient or understanding policies related to enrollment in MAS courses to help the viability of the courses.

Sebastián faced constant scrutiny from his college administration over the enrollment and completion numbers of the MAS program on his campus. At the same time, he pointed out that he ran the MAS program without any budget from the college, which became a way to justify its continuance:

One of the things I like to brag about, and I mention to people, whenever anybody questions the viability of my program here, I always ask them, and it's usually administrators here at the institution, I asked them, I said, "Do you know what my budget is?" They're like, "No, tell us what your budget is." I'm like, it's zero. I've always had a zero budget line. The institution cannot claim that it's not viability, because there's no investment in it. And I produce graduates. There's no other

program here that can say the same thing. I'm the only program with a zero budget that produces graduates. This is one of the ways I stave off any attacks. It pretty much ends there.

Sebastián's commitment to creating graduates despite the obstacles placed in front of the MAS program could be interpreted as a carefully planned *tranza* on his part to shut down critics of his program. In the face of budgetary constraints, he responded with careful mentoring and recruitment plans that he led to ensure that the program could respond to administrators' challenges with evidence of success.

Leticia spoke of her struggles to get a MAS course into the core curriculum at her campus. She tried several times and was blocked each time by bureaucratic functions that seemed to pass-the-buck to avoid the topic:

The first year I was told, "Oh no, we're not going to add anything to our core right now because we're waiting for some changes from the state." I'm like, "Okay." Then the second year I went ahead and go through the big process because you have to go through your curriculum review team and the district, then they talk about it and then they have to agree on it. Then it goes to the Vice Chancellor, the Chancellor and the presidents and they agree on it.

She continued, noting that when playing by the rules of the game to get a course into the core curriculum, MAS courses and programs are at a distinct disadvantage:

The second year, I went through the whole process and apparently, it passed. That's what I was told, but I don't get to go to those meetings. There's a certain select committee that's there, and so low and behold, I check online and we're not in the core. We're not actually in the catalog. There was miscommunication

somehow. I don't know who blocked it, right? It's just not in the core. I had all of the paperwork. We had agreed to everything. I had worked with all of these discipline coordinators...and there's one discipline coordinator from [another community college]...but she always blocks these types of courses. Now her argument is, "Well, they don't make," and she's probably right. They don't make at [her community college]...at our college, it will make.

Leticia's comment that she was not allowed to attend certain meetings adds to the notion that faculty in these programs may not be invited to the table to advocate on their own behalf, much less the students they aim to serve. She also highlighted a struggle that is common in higher education: when working for consensus, one or two individuals can derail an otherwise supportable movement. In this case, it is difficult to determine whether it is an individual blocking progress, or a system.

Leticia and Saul, being part of the same district, also brought up the struggles that these programs faced by the state. Once issues at her college settled down and she was able to get MAS courses added to the core curriculum, she noted that a state senator introduced legislation that would ban ethnic studies courses from the state core. She summarized her struggle to coordinate the program as, "If it's not one thing, it's another." Saul argued that he saw the state and his own college's willingness to invest \$1.6 million in a cosmetology program, but administrators were unwilling to allocate money to the MAS program for scholarships, the promotion of the program, space and salaries for faculty, and to foster relationships with community-based organizations.

Jesus also addressed the ways in which constantly changing rules disrupted the MAS program and its requirements. For instance, the list of courses for the MAS degree

at his college required students to take an intermediate Spanish course, which he pointed out problematically assumed that all students were proficient enough in Spanish to take an intermediate course for credit. This barrier effectively added two additional classes for non-proficient students to take as prerequisites before the course for the MAS degree. This problem also revealed some of Jesus's colleagues' misunderstandings of MAS students. As Jesus put it, "People would argue, 'Well, they could cut [the Spanish language requirement] out.' Well, that's a false assumption to think that all students interested in MAS are Spanish proficient." In addition to balancing state requirements and transfer policies, Jesus also had to combat the assumptions made about the type of student who took MAS courses.

Responding to challenges of legitimacy. Three faculty members, Josefina, Leticia, and Carmen, described incidents with other faculty on their campuses that called into question the usefulness of their program or where their efforts to build up the program was stifled. In Josefina's case, an older, White faculty member voiced his assumptions about the MAS curriculum. As Josefina described, "He felt that Mexican-American Studies was something from the 1970s that was outdated...that it wasn't really that important nowadays and that it was backwards because it was so rooted in the '70s and not what's going on today." This argument appears baseless, considering that participants across the board named recent issues (e.g., the changing policy surrounding undocumented students and those who have applied for DACA², the 2016 Presidential election) that they discuss in their classes.

² The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program was established under the Obama Administration in 2012 to provide temporary protection from deportation and a work permit to people who were brought to the United States as children illegally (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, n.d.). DACA was rescinded by Donald Trump in September, 2017, and at the time of the writing, its status is uncertain.

In Leticia's case, the anti-MAS attitudes were more covert. In attempting to add more MAS-focused courses into the core, Leticia discovered that colleagues on college-wide committees who did not support the MAS courses would vote against efforts to move the program forward. Leticia, along with Saul who worked in the same college district, found themselves in a Catch-22: Courses would not make if they were not part of the core curriculum because students wanted to take courses that were guaranteed to transfer. However, the argument made against these courses making when they went to approval votes was that they did not make. Leticia noted multiple times in her tenure as program coordinator at her college where she had to show up at meetings to represent MAS when no one else would or to organize faculty, even in the form of petitions, to advocate for MAS causes.

“I'm just tired of fighting”: The Emotional Labor of Teaching in MAS Programs

Leticia was clear that the ways in which other discipline coordinators kept her out of key conversations like including MAS courses in the course catalog left her “really pissed off.” But after describing the whole tenure as the coordinator (about six years total), Leticia found herself emotionally and mentally burned out. In reflection she said, “Right now, I'm just tired of fighting. I really am, and I just need to pick and choose my battles. When you're a coordinator, I just felt like the battles on all the time and I just needed to take a step backward now.”

Within the classroom, MAS faculty encountered students who are dealing with profound anxieties due to the current political climate of the United States. This, in turn, required a different sort of emotional labor for faculty in terms of dealing with students who live in real fear of deportation or discrimination as well as the weight of responsibility for exposing students to a curriculum that focuses on students' backgrounds. For instance, Carmen shared,

I'm not saying this to show off or anything but on a daily basis I have students thanking me, whether it's in person or through e-mail, on a daily basis. Every single day I'm humbled by this and terrified simultaneously because it's a huge responsibility. Every day I'm also terrified that I'm going to push a student a little too far and they're going to get hurt by this history. It doesn't feel good to see that this is the way the world sees you.

This accomplishment did not come without a personal toll on Carmen. She described the emotional and physical burden of teaching in these programs, which she directly attributed to racial battle fatigue.

Teaching MAS in the Age of Donald Trump.

Most of the participants also described the specific challenges of teaching two polarized student populations: those who held pro-Trump political beliefs and those who were negatively impacted by the rhetoric of the Donald Trump campaign and subsequent administration. Josefina actively tried to steer away from today's politics because of her college's policy that faculty appear neutral. However, she encountered undocumented students who openly discussed their situations in class, and that type of neutrality, especially when undocumented students openly cried, was difficult to maintain.

As Sebastián described, conditions on the college campus are not the only aspects of faculty life that add to the emotional toll of the participants. He aptly points out that challenges to progress for Latinx peoples are not just in the ivory tower, but also in varying levels of state and federal government. Although disappointing, he contended that being able to identify these types of people can be helpful:

Even more so today with a racist president in the White House. With a racist staff in the White House. With a racist governor, Austin, and a racist lieutenant governor. Those are challenges. I remind people saying, let's not lose sight of that. That is a challenge. Now at least we're facing these guys, they're not in their white robes and white hoods, they're wearing their suits and ties, but at least we're facing them in a way that's very public. Yes, they're emboldened, they're empowered now, but they're easier to identify. Those challenges, they're coming at us straight on, whereas before we had to be very aware, vigilant, of the subversions that they would attempt.

Through his teaching, Sebastián showed students how to channel their emotions (e.g., anger, fear) into actions that could be beneficial to protecting and advocating for the communities. In addition to bringing in a distinctly Latinx curriculum specifically from the Southwest into his MAS courses and his literature courses, Sebastián also routinely brought in speakers from the local community to talk with students about civic issues. His students typically respond with anger, but as Sebastián went on, he discussed how he moves students from anger to community engagement:

I tell them, get riled up, feel it. Deal with it in a healthy way. What's an outlet? Get involved. Find a way to get involved. Reconcile that emotion. It is a necessary part of your being. Not your Brown being, not your activist being, just being a human. Reconcile it. Yes, our country's messed up. Look what's happening today. Does it piss us off? Yes, it should. Deal with it. Find an effective way to reconcile these emotions, but work with those emotions as constructively as you can.

Sebastián unapologetically connected course content with students' communities to help them find ways to make a positive difference once they left his classroom.

The positive aspects of teaching MAS. Despite the challenges that faculty faced in the day-to-day operation of their programs, and the emotional toll it took on many of them, the participants of the study were very clearly able to identify positive outcomes for the students. For several of the faculty, they spoke of their Latinx students regaining and (re)claiming a piece of their own histories because it had never been taught to them previously. Nadia discussed how one student reflected on the importance of MAS that impacted more people than the students who take the courses:

One young woman talked about her brother and sister [who] had taken Mexican American studies classes when they were in high school and she was much younger, and how they taught her not to be ashamed of being brown. How she didn't like being brown, how she once stopped eating chocolate because some grandparent had told her that if you eat chocolate, you're going to get darker, and how she learned to accept her dark coloring and her hair, her coarse, thick hair. How these classes, now that she's taking them, she's proud to be someone who's brown, and she's not ashamed of it.

Additionally, Sebastián remarked that many students use his class as a place to process current events or the multiple messages surrounding them, many of them negative, about race in the U.S.:

The classroom is a safe place for them to vent. They come in and they learn that White is not a dirty word. Brown is not a dirty word. Black is not a dirty word.

You don't have to feel discomfort in mixed company when you use those words.

We talk, of course, about those labels, and how we apply them.

Finally, it is important to point out that students did not need to be Latinx to appreciate and enjoy MAS courses. Carmen, who uses significant amounts of trauma theory in her pedagogy, saw a number of White students and veteran students in her classroom. She said, “They came in thinking they would not relate at all because they're not Mexican American. Then they're surprised that they do and somehow in the process learned more about themselves than they ever thought they would.” She continued, noting that veteran students connect with the material via their own post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and come “to be [her] biggest allies in the class” when she assumed they would be heavy resisters when discussing the negative things our country has done to racially minoritized people. White resistance, according to Jones (2008), can manifest in many forms in the classroom “from the brutally obvious to the silent, obscure to transparent, and planned to unintended” (p. 73). Examples of White resistance might include victim blaming, not wanting to talk about race, provocation, or even silence. Jones states that resistance is a symptom of cognitive dissonance experienced by the students who are struggling between old and new knowledges and the unsettling feeling of exploring one’s own racial (and other identity categories) privilege. Carmen’s early presumption of White resistance is not unfounded, so it is encouraging to learn about exceptions and is a tribute to her student-centered teaching methods that tamper that resistance.

Discussion

The community college campuses where the participants teach are in a majority-minority state where the Latinx populations constitutes just under 40% of the state population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). The campuses themselves are all Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and the

plurality of students who enroll at community colleges in Texas are Latinx at 43.2% of the population in Fall 2016 (Texas Higher Education Almanac, 2017). Despite the undeniable presence of Latinx students on these campuses, the findings demonstrate that community colleges, even in Texas, continue to exist as whitestream (Urrieta, 2009) and have not adapted to the demographic realities of the state. The existence of MAS programs in these whitestream spaces was the result of community college faculty activism fifteen years ago; however, that activism only got MAS programs approved at the state level. Their continued existence on individual campuses remains a struggle for legitimacy and resources. This reality underscores the lip-service nature of support of these curricular forms of diversity in favor of structural diversity (Harper & Antonio, 2008). As they stand now, however impactful for students, MAS programs by themselves are unable to break through the hegemonic whitestream culture of the academy to create the transformative experiences they seek to provide. We contend that curricular diversity's expansion (when intentionally and carefully planned) is vital. We also contend that interactional and cocurricular learning opportunities should be expanded at community colleges. Making the work of "doing diversity" the responsibility of all campus leaders can stem the tide of faculty burnout that we observed in this study. Grounded in the findings of this study, we agree with Hurtado's (2005) assertion that the future of MAS programs is uncertain and under attack, and there are many concerns that need to be addressed at all levels of education, but community colleges in particular. Hurtado claims:

Among the dramatic changes that Chicana/o scholars have to contend with are: (1) we no longer have a visible, public social movement for social justice; (2) the demands of the academy have become especially brutal and insatiable; (3) the increasing numbers of Chicanos and other Latino groups have created an unprecedented diversity that is

imploding the core of Chicana/o Studies; and (4) we have a country that is increasingly moving towards a militaristic and authoritarian view of higher education. All of these forces threaten the dilution, if not the downright dismantling, of Chicana/o Studies (p. 192).

From the faculty perspective, the study confirms previous research that MAS programs are needed for Latinx students to provide them a special counterspace to process their lived experiences in and out of the college classroom and to connect with and process their Latinx identity (Núñez, 2011). The establishment of these programs can be interpreted as a special type of race-related service (Baez, 2002) that faculty members take up as a means of transcending the Whiteness of their academic space and promoting social justice for the students they serve, especially given that some of the campuses where the faculty members in this study teach are Latinx-majority colleges. Relatedly, Gonzales and Ayers (2018) theorize that community colleges often tap into faculty members' emotions and willingness to serve the needs of their students in order to compensate for insufficient resources. In combining the institutional logics around family, democracy, and even religion, community colleges challenge their faculty to take the lead in undoing the structural and historical inequities their students face (e.g., racism, poverty) without sufficient support and resources from the institution itself (Gonzales & Ayers, 2018). Such efforts, as shown in this study, eventually take an emotional toll on faculty. We expect that the emotional burden carried by the faculty in these programs threatens the long-term sustainability of the programs themselves, especially on campuses where the coordination of programs falls onto the shoulders of one faculty member.

At the same time, Garcia and Okhidoi (2015) remind us that the presence of an ethnic studies program is not enough—especially if it is isolated from the rest of an institution. The

faculty represented in this study recognized this and fought for their program to gain visibility and permeate into the core curriculum and student life. They also had to “play the game” or work through *tranzas* by learning and working through bureaucratic processes to accomplish these tasks. Perhaps the biggest transaction MAS faculty engaged in was working through the bureaucratic processes to put MAS courses into the core curriculum at the state and institutional levels to ensure their legitimacy, especially for enrollment and transfer purposes. Though politically fraught, these actions promoted the viability of the program.

A consequence of this “playing the game” action did not come without emotional impact. After six years as coordinator, Leticia showed signs of stress and fatigue from battling her colleagues at every turn to promote the program that led her to step away from her coordinator post or what Gonzales and Ayers (2018) might characterize as burnout as an effect of emotional labor. While these faculty members showed great devotion to their students, they admitted the emotional toll it takes to work with Latinx students who face discrimination daily and to help them see the beauty and pride to have in their racial/ethnic identities. Supporting a MAS program was work that was taken on without additional pay or resources (e.g., physical space, course releases) and was done in addition to the other courses and service faculty were expected to complete. The willingness to take on this work is supported by Baez’s (2002) concept of race-related service as a means to advocate and resist an oppressive structure.

Implications for Research and Practice

This study offers a number of implications for future research and practice. We acknowledge that in an era of declining appropriations in higher education, the recommendation for more funding for MAS programs and others like it may be unrealistic for many community colleges. Hispanic-Serving Institutions are historically underfunded (Benitez, 1998), and this

problem is only compacted in the community college sector which faces continuous budget cuts (D'Amico, Katsinas, & Friedel, 2012). For new programs to survive, especially programs not directly tied to business and workforce interests, funding is crucial. While Title V HSI Grants are useful to provide colleges with funding in the short-term (three to five years) to build programs in support of Latinx students, college administrators should lobby their executive leaders and legislators for program funding that is built on hard money, not soft money.

However, there are other ways administrators may acknowledge and reaffirm the work of faculty. From an equity standpoint, academic programs in both two-year and four-year sectors might consider the tolls of emotional labor and race-based service in workloads and in guidelines for annual reviews, promotion, and tenure. In giving some balance to the various demands of establishing and maintaining programs like MAS, administrators have the opportunity to create greater long-term stability for these programs by acknowledging the work of its faculty and responding to those demanding conditions.

Finally, this study shows that faculty of color are ready to take up program development that they think is important to serving their surrounding communities. However, a program cannot be sustained on one or a small handful of faculty members' shoulders. Sustaining these programs means building them into the fabric of the institution so there is no doubt how they contribute to the broader campus community. This serves as more than simply a process for legitimizing the program; it also means that they are more faculty and staff members invested in the program's success that can share the burden of supporting a MAS (or other type of ethnic studies) program.

Considering this is the first study to look at MAS programs in community colleges in a meaningful way, potential future research topics are wide open. Future research should continue

to look at the place of these programs within a particular institution and how they contribute to the overall campus environment and climate. Second, other research should bring in student voices to reflect the impact these courses have on students both personally and academically. Last, there is a dearth of research on programs that either focus on specific racial/ethnic groups (e.g., African American Studies, Asian American Studies) or gender identity groups (women and gender studies) in the community college sector. More research should focus on these programs and their impact on their respective campuses.

Conclusion

To our knowledge, this is the first work to focus on the community college sector, which has been largely left out of discussions about ethnic studies curricular implementation. What this study shows more than anything is that despite their large enrollment numbers in the two-year sector, community colleges are still hesitant to provide resources to programs that could provide powerful curricular experiences to their Latinx students. Without MAS programs, Latinx students continue to receive a whitestream education in a space that refuses to acknowledge their presence. However difficult the fight to keep these programs in place is, the faculty in this study describe the value that these programs have in addressing the gaps in students' education and in instilling a sense of pride and community for students who enroll in these programs while acknowledging the racism and discriminatory politics imbued in broader society. While seemingly going against the current priorities of community colleges nationwide in terms of boosting the credentials and training for the workforce, these programs actually do support Latinx students and others in ways that have been previously ignored. These programs offer potentially powerful moments for helping Latinx students claim their space within higher education.

Table 1

Description of Participants

Pseudonym	Discipline	Highest Degree	Region/District	College Name (pseudonym)	Approximate Years Taught
Carmen	Humanities/History	Ph.D.	South Texas	Olmos College	5
Leticia	History	M.A.	South Texas	Olmos College	10
Sebastián	Humanities/English	M.A.	West Texas	Sun City College	10
Jesus	History	Ph.D.	South Texas	Borderlands College	10
Saul	Humanities/Arts	M.A.	South Texas	Nueces College	10
Josefina	Humanities/English	M.A.	East Texas	Urban College	5
Estela	English	M.A.	East Texas	Urban College	25
Nadia	History	Ph.D.	South Texas	Cedro College	<5

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