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# Nuestros Conocimientos: Life Lessons and Cultural Knowledge for a Successful College Transition

Yesenia Mendoza Muller  
ymendoza9823@gmail.com

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University of San Francisco

***Nuestros Conocimientos: Life Lessons and Cultural  
Knowledge for a Successful College Transition***

A Field Project Proposal Presented to  
The Faculty of the School of Education  
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in International and Multicultural Education

By  
Yesenia Mendoza Muller  
May 2018

# ***Nuestros Conocimientos: Life Lessons and Cultural Knowledge for a Successful College Transition***

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

in

INTERNATIONAL AND MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

by

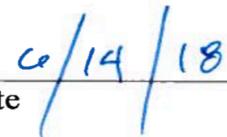
Yesenia Mendoza Muller  
May 2018

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this field project (or thesis) has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

Approved:

  
Instructor/Chairperson

  
Date

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## ABSTRACT

For the past 40 years, first generation college students have been the topic of scholarly research aiming to improve college persistence models. Because of the shifting ethnic demographics, an increase in underrepresented minority students continues to diversify the population of first generation college students. The debate ensues when existing dominant persistence models fail to address the multidimensional challenges students from underrepresented backgrounds experience when transitioning to college. The focus of dominant persistence models is in encouraging first generation students to assimilate by leaving their old identity to gain a new identity and learning the “ins and outs” of how to be a successful college student (Tinto & Engle, 2008; London, 1992). Alternative persistence models focus on addressing how the greater campus culture can help first generation college students’ transition through validation of their experiences and empowering utilize their cultural attributes to build upon the existing campus structure (Benmayor, 2002; Delgado Bernal, Burciaga & Erbstein, 2012; Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2012; Espino, Vega, Rendon, Ranero, & Muniz, 2012; Nora, 2001; Rendon, 2006; Solórzano , Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996; Yosso, 2005).

This project will create a training curriculum that engages current students who are part of a scholarship program to lead an orientation of incoming first generation students from underrepresented backgrounds. Utilizing *testimonio*, critical pedagogy and community cultural wealth as theoretical frameworks, this project focuses on the strengths that first generation college students from underrepresented minority backgrounds bring. This project also reflects on structural challenges to identify strategies for success. The three-module lesson plan provides an example of how to create spaces that encourage students to bring their authentic selves to the

university, and to recognize cultural attributes that will empower them to successfully transition to college.

## CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

### *Mi Testimonio*

As the first in my family to attend university, I began my college career with uncertainty, self-doubt and lots of pressure. As I think back to the couple of months before my first year of college, I remember the three main *consejos* that my mother would share with me. I incorporate below three examples of how *los consejos de mi mama* (my mom's advice) helped me during my transition to college as part of my testimonio.

1. “*¡Ponte las pilas mija!*” This advice meant get yourself together and get going. This *consejo* inspired determination and the idea that there is always a greater purpose.
2. “*¡Echale ganas!*” This advice meant put effort into it. This *consejo* helped me to understand that in order to achieve, I needed to dig within me to find the *ganas* (will), to focus on my goals.
3. *¡No te rajes!* This advice meant do not give up. This *consejo* was an expression that I grew up hearing in my family and within my Mexican culture. It meant that even if we were afraid, we must have *valor* (courage) to confront any situation.

These expressions became constant reminders that I had what it took to be successful in any given situation. During my first year of college, I struggled academically. I received D's on exams when I was used to receiving A's in high school. I felt like an outsider among my peers because they would regularly describe me as “Yesi, the short Mexican girl”. This description, reminded me that in fact, I was one of the few Mexicans in college and because of that I was a different type of Mexican, yet not the same as the dominant culture in college. In the women's soccer team, I also felt out of place. When my coach chose me as a starting player during the soccer matches, several of my older teammates were rude to me on the field, treated me different

from other girls even though I played well, and worked hard. This affected my confidence during soccer matches and eventually I was not starting but instead sitting on the bench and barely getting to touch the ball. My love life was another issue as I began to notice my relationship with my boyfriend at the time was growing apart because we were living in two different worlds. I was in college and he had a full time job at a factory. In the end, *los consejos* de mi mama reminded me to get myself together (*ponerme las pilas*), give it my all to reach my goals (*echarle ganas*), and confront all roadblocks and to not give up (*no te rajes*). In retrospect, I knew I had a wealth of *ganas* (determination to achieve) and my family was always there to remind me. These *consejos* helped me to persist through college becoming the first in my family to earn a bachelor's degree.

My family and I came to the United States from Mexico to achieve the American dream. I became a 1.5-generation immigrant as I was born in Mexico, but immigrated at a young age with my parents. As a 1.5-generation immigrant child, I experienced a transition of gaining many skills and knowledge by observing, doing and leading. Since childhood, I was interpreting for my parents in all types of situations and I translated many important documents that my young mind could barely comprehend. I facilitated conversations with our neighbors, at the bank, at our school, in the grocery store and even with door-to-door salespeople. On behalf of my parents, I made appointments, organized the calendar with important dates, sorted information and called different services to complain or to renegotiate a price of a service or item at a store. In many ways, these instances although frustrating at times made me feel that I was a vital member to my family. I was building my skills, knowledge and confidence.

Understanding the knowledge, skills and abilities that I brought, as a first generation college student, from an underrepresented community, would have helped me to build a

successful transition into college from the start. Instead, I began my college career with the pressure to make my family proud, thinking “don’t mess up, don’t mess up” as if the statistics of Mexican student persistence followed me everywhere I went. With the statistics in mind, I was constantly validating my presence in college. I felt under pressure to appear prepared for college and confident that I would be successful no matter the challenges coming my way. I did not want to be inadequate therefore, I hardly asked for help when classes got challenging. Despite my efforts, there was a constant reminder that my community was full of negative aspects (lack of college going, delinquents, drug traffickers, poverty-stricken, working class, teenage pregnancies, undocumented, etc.). This negative messaging came primarily from places such as television and news media, where Latinos are misrepresented, constantly characterized through derogatory stereotypes.

At the same time that Latinos are misrepresented, their contributions are grossly left out of historical and educational contexts. For instance, in my economics courses, my professor would discuss at great length how beneficial it was for Mexican immigrants to come to work in the US, using the opportunity to send remittances to help their hometowns in Mexico. However, he failed to mention that the communities receiving these migrant workers in the US also benefited from the labor input. Additionally, the cheap labor paid to the migrant workers impacts the lower cost of products to consumers. As I sat in class, I felt the gaze from my classmates as if I was expected to explain my people. However in my mind, I knew that there was something missing, the other side of the story. The story that is missing is about the contributions of Mexicans to this country. In thinking about my story, I do not think that I am an exception, but another example of the thousands of Mexican immigrants that come to the United States with the hope of improving our chances at life and contributing to the overall economy and culture.

Despite these stories, I continued to be described as a different type of Mexican: the smart kind. Although I felt accomplished that I had “made it” to college, it angered me that I had become a token Mexican and that my success was labeled as American. This label negated the tireless determination, the many sacrifices and most significantly, the real *educación* that I had received from *mi familia y mi Mexicanidad*. It frustrated me that my resilience and my persistence was characterized as solely American and individualistic and that anything that could be informed by my cultural values were irrelevant and incoherent. I wanted to be seen as a success to *mi comunidad*, and to the greater institution, I wanted to be recognized as a student who is proud of her Mexican cultural heritage because it has been a key foundation in her success. But how could I defend my community when I was one of the few *Mexicanas* in college at that time? How could I even have the guts to speak out and be proud when every news article that mentioned my community included a negative stereotype: drug dealers, achievement-gap, teenage pregnancy, illegal aliens, etc.? These feelings followed me throughout my college career. I felt that because my people were not represented in college, we must have been doing something wrong. However through my career working in higher education for the past eight years, I have come to realize that this story is not one-sided. My story and that of first-generation college students from underrepresented communities require a multidimensional assessment of how to successfully transition to college. The investigation however, should include not only the student’s background but from the ways in which our higher education institutions work to facilitate or hinder the college transitions.

Despite an increase of first-generation college students from communities of color attending college, they continue to be viewed from a deficit perspective (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). For instance, as a student of color, the institution regarded me as bettering myself and my

community through the touch of higher education, however during the exchange; I was giving up more than I was gaining besides the large student debt. I gave up relationships because they were not a good fit with my new life in college. I had to adapt to the typical American college life, in order to fit-in with my new peers. It became impossible during class to challenge dominant western perspectives when these perspectives are the foundational hegemony of the academy. In my attempts to take in the dominant campus culture, I realized that it only accepted parts of me. For instance, when a close group of friends and I discussed ‘illegal immigration’, it was not okay for me to defend ‘illegal immigrants’, however I reminded my friends that I too had been an ‘undocumented immigrant’ and that I have a lived experience that can inform the implications of current immigration policies. Their response was, yes but you are not undocumented anymore, as if requesting that I forget that part of my story. What I came to realize during these experiences was that there was an expectation to forget where I came from and simply adapt to new ways of thinking and being. However, I did not let this happen and instead, I found new friends, and mentors who helped me be true to myself and keep focus on my personal genuine growth by reminding me that I was the one who would make a difference in the institution. The institution we call higher education needs students who are from underrepresented communities to challenge the status quo. This challenge begins with sharing our *testimonios*, reflecting on our lived experiences within the current institutions and strategizing to create new solutions.

## **Background**

In my current profession, as the advisor to students in the Fiat Lux Scholarship Program at the University of California, Berkeley (UC Berkeley), I support students in recognizing that their strengths and cultural knowledge are valuable and imperative to their academic and professional development. The Fiat Lux Scholarship Program, established in the fall of 2016

aims to attract high-achieving students from underrepresented communities to the University of California, Berkeley. Fiat Lux Scholars hail from partner high schools in the Bay Area, Central Coast area (Salinas), San Jose, Sacramento, and Los Angeles. The Fiat Lux Scholarship program provides comprehensive support services and financial awards to grow and strengthen UC Berkeley's diverse, and innovative undergraduate student community. Fiat Lux Scholars benefit from faculty mentorship, leadership development, community service, and peer support. Other program benefits include a research stipend, financial advising, service opportunities, a dedicated study space, and a scholar association (Berkeley Student Affairs Philanthropy, 2017).

My role in the program begins with outreach where I visit partner high schools and I speak with high school students and their counselors about the scholarship opportunity at UC Berkeley. Once prospective students are admitted to Berkeley, our office determines the students who will be invited to the interview, based on 'exceptional admissions criteria' and financial need. Once invited, candidates come to campus to interview with our esteemed faculty. If selected, these candidates will receive a scholarship that can potentially cover a student's full financial need for up to eight semesters. Through the Fiat Lux Scholarship program, I have had the honor to connect with and guide scholars from the recruitment phase to the culmination of their college career. I enjoy this work as I advise scholars who are all very unique in their aspirations, in their backgrounds and most importantly, they are the next movers and shakers representing their families proudly as first generation college students.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The Fiat Lux Scholarship Program is one of the many initiatives at UC Berkeley, aiming to provide support needed to thrive at a rigorous institution to first generation low-income students from underrepresented minority backgrounds. Fiat Lux Scholars mainly identify as low-

income, first generation college students and as belonging to under-represented ethnic minorities (UREM). Fiat Lux Scholars come from communities completely different from those of the dominant campus culture and from my experience as their advisor, I have learned about the many challenges Fiat Lux Scholars face. Many of them have worked very hard to get into Berkeley, yet they feel they do not belong in its rigorous academic culture. UC Berkeley rates among the top ten research universities in the world and is the top public university in the United States (Academic Ranking of World Universities, 2017). Aside from being a competitive academic university, UC Berkeley is highly regarded as a nationwide leader for having a wide array of “high touch” services that help students from marginalized backgrounds feel welcomed and supported. However even with additional services, many first generation, low income students of color come to Berkeley feeling overwhelmed, intimidated, and out of place. The problem my research project addresses is that even though Fiat Lux Scholars come with an enormous amount of skills and knowledge. As first generation college students of color (FGCSoc), they are often reminded of their inadequacies and they are pressured to assimilate into the dominant campus culture by absorbing the norms, and neglecting their own cultural pride and attributes. As a result, Fiat Lux Scholars are not able to recognize the wealth of knowledge they bring and instead focus on their shortcomings. My project will propose to create a space where the Fiat Lux Scholar community will help facilitate a culture of celebrating each other’s strengths, background and contributions. This project will help incoming scholars feel motivated to bring their authentic self and build on to their community instead of feeling pressured to assimilate to the dominant culture.

### **Purpose of the Project**

The purpose of this project is to build a sustainable student driven orientation that will empower incoming Fiat Lux Scholars to identify how their strengths and prior knowledge will help them shape a successful college transition. This project integrates Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005), *Testimonio* (Burciaga & Navarro, 2015; Delgado Bernal et al., 2012) and Problem Posing, Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 1972; Burciaga & Navarro, 2015) as theoretical frameworks and pedagogical tools to focus on existing strengths Fiat Lux Scholars, reflect on structural challenges, and come up with strategies for success.

The project begins with a training implemented within the Fiat Lux Scholar Association (FLSA). The training is open for current Fiat Lux Scholars who would like to develop and lead an orientation for their incoming peers. The goal is to help new Fiat Lux Scholars understand the college transition as one that is adding and not taking away from their familial histories. The training contains three modules: (1) Intro to the authentic self, (2) *Testimoniando*, the power of sharing lived experiences and (3) Building community in the third space. Together these modules will be utilized to focus on the unique aspects and contributions Fiat Lux Scholars bring. At the end of the training, students will identify common themes learned during the *testimonios*, to build on to the orientation lesson plan, and implement during the Fiat Lux Scholar Orientation.

My work as the Fiat Lux Scholar advisor has opened the door to learn about the struggles the students face as well as the potential the students have. Throughout each interaction, I have learned that my students have powerful experiences that need to be shared in community spaces where they can strategize and praise as they overcome and accomplish. I know this because scholars walk out of my office grateful they had someone they could “be real” with as they share their honest feelings of something that may not feel comfortable sharing with others on campus. I

continue to hear this narrative repeatedly; however, the most beautiful thing I hear is when the scholars share their stories with one another in the Fiat Lux Scholar space next to my office. In this space, I see tremendous possibility as they can acknowledge, empower and build community with one another.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Fiat Lux Scholars come from a variety of multicultural backgrounds and with that comes different experiences and challenges that intersect with their background. To fully honor the experiences and multicultural backgrounds that Fiat Lux Scholars represent and how this comes into play during their college experience, the most appropriate theoretical lenses used for my project constitute of Community Cultural Wealth (CCW), *Testimonio* and Critical Pedagogy's Problem Posing method.

#### **Community Cultural Wealth (CCW)**

In this project, I use Community Cultural Wealth (CCW), which is conceptualized within Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latina/Latino critical race theory (LatCrit). CCW will amplify not only the challenges, but also the systems in which Fiat Lux Scholars utilize their cultural capital to navigate the university experience. To better understand CCW, I will discuss its origins as influenced by CRT and LatCrit.

#### **CRT and LatCrit influences to CCW**

CRT originated in the field of law, with the purpose to demonstrate how the legal system serves as a method to sustain white dominance over American society (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2013; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002;). This idea was applied in education to challenge and dismantle educational social inequities reinforced through

educational institutions (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Derrick Bell's (as cited in Delgado & Stefancic, 2013) work influenced the use of race-based perspectives to challenge traditional modes of research and to promote social justice by providing a fundamental understanding of how racial discrimination is infused in school-based experiences of students of color. Since 1994, educational researchers have used CRT in education as a theoretical framework to analyze the role of race, racism, and its intersections with other forms of oppression in the lives of racial minorities (Solórzano et al., 2005).

CRT in education seeks to transform the relationship that upholds racism and power by developing theoretical, conceptual and pedagogical strategies working to eliminate racism and other forms of subordination (Yosso & Solórzano, 2000). CRT assumes that educational policies and practices are inequitable and unjust in regards to students of color as political, social, and historical realities posit the normalization of inequitable, unjust, and race-based practices. Due to the normalization of these practices, low-income, first generation and in particular, students of color in their effort to integrate, instead end up losing touch with their cultural strengths without realizing. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) describe five central tenants of a CRT framework in education, which include: (1) the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism with other forms of subordination; (2) the challenge to dominant ideologies; (3) the commitment to social justice; (4) the importance of experiential knowledge; and (5) the use of interdisciplinary perspectives. Together these tenets of CRT provide a framework for scholars to examine the historical and contemporary marginalization of students of color in higher education, and methods in which these issues may be addressed. LatCrit builds on to CRT by addressing issues that intersect with Latina/Latino community such as such as language, immigration, ethnicity,

and culture and is concerned with Latina/Latino pan-ethnic coalitions as a part of its social justice framework (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) is a lens that takes into account the intersecting issues within communities of color and offers a remedy to the deficit perspective through which non-majority populaces are viewed and self-internalize (Yosso, 2005). CCW was developed by Tara Yosso and influenced by the work of Daniel Solórzano and Octavio Villalpando (as cited in Perez Huber, 2009) utilizing the CRT and LatCrit frameworks to highlight forms of resistant cultural capital, known as the accumulation of resources and assets that students of color use to succeed in higher education despite obstacles they. Yosso (2005) speaks best to the concept of how students acquire a wealth of cultural capital from their homes and communities and how this can transfer directly into the classroom. Shifting the lens from a ‘deficit view of communities of color’ as places full of disadvantages and lack of agency, CCW focuses on the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and networks possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged. Yosso (2005) describes CCW within six forms of capital that exist in communities of color.

1. *Aspirational Capital* refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers. Fiat Lux scholars come to Berkeley because they aspire to achieve their dreams despite the challenges they face in their communities. Yosso (2005) describes the work of Patricia Gandara (1982) to highlight this form of CCW through the study of background factors and experiences that contributed to the educational accomplishments of 17 Mexican-American women, despite having the lowest educational outcomes compared to every other group in the US. Among one of the most important findings in this study was the

models mothers provided, in stimulating academic achievement in Latinas with limited resources. Gandara (as cited in Yosso, 2005) proposes that aspirations ‘nurture a culture of possibility by creating a history that would break the links between parents’ current occupational status and their children’s future academic attainment’. Fiat Lux scholars often talk about higher reasons for them to pursue higher education, besides the obvious, to get a decent job, to fulfill the dreams of their parents’, and put their families in a better economic position, and also setting an example for those who follow. The aspirational capital is more than a motivation for students to persist; it is what gives them a greater purpose.

2. *Linguistic Capital* includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style. In the work of Dorner, Orellana, & Jimenez (2008), linguistic capital describes the idea that children are brokers of language and culture to their family and community they interact with. This allows for the development of multiple language and communication skills. Linguistic capital as expanded in the work of Yosso (2005) and illustrated in the work of Dorner, Orellana, & Jimenez (2008) suggests that bilingual children who translate for their families gain a multitude of social tools. These social tools include vocabulary, audience awareness, cross-cultural awareness, and “real-world” literacy skills such as math skills, metalinguistic awareness, teaching, tutoring skills, civic and familial responsibility, and social maturity. Fiat Lux Scholars utilize these skills subconsciously as they transverse between various social and cultural groups including: peers, faculty, and staff and to navigate the general campus culture. Linguistic capital builds students’ confidence to approach people who are from

- different backgrounds, allowing them to build more friendships and establish connections within the wider community.
3. *Familial Capital* refers to cultural knowledge nurtured among *familia* (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition (Delgado Bernal, 2002). This form of CCW engages a commitment to community wellbeing and expands the concept of *familia* to include a broader understanding of kinship. Familial capital is developed within families, and within community groups such as schools, sports, religious gatherings and other social community. Yosso (2005) emphasizes the work of scholars who have found familial capital within the communal bonds of African American communities (Morris, 1999), the funds of knowledge within Mexican American communities (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2009) and pedagogies of the home that students of color bring with them to the classroom setting (Delgado Bernal, 2002). Fiat Lux Scholars as a group understand the importance of belonging to a community, as they come to Berkeley, they wish to find their community and be engaged. When they are struggling, they look for support within their particular community on campus.
  4. *Social Capital* is understood as networks of people and community resources. These peer and other social contacts can provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society's institutions. For example, if a Fiat Lux Scholar is struggling in their classes due to family issue, which may be causing stress and anxiety, they might share with their close friends who may encourage them to come talk to me as a starting point. I am not an actual counselor, but I always commend them for starting with me and I can point them to our Tang Center, which has

- Counseling and Psychological Services. After one scholar takes advantage of this service, they share their experience with other scholars, giving them advice to utilize the service as well. Fiat Lux Scholars are constantly sharing information with one-another about resources and opportunities, big or small.
5. *Navigational Capital* are the skills, both social and psychological which are utilized by people of color to navigating with resilience through social institutions historically not created with them in mind and permeated by racist structures (Solórzano, Villalpando, & Osegera, 2005). This particular skill, Yosso (2005) posits centers individual agency within systemic constraints and the ability to connect to supportive community resources within schools, job market, health and judicial systems. Fiat Lux Scholars can use these strategies to navigate through racially hostile instances present in the university campus.
  6. *Resistant Capital* is the referred to the knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality, grounded in the legacy of resistance to subordination by communities of color. Historical knowledge is important in maintaining and passing on as a base of resistant capital to children from communities of color. Fiat Lux Scholars come into higher education with a wide range of experiences having to do with housing displacement, crime-ridden communities, police brutality, racist educational structures, sexism and all types of discrimination and oppressions. They are on high alert to pick up even the subtlest injustices. This could seem as being in constant survival mode, however, it is resisting normalizing their lived experiences, and changing the narrative to improve their communities. Ultimately, resistance capital is key in understanding systemic

oppressions and the steps that students can take to make a difference as they fulfill their goals and dreams through higher education.

Knowing and understanding how to utilize the cultural capital that students bring will help first-generation students from communities of color have the confidence and resilience needed to transition successfully into college and to make the best out of their experience on their own terms. Next, I will discuss how *testimonios* along with CCW can help students connect to each other's experience to form alliances, resist and restructure their college experience as authentic as possible.

### ***Testimonio***

*Testimonio* is used as a theoretical and pedagogical tool that centers the lived experiences of FGCSoc within the sociopolitical realities and seeks to create solidarity. *Testimonio* originates from the oral traditions and cultures of Latin American liberation efforts and resistant movements against oppressive governments in Latin American countries in the 1970s (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). In the past thirty years, *testimonio* has positioned itself as powerful tool used by Chicana and Latina scholars as this genre exposes brutality and other forms of violence and at the same time building solidarity among women of color. In the field of education, *testimonio* has been used to resist traditional frameworks, challenge objectivity, by situating the lived experiences of those marginalized and oppressed. The essence of *testimonio* however is not just the telling the story; it is about consciously acknowledging the political, social, historical, and cultural histories within our lived experiences as a means to bring about change. Delgado Bernal et al. (2015), posit, "By bridging individuals with collective histories of oppression, a story of marginalization is re-centered to elicit social change" (p. 364). In this project, *testimonio* is employed as a way to document the lived experiences as FGCSoc transitioned onto college,

noticing instances of struggle and success and using these stories to strategize as a community of scholars to improve the process of adjusting to college. The positioning of *testimonio* within Community Cultural Wealth will inspire students to apply critical pedagogical strategies as they draw connections to begin mapping intrinsically similar experiences.

### **Critical Pedagogy (Problem Posing)**

Freire's (1972) problem posing pedagogy emphasizes critical thinking for the purpose of liberation through dialogue and an understanding of context and life experiences. Freire asserted that people can either be passive recipients of knowledge or they can engage in a problem posing approach, as they become active participants. Problem-posing method is an alternative to the banking model of education, a metaphor referring to students as empty vessels into which teachers fill with knowledge. Freire's argument was that this banking model blocks the student from partaking in the knowledge creation process and it reinforces oppression whereas, problem posing encourages creative process through critical thinking. Fiat Lux Scholars come into the university forgetting they have the capacity to be involved in the "creation of knowledge" and they come with knowledge that is valid and critical. We all have experiences that when shared can create movements to inspire new approaches to how we learn and what we learn. We have the power to recognize our reality and to question and reflect towards action. Freire's (1972) *conscientizacao* calls for just that, "the process for which men, not as receipts, but as knowing subjects, achieve a deepening awareness both of the socio-cultural reality which shapes their lives and their capacity to transform that reality." (p. 104-111). Utilizing Freire's Problem Posing as knowledge creation tool will challenge Fiat Lux Scholars to break free from the prescribed norms, which they are initially pressured into their college experience.

### **Significance of the Project**

First generation college students of color (FGCSoC) are a growing population in higher education (Krogstad & Fry, 2014). The success of FGCSoC is of paramount importance to the University of California. According to a publication from the University of California Office of the President (First-Generation Student Success at the University of California, 2017), the University of California's total student population for 2016 was made up of 42.8% (27,705) first-generation students. Of this first-generation population, 49% of entering students were underrepresented minorities (URMs), 39% percent of first-generation students' first language was not English, 34% of first-generation students entered as transfers, and almost two-thirds of first-generation students are lower-income Pell Grant recipients. The University of California serves a record number of low-income students compared to any other research university in the country, educating eight times as many low-income students as the entire Ivy League combined (UC Newsroom, 2014). Along with the increasing population of FGCSoC, the recent emphasis on the importance of a healthy college campus climate speaks to the experience of individuals and groups on a campus, aligning quality programming and interaction between various groups and individuals (Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012). Many campuses across the country are moving beyond addressing diversity and inclusion as mere representation of staff of color to efforts of addressing actual climate. Hurtado and Ruiz (2012) suggest that a healthy campus climate is one in which students encounter racial/ethnic differences, build awareness and appreciation of difference, and learn how to treat each other as equal citizens.

This project adds to the efforts in highlighting persistence of FGCSoC who successfully utilize their strengths and assets to persist and succeed. This project combats the deficit thinking approaches by which FGCSoC are often depicted. This project will remind incoming Fiat Lux

Scholars that they already bring an abundance of knowledge from their homes, which will give them the confidence coming into Berkeley and knowing they are not alone in this transition. Finally, this project will strengthen the community of current scholars as they critically contribute towards the orientation of the newest members and my hopes are that this will become a tradition of the Fiat Lux Scholarship program, led by the scholars.

### **Definition of Terms**

In this next section, I will provide definitions of key terms that will be used throughout my field project. The list of key terms includes a combination of definitions used by the University of California as well as from other scholarly contributors. I will provide descriptions of acronyms used in this paper for the purposes of simplification.

First generation college (FGC) students, as defined by the University of California, are those students whose parent(s) did not complete a four-year college degree (University of California, 2017).

Low-income students, for financial aid purposes, are those students who qualify for Pell Grants (federal aid awarded to students from families with household incomes of \$50,000 or less) (UC Newsroom, 2014).

Underrepresented Ethnic Minorities (UREM) refers to historically underrepresented racial/ethnic groups (African American, Chicano/Latino, and Native American/Alaska Native) (UC Berkeley Cal Answers, 2016).

Students of Color, encompasses all non-white students, with an emphasis on common experiences of systemic racism.

The Fiat Lux Scholarship program represents students from low income, first generation, underrepresented ethnic minorities and students of color. Thereinafter I will refer to this population as First Generation College Students of Color (FGCSoc).

## CHAPTER II REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### **Introduction**

First-generation college students face unique challenges during their transition from home to college. The experiences greatly vary depending on income and ethnicity; however, research indicates that first generation college students of color from low-income families have a more difficult adjustment to college than those from middle-income and white communities (Thayer, 2000; Tinto & Engle, 2008). The goal of my project is to develop a culturally relevant orientation model informed by stories of current Fiat Lux Scholars, on how they experienced their transition to college, my literature review consists of studies that explore: (1) expectations influenced by dominant narratives on adjusting to college, (2) implications from these expectations, and (3) alternative frameworks to transition to college. Together these studies will help bring into context the experiences of Fiat Lux Scholars and together come up with strategies to help them overcome challenges and build a successful transition.

### **Expectations Influenced by Dominant Narratives on Adjusting to College**

Research on first-generation college students had traditionally focused on one-dimensional linear processes of the transition from home to college and accompanied by comparison of skills, knowledge and persistence among FGC students of color to traditional students (Terenzini et al., 1996). These skills and knowledge are social and cultural capital and they are commonly discussed when comparing FGC students to traditional middle class students (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). Social capital takes the form of the relationships among individuals that facilitate a connection or particular resource information. These relationships can help students connect to information on how to prepare for college, including academic preparation, applying for college and cultural expectations of college. Access

on information about making beneficial decisions on college preparation, degree completion, academic and social choices give a distinct advantage to traditional students over first-generation college students. Although researchers hardly mention social capital, they allude to it by comparing first-generation students' lack of information about college passed on from family and lack of study skills necessary for academic success (Choy, 2001; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006).

Many studies suggest that because first-generation college students' lack this cultural/social capital, the process of reaching for these expectations creates psychosocial stress, which results in isolation, intimidates their cultural identities, and undercuts their academic performance and persistence (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Terenzini et al. 1996). For instance, Stephens, Markus, Fryberg, and Covarrubias (2012) argue that because institutional expectations predominantly focus on middle-class norms as the most relevant way to experience college, this results in working-class students feeling alienation. Emphasis has been placed on the type of social capital that a student must have in order to succeed, resulting in the push for colleges and universities nationwide to adopt so called best practices which focus on teaching FGC students the social capital that dominant groups have in order to facilitate their transition in navigating the complex college institutions (Tinto & Engle, 2008). This assumption however, treats FGC students as empty vessels and does not recognize the wealth of knowledge that is utilized within their communities that could be transferable to navigate college.

In their report, Saenz, Hurtado Barrera, Wolf, and Yeung (2007) explore 35 years of trends on first-generation college students compared to their peers with college educated parents by analyzing survey data collected through Cooperative Institutional Research Programs (CIRP) freshman survey from 1971-2005. Although their review of the existing empirical and policy

research on first-generation students found critical differences across demographics such as pre-college academic, social and college persistence measures, their work also attested to discussions on how the overall population of first generation students has changed over time. For instance, their study found that even though the racial/ethnic groups with the lowest education attainment are African American and Hispanic, these groups have the highest proportion of first generation college students at four-year colleges. Their study further discussed the differences in skills, information guidance, attitudes and expectations about college comparing first generation college students to traditional middle class peers. For traditional middle class students, their parents may have transmitted a more advanced understanding by providing the knowledge on how to get into college and ultimately how to succeed in college. Additionally, traditional middle class students are more likely to have financial resources and connections to benefit students in their academic and career goals. However, they also found that parental engagement has more than doubled since 1971, contrary to the notion that parents from these communities are not involved as evidenced in the survey (Saenz et al., 2007). Their study has contributed to discussions, which caution oversimplification of the transition of FGC students in particular, those from low income and underrepresented ethnic minorities.

Another study by Hurtado, Carter, and Spuler (1996) focused on environmental influences as Latinos transition to college by assessing the difficulties and factors in a successful college adjustment. Their study focused on the factors that affect Latino student adjustment in the first and second year of college by examining data from a national, longitudinal survey complimented with the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire completed by Latino students viewed as having high potential for success, upon entering a variety of four-year colleges. The results yielded multi-dimensional factors that affect all forms of student adjustment

such as academic, social, personal/emotional and attachment. Academic adjustment was measured through the student's attitudes of satisfaction toward their work. Social adjustment measured the student's involvement in social activities, success and interpersonal relationships and their satisfaction with the overall social environment. Personal-Emotional Adjustment measured the psychological health of students in terms of how students respond to stress, and any physical manifestations of academic and social pressures. Attachment measured the degree to which students feel they belong in the institutional environment and their goals and commitments to persist or stay in the particular institution. This study not only provided information about typical adjustment concerns for most college students but also surfaced patterns of issues that are particular problems for minority students on predominantly white campuses, revealing a significant contribution of campus climate-related stressors for minority students such as experiences of discrimination, and subtle forms of intergroup dynamics. The measure of racial/ethnic tension in this study captures subtle intergroup dynamics on campus and how these stressors can create a climate, which undermines academic confidence and the ability to fit into the overall campus community. Finally, their study found that both structural and climate characteristics of campuses may facilitate a successful transition or hinder the multifaceted areas of college adjustment.

Many scholars continue to analyze the impact of the racialized structures, policies, and practices and their impact on the educational attainment and academic progress of Latinas/os and other under-represented minorities (Ojeda, Castillo, Meza, & Piña-Watson, 2013; Solórzano et al., 2005). Ojeda et al. (2013) and Solórzano et al. (2005) argued that too often college persistence theories focus on psychological models that emphasize the impact of the individual's abilities to adjust to college but fail to address the cultural realities of students and contextual

variables such as the student–environment relation. Collectively, the work of these scholars tells us that the college transition process itself for FGCSoc, carries a much greater meaning and comes with many consequences. In the next subsection, I will discuss how social reproduction in educational institutions continues to transmit generational social inequality.

### **History and relevance of social reproduction theory.**

The dominant discourses on persistence imply that the way to achieve upward social mobility is for poor people to assimilate to the dominant values. However, understanding social reproduction and how it is produced in education is key to understanding why dominant discourses push for FGC students to assimilate. The theory behind social reproduction explains that we are reproducing social inequality across generations (Bourdieu, Bottomore, Nice, & Passeron, 1977). Influenced by Marx’s original concept of social reproduction, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986) developed one of the most modern ideas of the concept of social reproduction by proposing four different types of capital and how they contribute to social reproduction in society. These four types of capital are financial capital, cultural capital, human capital and social capital. Financial capital refers to the income and wealth of a person. Cultural capital is the shared outlook, beliefs, knowledge, and skills that are passed between generations. Social capital can largely influence one's ability to find an internship or job. All four forms of capital play a role in social reproduction because capital is passed from generation to generation and keeps people in the same social class as their parents before them. Bourdieu’s interest in social reproduction comes from the way in which the educational system functions, to inhibit, rather than encourage, individual social mobility.

**Social reproduction theory in college integration.**

Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital informs us on the knowledge, thinking, and values that are passed along from one generation to the next. Placing this into the context of adjusting to college is best illustrated by Vincent Tinto's (1975) student integration model, which became the start of contemporary discussion over undergraduate retention strategies for FGC students. In his work, Tinto stresses that students who socially integrate into the campus community are more likely to be committed to their institution and will have higher chances of graduating. In order to gain membership into the community, students must abide by the structural requirements. In the next section, I will discuss the implications on the rigid requirements and expectations for FGC students to assimilate to the dominant college structures.

**Implications from Dominant Narrative Expectations**

The body of research on college transition for FGC students continues to focus on the notion that FGC students lack specific skills and knowledge to participate and to be accepted into the college community. FGC students are seen as not having the cultural capital needed to succeed and therefore, they must learn from the new community from whom they are seeking membership (Tinto, 1988). Other scholars suggest that because educational institutions place a high value on upper-class cultural capital, consequently this further marginalizes groups who do not have access to this capital (Yosso, 2005). It is important to demonstrate how and when the marginalization occurs. In the following section, I will explore Tinto's model, which became the start of the contemporary discussions on student persistence.

Tinto (1988) utilizes Van Gennep's Stages of Passage to describe how college students transition into their college career through the following stages: (1) separation (leaves an old territory or community) transition, (crossing a border, physical or ceremonial), and incorporation

(takes up residence in the new location or community). These stages provide a way of thinking about the process in which student persistence in college is dependent upon student's success in integrating onto the new community. His work strongly suggests that in order to integrate, students must *break* from the past to better *adapt* with the present (Terenzini, Rendon, Upcraft, Millar, Allison, Gregg, Jalomo, 1994). In this way students will "find and adopt norms appropriate to the new college setting and establish competent membership in the social and intellectual communities of college life" (Tinto, 1988, p. 446).

In opposition to Tinto's hypotheses, Terenzini et al. (1994) assert that the transition and adaptation into college is far more complex for FGC students as it constitutes a major "disjunction in their life course". This means that for FGC students, college going was not part of their family's tradition or expectations as opposed to the traditional students who continued the next "logical, expected, and desired stage in to the passage toward personal and occupational achievement" (p. 63).

Similar to Tinto's model, London (1992) theorized that FGC students must experience this "breakaway" contending that the cultural challenges faced by FGC students includes a shift in their identity which is different than the one from home. London argues, to move up, requires shedding one social identity to gain another. Together, London's (1992) and Tinto's (1988) theories of separation and breaking away, are criticized as assimilationist for pushing the notions that cultural identity does not bring value to the academic landscape (Cabrera & Nora, 1996; Rendon, 1992). Benmayor (2002) cautions that although these theories account for the cultural tensions that FGC students experience, the language builds on a deficit narrative for which students should see the college experience as "marking a separation with a familiar past, a traumatic period of confusion, a loss of past self" (p. 109). These expectations of separation and

conforming to dominant narratives can exacerbate tensions especially for FCG students from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds as they struggle to reconcile two very different identities as they experience feelings of isolation, pressure, anxiety, guilt, self-doubt, culture shock and overall difficulty adjusting to college (Terenzini et al., 1996).

As a result, critical race scholars have designed models that focus on the greater campus culture and environment. These models more accurately tell the story of the multidimensional struggles FGCSoc face when adjusting to college. For instance Cabrera and Nora (1996) developed a model that investigated the underlying dimensionality of perceptions of prejudice and discrimination (PPD) comprised of campus racial climate, prejudiced attitudes held by faculty and staff, and in-class discriminatory experiences. Through this model, observations were made on the effects that the experiences on discrimination-prejudice had on feelings of alienation across four ethnic groups. Similarly, Rendon (2006) theorizes that models of student success must address cultural and academic incongruity, which is used to characterize success for underserved students, keeping in mind that students cross into the college world, will experience cultural incongruity in the form of alienation, marginalization and possibly discrimination. She argues that students of color are particularly impacted by cultural and academic incongruity due to the lack of culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy.

Furthermore, as scholars focusing on student success point to the notion, that students must get involved in institutional life in order to fit in, Rendon (2006) and numerous scholars (Nora, 2001; Terenzini et al., 1994) recommend instead that low-income, first-generation students benefit from what Rendón has called validation. Rendon (2006) describes validation as not assuming that students can form connections on their own and instead asks the institutions to take initiative in reaching out to students to assist them to learn more about college, believe in

themselves as learners, and have a positive college experience. Involvement leans more toward students taking the initiative to be engaged on a campus. Although involvement is an important part of college life for student development, underserved students who have experienced invalidation in the past are not likely to get involved or utilize campus resources easily. Rendon (2006) proposes an interactive model of success that conceptualizes how underserved students make the transition to college, how they attain success and the patterns of adaptation that students develop. The models should discuss how students overcome oppressive environments, negotiate racial conflict, interact with different groups, and overcome cultural attacks such as discrimination and stereotyping. Furthermore, Rendon proposes success should be conceptualized in a holistic fashion with an emphasis not only on intellect, but also on social, emotional, and spiritual development.

Related studies examined the impact of the prejudice and discrimination on the adjustment of students to college (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Nora & Cabrera, 1996). Results indicated perceived discriminatory behavior negatively affected minority student academic/intellectual development, social experiences, and institutional commitment. The work of Ojeda et al. (2013) further analyzes the structures and the processes of acculturation and enculturation as they influence career intentions and life satisfaction for Mexican students; resulting in findings that determined the more embedded Mexican American, college students were in their heritage culture the more satisfied they were with life.

### **Alternative Frameworks to Transition to College**

Drawing from Critical Race Theory, scholars offer different frameworks to interpret the lived experiences of FGCSoc as they navigate the academy. Solórzano and Villalpando, 1998 as cited in (Solórzano et al., 2005) argue that FGC students succeed because they have developed

*critical resistant navigational* skills to succeed in higher education instead of conforming to the dominant cultural norms of a college environment. In this regard, CRT and Chicano/a scholars propose utilizing cultural resources as funds of knowledge when working with FGC students of color. Similarly, Benmayor (2002) proposes frameworks that support the experiences of first generation students of Mexican origin allowing them to ‘construct themselves as *cultural citizens* in the university’. This enables students to assume “cultural responsibilities that can help them integrate through multiple cultural worlds to understand and embrace their positionalities as students, family advocates and community builders” (Benmayor, 2002, p. 109). Benmayor pays attention to how the stories of the children of Mexican farm workers collectively touch on *memory dialogue*—as students reminisce through recounting their parent’s hard work and gain an awareness that going to college builds upon their family tradition, history and memories. Contrary to the claim that college separates you from your culture, Benmayor found that as her students learned more about their culture through this gained knowledge; it strengthened their connection by the desire to give back to their communities.

Another framework and form of resistance is *testimonio*, described as “the spoken word to social action and privileges the oral narrative of personal experience as a source of knowledge, empowerment, and political strategy for claiming rights and bringing about social change” (Benmayor, Torruellas, & Juarbe, 1997, p. 153). *Testimonios* can build solidarity through story sharing, respond to, and resist the dominant culture, laws, and policies that perpetuate inequalities. Espino, Vega, Rendon, Ranero, and Muniz (2012) took *testimonios* further by developing an innovative methodological technique called *Reflexion*. During a symposium, established Latina scholars were invited to participate as dialogue partners to reflect on the following: (1) seek answers to assuage our apprehensions, (2) heal the fragmentations caused by

oppressive environments, (3) critique oppressive educational structures, and (4) formulate strategies for social change within academe. *Reflexion* functions as a way to bridge *testimonios*, by embracing ‘intergenerational perspective, critical consequences and benefits the academic socialization processes of emerging Latinas’. This technique frames a collective consciousness across generations and social identities about what it means to be a Latina in the academy (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). *Testimonios* can also become a pedagogical tool with the ability to connect people across different social, cultural experiences and build solidarity with those who are familiar and unfamiliar with the experiences of the *testimonio*. The work of *testimonio* becomes important in the educational experiences of FGCSoc because it embraces the borderlands between the home culture and academic culture, facing the challenges of being “educated out” of one’s community. At the same time, *testimonio* serves as a pedagogical and methodological tool to integrate the ways of knowing and learning in our communities (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012).

Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) in conjunction with *testimonio* and *reflexion* (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012) focuses on values and capacities cultivated by communities of color that enable persistence and social mobility in the face of significant obstacles (Yosso, 2005). In (re)telling our stories, students can reflect on multiple elements that can shed light on values and resources inherent within communities of color. Utilizing Community Cultural Wealth, Burciaga and Erbsstein (2012) studied a group of Latina/o dropouts who were viewed as deficit students though societal measures for having dropped out. In their study, they observed how despite having dropped out, these Latina/o students employed alternative forms of capital to create a plan for success via alternative routes. Through *testimonios*, the participants resisted utilizing the term, “dropout” because they understood dropping out as more than just a school

departure, dropping out involved a complex process, rather than a sudden or impulsive “dropout” and they did not see it as a long-term plan, but rather as a pause to attend to other important life circumstances. These findings obscure the predominant views of “dropouts” as a disconnected and apathetic youth who has made a terrible decision. However, the authors challenge the shift in perspective, to see these young adults as contributing members to their families who did not have equitable access or the levels of support needed to succeed (Burciaga & Erbstein, 2012).

### **Summary**

The process of examining literature on first generation college students was eye opening as most of the influential work regarding student persistence of FGC students comes from a perspective that favors upper class cultural values. Influenced by those values, the dominant narratives create expectations for ‘how’ students should adjust to college by separating themselves from their past (Tinto & Engle, 2008; London, 1992). In turn, these expectations maintain the preservation of the status quo. To address these implications, CRT scholars propose to bridge the home communities to the educational community, by empowering students to tap into their cultural capital they bring and realize the transferability onto this new community they will be forming. Developing an understanding of the total experience of first generation college students from communities of color offer an important conceptual framework for scholars to shed light on how current practices under the guise of helping FGC students transition, might actually be hindering their holistic development, and at the same time maintaining the complex institutions of higher education intact.

### CHAPTER III THE PROJECT AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

This chapter will describe how an orientation led by current students that is focused on acknowledging their authentic selves and their lived experiences will highlight the knowledge and skills that first year students bring with them during this important college transition. This process is enhanced (or implemented or framed) through Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005), *Testimonio* (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012) and Critical Pedagogy's Problem Posing method (Freire, 1972).

College orientations for first year students in general are designed to impart an exhaustive amount of information to students with the hope that this information will enable students to successfully transition into college. Information includes navigating academics, financial aid, health and social student interests and needs. This type of information is necessary, and yet FGC students could benefit from an orientation that focuses on their knowledge and lived experiences and how they can bring their whole self into their college career. The project will outline the need for a successful orientation program and the benefits it can have for FGC students. I describe the training that current student will embark in as well as the general purpose of the orientation. I share my own *testimonio* describing how reflecting on the lived experiences of my students has affected my advising style. I will describe the core values to keep in mind when implementing this training and the step-by-step instructions, including examples.

#### **Description of the Project**

The project begins with leadership training, implemented within the Fiat Lux Scholarship Program. The Fiat Lux Scholarship program has a student run scholar association, Fiat Lux Scholar Association (FLSA). The training will be for current Fiat Lux Scholars who would like to develop and lead an orientation for their incoming peers with the goal of helping new Fiat Lux

Scholars understand the college transition as one that is adding and not taking away from their familial histories. The training modules will be integrated into FLSA as a living document within their existing manuals. By adopting the training as part of a tradition to welcome new Fiat Lux Scholars, it will enable student leaders to continue to implement, improve and sustain. Should others want to borrow this project to implement within orientation trainings, it would be imperative to maintain the core values that make up the training: (1) *Testimonios* as lived experiences, (2) Community Cultural Wealth to honor what FGC students contribute, and (3) Critical Pedagogy's Problem Posing method to help students question and challenge dominant narratives, by creating new knowledge to move forward.

### **Development of the Project**

I have been inspired through my experience in advising students for the past eight years. Before I moved to California, I worked at a community college in rural southeast Minnesota as the Multicultural Programs Coordinator and Enrollment Advisor. My role included community outreach, advising and retention. One of the projects I coordinated was the Be Your Best Summer College Prep Academy (BYB). The BYB students taught me valuable lessons about what FGC students need to successfully transition into college. In 2011, my first year organizing the program, I started off on the wrong foot as I treated the students like empty vessels and my role was to impart the much-needed knowledge for their success. Paulo Freire's (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* speaks to the oppressive nature of schools acting as holders of knowledge without allowing students to partake in the knowledge creation. As a society, we continue to replicate this type of schooling. As a result, things did not turn out quite how I imagined, as the percentage of students completing the program was one of the worst in the program's history. Furthermore, students did not trust me and instead resisted my advice.

After the program was over, I reflected on what could be improved. I realized that the BYB students knew what they needed to do to be successful; they just needed to feel validated and have practical support. I needed to be more accepting of the unique process each student needs to feel equipped for success and not just throw everyone into a one size fits all success stories. This experience was humbling and resulted in me wanting to change my approach to leading BYB and my approach to advising in general. I kept reflecting on what conditions were needed for the students who did not successfully complete the program instead of focusing on the students who successfully finished the program, which too often is the case. I reflected on their stories, what made them who they were, their family situation, what type of support they had at school and ultimately, what did they want out of the college experience. During my reflection on these questions, I decided to include them on the application for BYB thinking it would help me get a preview of the aspirations, limits and opportunities of each of the students. Once students were chosen, keeping in mind their stories, I designed the program to meet their specific needs. I changed everything from the language on the application to the way I recruited and trained tutors, faculty and staff and the way we lead the orientations and other workshops. I was on a mission to change the culture of what it meant to transition FGC students from low income and diverse ethnic backgrounds. For example, for several students getting to class was going to be a hardship during the summer because the school bus was not available to pick them up as it does during the school year. I decided to pay our tutors additional time to utilize college cars to pick up students and take them back home after class. On a side note, these rides home provided the tutors an opportunity to get to know the students on a deeper level and build a stronger relationship. Providing rides home to students would have been very useful during the first year because the students who did not pass the program were constantly late or missed class,

due to transportation issues. After the second year, I regained my confidence and my leadership in BYB felt less pretentious and more authentic. I was there to learn from my students and find ways to improve the program together.

Reflecting on this experience has been key to my development as a student advocate for many reasons. For one, after my first year coordinating BYB, I considered raising the standards, which included recruiting students who would take college serious instead of students who missed or were constantly late to classes. However, this kind of thinking puts all of the responsibility on the students instead of challenging those in charge of making decisions on how the program can meet the needs of the students who need the most support. Secondly, I decided to listen to the students who were having issues completing the program because they challenged me to step outside of the dominant structure that constantly makes them feel unwelcomed. I realized that my success as a student was in part due to dancing to the same rhythm of the dominant structure. As a student, I was constantly reminded that I was a different type of Mexican because I was smart and I did the right things. The qualities that I displayed in my academic progress became understood as qualities that are usually attributed toward white students, who are more likely to be successful in school. This stereotyping is known as having an implicit bias, when certain qualities of a member or social group are attributed exclusively to that group (Staats, Capatosto, Tenney, & Mamo, 2017). Conversely, Hispanic or black students are attributed with higher potential to dropout or be less engaged in school. This explains why I was seen as a “different type of Mexican”. Unconsciously, I had come to believe that there was only one way to be successful and that was to exist within the dominant structure that acknowledges and rewards those who believe in the system. However, students who deviate from following a certain path towards academic success are reminded that they continue to fulfill

their community's stereotype of not being successful in school. I realized that I needed to know more about this system and why it helped some students succeed, whereas keeping others out.

After five years of working at the community college, I decided it was time to immerse myself in a deeper understanding of what it means to engage with a multicultural community that needs a supportive structure within the dominant framework in education. My husband and I packed our bags and drove cross-country to start our new journey in the San Francisco Bay Area. I began the International and Multicultural Education Master's program at the University of San Francisco and at the same time, my advising role at UC Berkeley. Currently, I serve as the advisor to Fiat Lux Scholars at UC Berkeley. Since I began this position in 2015, my goal has been to get to know my students as much as possible. One of the first emails I sent out to my advisees was asking them to stop by and share their story with me. Shortly after, my calendar filled up with 30-minute appointments. Students came in to share with me their struggles, successes and dreams. I would in turn share with them where I came from, what my goals were and how I ended up at Berkeley. After these exchanges, I established a strong connection with my advisees and they continued to set appointments. I found that sharing our stories laid the foundation of trust because students knew that I too was a FGC student and they could come to me without hesitation. I also found out that even though my students were brilliant, they faced serious struggles and many of them felt that they did not belong at such a prestigious public institution. Listening to their stories helped me to contextualize the needs of my students and strategize ways I could best advise them.

The same year that I began my work at Berkeley, I also started my first semester of my masters at USF. In that semester, I enrolled in two courses: Critical Race Theories (CRT) and Latinos in Education. Even though both CRT and Latinos in Education were helpful in laying the

foundation of the institutional struggles I had gone through as a student, *Latinos in Education* introduced *testimonio* as a theoretical lens, methodology, and pedagogy. During the *Latinos in Education* seminar, one of my assignments was on *testimonio*, I interviewed three Mexican males who have come of age in the United States: my brother who is a couple years older than I am, my nephew who is currently in high school, and a student from my previous job. These *testimonios* were very powerful because they demonstrated how through story sharing, one can understand the restraints of the dominant culture (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012) especially on these three Mexican males who could have had better opportunities for success. Their stories allowed me to understand the ‘male’ perspective and the difficulty in asking for help. For example, my brother felt embarrassed to ask for help in front of his friends, not wanting to seem like less of a man. The *testimonios* also showed examples of how schools contribute to criminalization by constantly policing Latino youth and labeling them as deviant, criminals or gangsters. Additionally, their identities were constantly challenged, when crossing onto the US cultural norms of what is expected of them from both cultures. Considering how the Mexican male experiences have been shaped throughout their upbringing in the US and even more in the educational and socio-political environment allowed me to have a deeper understanding and building solidarity as I think about how they cross borders in negotiating their identities interjected by both culture and gender.

This assignment was one of the most impactful because even though I had grown up witnessing the constant policing my brother experienced, we never talked about it. I recall my brother holding his head up high and acting like it did not bother him. My brother was proud and strong. I admired him for that, but I do not think this was fair for him to have to go through this type of discrimination as a kid from supposedly responsible adults entrusted by our parents.

*Testimonio* allowed me to see the resistance my brother was exhibiting as he drew upon his lived experiences within the systemic oppression and violence in school. I was able to reconnect my brother's resistance with the students from the BYB program. It dawned on me that the way I had managed the program my first year, I continued to perpetuate the oppressive systems and the students rightfully resisted and thankfully because it made me realize and change direction. I recognized that the power of sharing stories with my students allowed me to reflect on how I would like to move forward as an advisor. The reflection is as important as the *testimonio* itself. One cannot just listen to the story; one must reflect on the structural environment from which the *testimonialista* is experiencing the margins.

### ***Testimonio as Pedagogy***

*Testimonio* is a critical tool giving space for lived experiences of FGC students to be recounted during the important transition to college that is all too often obscured by dominant narratives that suggest it is better for FGC to leave behind their lived experiences. In fact, sharing lived experiences among FGC students will not only help them understand their specific journey, but also create community as they discover the interconnections of one another's stories. Creating community is very important for students who already feel marginalized from the higher education institutional structure and culture. To create a community where FGC students feel welcomed, institutions must make it clear that students' origin does matter. Their origin informs their experience and it has everything to do with the type of person they are and the values that they hold dear. Institutions must recognize the unique values and experiences that FGC students bring to their higher education experience. Additionally, institutions must be willing to learn from and allow students to build upon and recreate knowledge that will improve the institution. *Testimonio* is a simple and powerful way in which we can listen to the stories of

all students and validate their lived experiences. Creating space for *testimonios* allows us to honor the borders that students cross as they negotiate their identity and become vulnerable in multiple contexts. In the following section, I will explore how *testimonios* inform the project and build a community of collective consciousness and solidarity.

### **The Project**

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the training will be implemented within the Fiat Lux Scholar Association (FLSA). FLSA serves as a bridge of peer support to scholars in understanding and utilizing the benefits of the Fiat Lux Scholarship Program as well as to encourage meaningful and intentional engagement within the scholar community. In order to achieve meaningful interactions, this project is designed to build community within the current Fiat Lux Scholars through sharing of *testimonios* and discuss how their stories interconnect. My role as the advisor in the process is to introduce the idea of a training on *testimonios*. Once the training is in place, the role of the advisor is to introduce key concepts, followed by facilitating discussion in a way that engages all participants throughout each step of the training.

FLSA is composed of a variety of officer positions elected at the end of each academic year. To implement this project successfully, the first step is to discuss the purpose of FLSA and the goals that each officer has to fulfill the purpose. As the advisor to FLSA, I would introduce the training and ask the officers to participate however they feel most comfortable. This is important because not all students may want to share their *testimonio* about their experience in their transition to college. However, the FLSA officers should participate in the training as a contributing audience, reflecting on other student's experiences and how they might relate with their own experience. Depending on how many officers would like to share their *testimonio*, the next step includes reaching out to the wider Fiat Lux Scholar community to ask for additional

participants which serves as a way to engage scholars who are not part of the leadership team. The reason I work through FLSA in order to implement this training is because they are the leadership group of the program. FLSA has goals in mind to help engage the wider scholar community and as the advisor it is important to engage them as leaders in this training. Involving FLSA as leaders is especially critical because the plan is for a training of this kind to become a traditional practice at the beginning of each academic year and FLSA has the student leadership structure in place. I would then work with FLSA officers to create an invitation to other scholars and introduce the main purpose of the training, which is to develop and implement the orientation for their incoming peers. The invitation should describe the purpose, time commitment and brief description of what will be covered in the training. Here is an example of what the invitation could look like:

Dear Fiat Lux Scholar,

The Fiat Lux Scholar Association (FLSA) is organizing a one-day training focused on collecting *testimonios* (personal stories) on transitioning to college. The goal of this training is to identify shared themes found within current Fiat Lux Scholar *testimonios*, and utilize those themes to inform the agenda for an orientation to welcome incoming Fiat Lux Scholars. Ultimately, after the training Fiat Lux Scholars will be inspired through the *testimonios* to create a relevant orientation that can be focused on the needs of Fiat Lux Scholars.

This training is essential because it will do a couple of things; it will engage current scholars to motivate new scholars by sharing *testimonios*, and it will help build community within the current Fiat Lux Scholars as they learn about each others stories and together, identify common themes.

Here is an overview of what the training will look like:

- 8 hour training on a Saturday/Sunday before school starts.
- Current Fiat Lux Scholars will share their *testimonios* (*personal story*) on their college transition experience, about challenges and strategies employed to overcome challenges.
- After sharing *testimonios* as a group, Fiat Lux Scholars who participate in the training will identify shared themes.
- The shared themes will inform the program for the welcome event.

The orientation for entering Fiat Lux Scholars will include:

- Main theme: *testimonios*—Fiat Lux Scholars who participated in the training will come up with a way to share their *testimonios* as a collective through creative expression such as theatre, spoken word, poetry, art, music, or another medium.
- Through their collective *testimonios*, scholars will showcase the uniqueness of their scholar community and the capacity to contribute to and build on to the overall campus culture.

We hope you will consider joining the training. This training will build community, it will build leadership skills and it will be a fun and rewarding way to give back as we empower and encourage entering Fiat Lux Scholars.

Please let us know if you are interested in joining the training and let us know if you have any questions.

### **Description of the training**

Once the participants have been identified, I will send out information on the location and the time of the training as well as instructions on prep-work that will need to be completed beforehand. I will elaborate on this as I get into the modules. The training will contain three modules, which will cover: (1) Introduction of authentic self, (2) *Testimoniando*, the power of sharing our lived experiences, (3) Building Community in the third space. Together these modules will be used to focus on the unique aspects and contributions that Fiat Lux Scholars bring through the use of *testimonio* as a pedagogical tool to connect and reflect on dialogue, on educational context, and on life experiences. *Testimonio* as a pedagogical tool is incorporated throughout the entirety of the training; from the way the students introduce themselves, to the sharing of the actual *testimonio*, to the way that they identify the shared themes and build solidarity and community in the final module. *Testimonio* will create a connection as they build solidarity and strategize on how to address challenges Fiat Lux Scholars face as they are transitioning to college.

## Introduction of Authentic Self

During the first training module, current Fiat Lux Scholars will be asked to introduce themselves in a way that feels authentic to them. The challenge is to move beyond the usual name and place of origin and intended area of study and move to an introduction that describes what brings them happiness. For example, in Module 1, students will do a free-write where they will answer the following questions and follow up with a share out. (Appendix, Module 1 worksheet: Introduction to Authentic Self, pg. 7)

1. What makes you happy? (an exploration of multiple sensations through a description of what that looks, feels, smells and tastes like)
2. Why does this place/moment feel right?
3. Why does it bring you happiness?

Here is an example of my personal free-write on what makes me happy (Appendix, Module 1 worksheet: Introduction to Authentic Self, pg. 7)

*En el baile, soy autenticamente yo! Me miro como una chaparrita apunto de engrandecer con el espíritu mas grande que el universo por que estoy apunto de mover mis caderas al son de la tambora. Estoy determinada a disfrutar del momento donde mi cuerpo se une al ritmo y nada nos puede separar. No solamente huele a sudor, huele a mi perfume que cada vuelta que doy lo atrapa el viento y lo enreda con aire fresco llenándome del oxigeno que regresa a mi y no paro, no paro, no paro de bailar. Huele a peligro estar contigo, canta la Arroyadora Banda el Limon, cuando me uno a mi pareja, nos volvemos a enamorar como si fuese la primera ves. Me enamoro, me ilusiono de las posibilidades...me sabe a dulzura estar bailando contigo sin parar, siento que si fuera mi último día en la tierra moriría en feliz.*

*Bailando para mi me trae bonitos recuerdos de mi ninez cuando bailabamos con la familia, cuando mirabamos a mi padre tocar su guitarra en los bailes, cuando bajabamos con la banda de las fiestas patronales de nuestro rancho. Me trae felicidad saber que el baile y la musica fueron pasados de mi padre a nosotros y es algo que disfrutamos siempre juntos como familia. Tanto nos encantaba bailar a mis hermanos y ami que asta nos arriesgabamos, escapandonos de la casa solo para disfrutar!*

*At the Mexican dance, I am authentically me! I look like a little girl about to enlarge with the spirit bigger than the universe--I am about to move my hips to the sound of the drums. I am determined to enjoy the moment when my body joins the rhythm and nothing can separate us. It not only smells like sweat, it smells of my perfume that at every turn I give is caught by the wind and it entangles it with fresh air filling me with the oxygen that comes back to me and I do not stop, I do not stop, I do not stop dancing. It smells like danger to be with you, the Arroyadora Banda el Limon sings, when I join my partner, we fall in love again as if it were the first time. I am in love, I am excited about the possibilities ...it tastes sweet to be dancing without stopping, I feel that if it were my last day on earth I would die happy.*

*Dancing for me brings back beautiful memories of my childhood when we danced with the family, when we watched my father play his guitar at dances, when we danced down the hill with the banda in our village. It brings me happiness to know that dance and music were passed from my father to us and it is something that we always enjoy together as a family. We loved dancing so much my siblings and I that we would risk getting in trouble by sneaking out just to go out to dance!*

Describing a happy moment brings so much more richness in painting a picture of who we are. This process gives access to the kind of things we cherish which probably largely-impacted our formation. In my example, I free-wrote about why dancing for me was more than just a moment of joy; it made me feel confident as I learned different steps. Dancing made me take risks as I tried new forms of dancing such as *zapateado*, *quebradita*, *norteno*, *duranguenze* and then later hip-hop, and country. Dancing was a social outlet as I made new friends and strengthened relations as we shared the love for dancing. I also think it is important to describe a happy moment and remember to reconnect with that moment, because when times get rough during college, you know you can go back to that moment. For example, when most students at my college were binge drinking, my group of friends and I were practicing self-care at the local Latino dance hall, dancing our little hearts out. These moments were key to my success as I had a space to just be my happiest and share with friends who shared the same interest.

### **Testimoniando, the Power of Sharing Our Lived Experiences**

During the second training module, students will share their *testimonio* on their lived experience transitioning to UC Berkeley (Cal). *Testimonios* will highlight challenges, opportunities and successes. Students will address the following questions with as much detail as possible:

1. What were you looking forward to as you transitioned to Cal?
2. What concerns did you have as you transitioned to Cal?
3. What expectations did you have for yourself?
4. What expectations do you think others (family, friends, others) had for you?
5. What challenges did you face once at Cal?
6. What strategies did you implement to overcome these challenges?

7. What strengths, skills and knowledge from your community background have helped you in the transition?

The questions above will be shared with the students ahead of time and they will be asked to bring a rough draft of their *testimonio* to be prepared to talk about their experience. However, students will be encouraged to add to their *testimonio* during their share out, even if it was not included in the draft. The goal during this module will be to simply listen to each other's stories, reflect, take notes and ask questions.

### **Building Community in the Third Space**

During the third training module, students will be asked to identify shared themes and trends within the *testimonios*, and recognizing instances where storytellers crossed from a familial space to new territory (creating a third space). This third space is also known as the “in between” or *nepantla*, described as (Anzaldúa, 2012) the space where students find themselves pulled in more than one direction as they cross borders. In this space, students experience the feeling that they are neither from here nor there, (*ni aqui, ni aya*) as they straddle multiple contexts. As Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/Fronteras* (2012) describe, this space is more than a separation or divide, it is a space inhabiting a cultural terrain of its own. During this module, students will pay attention to strengths, knowledge, abilities and skills needed for cross and engage within these borders. For instance once *testimonios* have been shared during the second module, participants will break into small groups of three to four students where they will sit in a circle and answer the following questions within their group:

1. What story resonated the most with you and why?
2. Identify shared themes and trends from the *testimonios*.

3. Give examples of instances where *testimonialistas* crossed borders from familial to new territory.
4. How did the *testimonialistas* engage within these borders?
5. What strengths, knowledge, or skills did the *testimonialistas* incorporate in their testimonios?

After the small groups have discussed and answered the questions, there will be an opportunity to share out to the greater group. During this time, students will map out and analyze similar themes, challenges, and strengths. For example, within the *testimonios*, students might share that a common struggle for them was feeling that they were not academically prepared. Or perhaps during the transition, *testimonialistas* experienced psycho-emotional stress in trying to fit in. Or they felt lost in figuring out their career path. With this information, students will add to the orientation lesson plan and create a resource guide of *consejos* (advices) that will be shared with their incoming peers. Upon mapping-out the top three themes and creating a program plan, students will brainstorm on a creative way to share their collective testimonio capturing the themes during the orientation. For example, *testimonios* could be performed through poetry, spoken word, theatre, music, art and any other medium. Module 3 is the culminating step of the training and it is perhaps one of the most important pieces to build community as students reflect on common themes and shared struggles. These final steps will not only help students feel validated as they relate to one-another's experiences, it will also help strengthen and build their social network within the Fiat Lux Scholar community. Students will identify common struggles contextualized within the underlying systems they navigate within higher education and beyond. Recognizing specific needs within the struggle will help students develop strategies that have

worked in their community cultural wealth as knowledge and recognizing the skills they have gained from experiences in their particular community.

### **Outcomes and Goals**

Upon completing these three training modules, students leaders will be able to identify three main themes that will be incorporated within the orientation for new scholars. Student leaders will incorporate the themes that come out of the *testimonios* into the overall program for the orientation. Student leaders will incorporate their collective *testimonios* through a creative form of expression during the orientation and there will be an opportunity for new students to pair up with another peer to share their current story of transitioning and reflect on common themes and connections among the *testimonialistas*. Aside from utilizing common themes to inform the orientation, the advisor should make space for additional information to be included into the orientation as needed. The goal is for participants to share their authentic selves through their stories, feel validated in what they are going through, build community, and strategize about the types of opportunities and resources available to help incoming students succeed. Finally, my hopes are that this orientation will help incoming students feel at home, as they develop an appreciation for themselves, their culture and for others in the Fiat Lux Scholar community. The training modules are located in the appendix.

## CHAPTER IV CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Conclusions**

Throughout this project, I have developed a series of modules that will be used by the Fiat Lux Scholar Association to welcome first generation college students as they transition to college. These modules can be redesigned to meet the needs of any particular group. I am utilizing these modules within an existing student group that has the goal of developing ideas to welcome students from first generation, low income and minority backgrounds. This project aims to build on the limited programs that work with first generation college students from underrepresented backgrounds by centering their lived experiences as knowledge to empower them to succeed and combat culturally deficit narratives. In acknowledging the structural challenges and through culturally relevant service-learning pedagogy, the institution can help facilitate this transition.

This work is important because our higher educational institutions continue to be a place dominated by whiteness and upper middle class culture. First generation college students from underrepresented backgrounds continue to internalize their culture as having less value than the dominant one, but the reality is they bring social and cultural capital that is often taken for granted by educational institutions. My project calls for FGC students to come together through introducing their authentic self, sharing their *testimonios* with one another, and recognizing challenges that are most likely inherent to the student-campus climate relationship. Through this process of sharing *testimonio*, students will have voice in a space where they feel empowered to share their experiences on transitioning to college. Through *testimonio*, the student as well as the audience will distinguish nuances of the college life that go unnoticed, unless reflected upon collectively, describing instances where socio-political and economic oppression occurs.

*Testimonio* solicits a listener who bears witness, gains awareness of structural challenges, and joins in solidarity to build resistance as we create a more equitable society. By empowering first generation students from underrepresented communities to bring their authentic self to college will inspire them to challenge the status quo and in turn to reach a more equitable educational system.

This project contributes to existing literature highlighting the wealth that exists in communities of color and by drawing out examples of capital that have historically been excluded from the dominant narrative. This analysis provides a unique narrative about how first generation college students can begin to think about themselves as knowledge holders as they prepare for college. They can begin to think about the strategies that have worked for their families in navigating spaces also dominated by whiteness and how these strategies translate to their new journey to college. Though there are many orientations and efforts to welcome students to college, oftentimes students from underrepresented backgrounds do not feel they can be themselves in these spaces. This project will contribute to creating those spaces.

My journey on this project was inspiring as I connected the Community Cultural Wealth framework to the praxis of *Testimonio* and Critical Pedagogy. Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model refocused the lens from a negative to a lens of possibilities. Through the resistance capital for instance, it reminded me of my purpose as an advisor, which should not be to regurgitate the norms by which first generation students, must adhere to. My purpose is to empower students to question and create knowledge to reinvent educational institutions. As I reflected on what this work would look like, at the beginning, my goal was to teach students the knowledge and skills it takes to successful transition onto college. My perspective changed as I read the work of critical race scholars (Solórzano et al., 2005; Ojeda et al., 2013) who theorize

that students from marginalized backgrounds are successful when they maintain their cultural ties and draw their inspiration from their roots to persist. I was also inspired by Rendon's (2006) interactive model of success that conceptualized a holistic view of success emphasizing not only the intellect, but also social, emotional, and spiritual development. These ideas gave soul to my project as their work allowed me to reflect on the ways that I drew resilience to persist in college and I connected it back to the greater purpose of why *mi familia* came to this country and how I was adding to the greater story. It was not just about me and it does not stop with me. The story continues with my students and how they challenge and continue to build a different a narrative by keeping true to what is meaningful to them and their community.

### **Recommendations**

This project has helped me to reconnect to the growth that I have gone through as a professional in my advising career. As I recounted my experience, I recognized the growth I reached and it motivated me to continue to pursue growth. Similarly, students need to hear the growth stories that other students went through in their transition and how they negotiated different aspects of their familial space with the new territory in academe. They need to hear about the lessons learned on crossing those borders because without those lessons, growth is not acknowledged. I know that students are excited about developing and they are more than willing to learn, however completely forgetting where they come from just to fit into the dominant culture is like erasing what makes them happy, it is forgetting to be their authentic self. As a student advisor, I recommend that we keep in mind, what makes our students happy, where our students come from and how those things have impacted their development, their aspirations and what they want to get out of higher education.

My hope is that the perspective I brought in to examining existing work on first generation students transitioning to college through the CRT framework will provide a space for more scholars to connect their work to the community cultural wealth model. I also hope that future orientations will consider the power of *testimonio* and critical pedagogy to continue to bring into focus the lived experiences of the most marginalized community members of our greater society. I believe these frameworks and concepts will add purpose to the work that we do in education as we aim to serve students from low-income and underrepresented communities. My intention for this project is to inspire a multitude of ideas to rethink ways in which we can construct meaning as we welcome students to college. Finally, it is my intention to build spaces where students feel at ease in their vulnerabilities, and to empower them to build solidarity within their new communities.

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## APPENDIX

*Nuestros Conocimientos: Life lessons and Cultural Knowledge*  
for a Successful College Transition

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### ***Testimonio* Training at a Glance**

Below is a brief description of the three modules for an 8-hour training day. Each module will be described in more detail in the following sections and each module will be accompanied by a worksheet that will include further detail to be shared with students to complete.

1. Introduction of authentic self (1.5 hours):
  - a. This module will go beyond the usual name and origin intro into understanding what types of things bring each student joy and why? This module will also be a fun way to break the ice.
  
2. *Testimoniando*, the power of sharing our lived experiences (3.5 hours):
  - a. This module will be an opportunity to listen to each other's stories, reflect, take notes ask questions.
  - b. Students will bring a light draft of what their *testimonio* will be, prior to the training that way students are prepared to talk about their experience.
  
3. Building Community in the third space (3 hours):
  - a. Mapping out shared themes and trends within the *testimonios* to inform the welcome event.
  - b. Identify strengths, knowledge, abilities and skills *testimonialistas* displayed in their stories and how these can be applied in crossing from a familial space to new territory.

#### Training objectives

1. Build community through sharing *testimonios*.
2. Connect shared themes (through *testimonios*) to inform the program for the welcoming event for incoming first year scholars.
3. Develop orientation program that focuses on building confidence of incoming Fiat Lux Scholars, helping them to reflect on the strengths and prior knowledge they bring from their communities to overcome structural challenges.

## Module 1: Introduction of authentic self

### Objective:

Fiat Lux Scholars will introduce themselves and get to know each other as authentic as possible going beyond the usual name and origin intro into understanding what types of things bring each student joy and why? This module will also be a fun way to break the ice.

### Materials:

- Scratch paper
- Post-it Easel Pad
- Writing utensils
- Student worksheet

### Steps:

1. Welcome (10 minutes)
  - a. Here the advisor/facilitator will give the introduction of what the 8 hour training will entail. Giving a brief overview of each module using the “at a glance” page.
2. Review Training Objectives (5 min).
  - a. At a glance, pg. 2 and Module 1 objectives pg. 3.
3. Establish community agreements (15 minutes):
  - a. Community agreements are what a group creates to formalize the expectations of group members.
  - b. These agreements are important for building trust. The creation of these agreements will help scholars prepare to share their *testimonios* and it will help their audience to keep an open mind and to be thoughtful as they reflect during module #2.
  - c. To begin, ask students to brainstorm the following prompt:

What would help us work best together during this training?

    - i. As students respond, the facilitator writes the community agreements on a large Post-it Easel Pad where it is easy for other students to see and to continue contributing.

- ii. Community agreements usually include: expectations (ground rules) regarding preparation, participation, behaviors on giving and receiving peer feedback, norms on how and when to participate, etc.
4. Introduce the first activity: free write (30 min).
  - a. Facilitator will provide a full example of introducing the authentic self.
  - b. Students will have a chance to list out the top three things that make them happy.
  - c. Free write—students will pick one of the top three things and free write describing in detail answering the questions (see module 1 worksheet, pg. 9)
5. Introduce the second activity: reflection as a group (25 min).
  - a. Students will reflect on how they felt sharing their happy moments and what they learned from each other.
6. Preview next module: *Testimoniando* (5 min).

## **Module 2: *Testimoniando* and the power of sharing our lived experiences**

### Objectives:

- (a) Review critical concepts— *Testimonio*, CCW, and Critical Pedagogy’s Problem Posing Method
- (b) Share *testimonio* of lived experience transitioning to college.
- (c) Listen to each other’s stories, reflect, take notes ask questions.

### Materials:

- Post-it Easel Pad
- Markers
- Student worksheet

### Steps:

1. Review of objectives. (5 min)
  - a. Module 2 objectives pg. 5.
2. Review Critical Concepts. (20 min)
  - a. Advisor leads the discussion and encourages participation on critical concepts.
  - b. See accompanying module 2 student worksheet for the full description on pg. 13.
3. *Testimonios* on lived experience transitioning to college (90 min)

NOTE: Advisor should offer students an opportunity to take a small break within this section.

Students will address the questions below.

- a. What were you looking forward to as you transitioned to Cal?
- b. What concerns did you have as you transitioned to Cal?
- c. What expectations did you have for yourself?
- d. What expectations do you think others (family, friends, others) had for you?
- e. What challenges did you face once at Cal?
- f. What strategies did you implement to overcome these challenges?
- g. What strengths, skills and knowledge from your community background have helped you in the transition?

### **IMPORTANT:**

- Prior to the training, students will be asked to address the questions above in a light draft. I would recommend that once participants are identified, the advisor

will follow-up with specifics about the training including an ask for participants to answer these questions.

- There is a possibility that not all students will be comfortable to share their *testimonio* and that is OK.
- Students should bring their draft and participate by listening and reflecting as well as by asking questions after the *testimonios* have been shared.

4. *Reflexion* (20 min)

- a. During the *testimonios* sharing, students will take notes and jot down questions to help connect common themes among the *testimonialistas*. See student worksheet for further instructions on pg. 12.

5. Share-out *Reflexion* (15 min)

- a. Students will get into small groups to share what they reflected on.
- b. *Reflexion* frames a collective consciousness, functioning as a way to bridge the participant's *testimonios*, by embracing their unique perspectives, and the critical effects and values the academic socialization processes imparts on first generation college students of color.
- c. During *Reflexion* as a group, the advisor should highlight the collective consciousness and circle back to problem posing method which reminds us to understand context and life experiences to engage in a creative process through critical thinking.
- d. The advisor is helping participants reflect on their reflection and setting the stage for the third and final module on creating community.

6. Preview next module: building community in third space.

### Module 3: Building Community in the third space.

Objective:

Students will identify:

- (a) Review Critical Concepts: “Third Space”
- (b) Shared themes, trends, strengths, knowledge and skills within the *testimonios*,
- (c) A creative way to share final *testimonios* during the orientation for incoming scholars.
- (d) Learning outcomes and discuss topics they wish to further explore.

Materials:

- Post-it Easel Pad
- Markers
- Student worksheet

Steps:

1. Review objectives on pg. 7 (5 min).
2. Review Critical Concepts (refer to the student worksheet) (10 min)
3. As a group answer the following questions: (25 min)
  - a. What story resonated the most with you and why?
  - b. Identify shared themes and trends from the *testimonios*.
  - c. Give examples of instances where *testimonialistas* crossed borders from familial to new territory.
  - d. How did they engage within these borders?
  - e. What strengths, knowledge or skills did the *testimonialistas* display?
4. Share out and Map-out (60 min)
  - a. Students will map-out and analyze themes, challenges, and strengths across the groups. For instructions on this activity, see the student worksheet on pg. 15.
  - b. Students will add to the orientation lesson plan incorporating the top three themes that came out during the *testimonios*.
  - c. Creative performance – in small groups, taking the common themes and orientation lesson plan, students will discuss ideas on incorporating creative expression to share their *testimonio* during the orientation utilizing poetry, spoken word, theatre, music, art and any other medium

5. Closing thoughts: (20 min)
  - a. In this section it is an opportunity to review what has been learned and if there are any missing pieces that might be incorporated into the orientation or left to explore further. Students will discuss the following questions.
    - i. What did you learn during the process of sharing and map out?
    - ii. What there anything missing that could be explored further?
    - iii. Any other questions or comments?
  - b. After the discussion on closing thoughts, the advisor should acknowledge the feedback and connect it back to the critical concepts, the goal of the training, and the purpose of the orientation.
  - c. If there is feedback that is adding new information or themes to the orientation, the advisor should provide guidance on how these new pieces of information can be included or further discussed during the follow-up meeting which will be discussed in the next section.
6. Once the training is completed, the facilitator advises student leaders on setting up a future meeting in which they can finalize the program for the orientation.
  - a. A follow-up meeting is required for students to implement the creative expression on incorporating the *testimonio* themes into the orientation.
  - b. Students leading the orientation will also need to practice and decide each other's roles.
  - c. These additional components can then be decided after participants complete the training modules as this training will shape the content for what will later be the orientation for incoming Fiat Lux Scholars.
  - d. The advisor will play a significant role in creating the orientation together with the leaders based on their *testimonios*.

**Module 1 worksheet: Introduction to Authentic Self**

**Step 1:** List or draw three things that make you happy (objects, experiences, people, places, traditions, etc.)



**Step 2:** Out of those three things, pick one that you can write in detail while you answer the following questions. As you answer the questions, utilize multiple sensations to describe what that looks feels, smells and tastes like. Feel free to write, draw, and utilize different language that you feel will capture your description most authentically. Feel free to utilize the back of this page to write. *See example on page 11.*

1. What makes you happy?
2. Why does this place, moment feel right?
3. Why does it bring you happiness?
4. Is this experience accessible when needed?

*I am happy when...*

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin green border, occupying most of the page below the text. It is intended for the user to write or draw their response to the prompt "I am happy when...".

### Free Write Example: Introduction of Authentic Self

Notice how I wrote the example in Spanish because I feel more in touch with my sensations in Spanish and because what I describe is rooted in my Mexican cultural experience. If I were to describe this in English, it would lose its originality and it might not make as much sense.

*En el baile, soy auténticamente yo! Me miro como una chaparrita apunto de engrandecer con el espíritu más grande que el universo porque estoy apunto de mover mis caderas al son de la tambora. Estoy determinada a disfrutar del momento donde mi cuerpo se une al ritmo y nada nos puede separar. No solamente huele a sudor, huele a mi perfume que cada vuelta que doy lo atrapa el viento y lo enreda con aire fresco llenándome del oxígeno que regresa a mí y no paro, no paro, no paro de bailar. Huele a peligro estar contigo, canta la Arroyadora Banda el Limon, cuando me uno a mi pareja, nos volvemos a enamorar como si fuese la primera vez. Me enamoro, me ilusiono de las posibilidades...me sabe a dulzura estar bailando contigo sin parar, siento que si fuera mi último día en la tierra moriría en feliz.*

*Bailando para mi me trae bonitos recuerdos de mi niñez cuando bailabamos con la familia, cuando mirabamos a mi padre tocar su guitarra en los bailes, cuando bajabamos con la banda de las fiestas patronales de nuestro rancho. Me trae felicidad saber que el baile y la musica fueron pasados de mi padre a nosotros y es algo que disfrutamos siempre juntos como familia. Tanto nos encantaba bailar a mis hermanos y ami que asta nos arriesgabamos, escapandonos de la casa solo para disfrutar!*

At the Mexican dance, I am authentically me! I look like a little girl about to enlarge with the spirit bigger than the universe--I am about to move my hips to the sound of the drums. I am determined to enjoy the moment when my body joins the rhythm and nothing can separate us. It not only smells like sweat, it smells of my perfume that at every turn I give is caught by the wind and it entangles it with fresh air filling me with the oxygen that comes back to me and I do not stop, I do not stop, I do not stop dancing. It smells like danger to be with you, the *Arroyadora Banda el Limon* sings, when I join my partner, we fall in love again as if it were the first time. I am in love, I am excited about the possibilities ...it tastes sweet to be dancing without stopping, I feel that if it were my last day on earth I would die happy.

Dancing for me brings back beautiful memories of my childhood when we danced with the family, when we watched my father play his guitar at dances, when we danced down the hill with the banda in our village. It brings me happiness to know that dance and music were passed from my father to us and it is something that we always enjoy together as a family. We loved dancing so much my siblings and I that we would risk getting in trouble by sneaking out just to go out to dance!

## Module 2 worksheet: *Testimoniando*, the power of sharing our lived experiences

Step 1: Review critical concepts

### ***Testimonio:***

- Originates from oral traditions and cultures of Latin American liberation efforts and resistant movements against oppressive governments in Latin American countries in the 1970s (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012).
- Used by Chicana and Latina scholars to exposes brutality and other forms of violence while building solidarity among women of color.
- In education, it serves as a way to resist traditional frameworks, challenge objectivity, by situating the lived experiences of those marginalized and oppressed.
- Acknowledges the political, social, historical, and cultural histories within our lived experiences as a means to bring about change. Delgado Bernal et al. (2015, p. 364).  
*“By bridging individuals with collective histories of oppression, a story of marginalization is re-centered to elicit social change.”*

### **Community Cultural Wealth (CCW)**

- CCW is a lens that takes into account the intersecting issues within communities of color and offers a remedy to the deficit perspective through which non-majority populaces are viewed and self-internalize (Yosso, 2005).
- CCW utilizing the CRT and LatCrit frameworks to highlight forms of resistant cultural capital, known as the accumulation of resources and assets that students of color use to succeed in higher education despite obstacles they face.
- Yosso (2005) describes CCW within six forms of capital that exist in communities of color.
  - Aspirational capital
  - Linguistic capital
  - Familial capital
  - Social capital
  - Navigational capital
  - Resistance capital

### **Critical Pedagogy, Problem Posing**

- Freire’s (1972) problem posing pedagogy emphasizes critical thinking for the purpose of liberation through dialogue and an understanding of context and life experiences.
- People can either be passive recipients of knowledge or they can engage in a problem posing approach, as they become active participants.
- Problem-posing method is an alternative to the banking model of education, a metaphor referring to students as empty vessels into which teachers fill with knowledge.
- Freire’s argument was that this model blocks the student from partaking in the knowledge creation process and it reinforces oppression whereas problem posing encourages creative process through critical thinking.

Step 2: *Testimoniando* our lived experience transitioning to college.

In the space below, take notes, ask questions, and highlight something that spoke to you as you reflect on the *testimonio* of your peer.

*Reflexion*

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin green border, occupying the lower half of the page. It is intended for the student to write their reflection on the testimonio.

Step 3: Share out—get into small groups, exchange thoughts on your reflection. After you have discussed your group reflection, use this space below to write your collective thoughts, questions, and comments. This step will include an opportunity to share out your reflections to the larger group.

### Group Reflexion & Share-Out Notes



## Module 3 worksheet: Building Community in the third space

Step 1: Review Critical Concepts:

### Third Space

- Known as the “in between” or *nepantla*, described as (Anzaldúa, 2012) the space where students find themselves pulled in more than one direction as they cross borders.
- In this space, students experience the feeling that they are neither from here nor there, (*ni de aqui, ni de allá*) as they straddle multiple contexts.
- This space is more than a separation or divide; it is a space inhabiting a cultural terrain of its own.

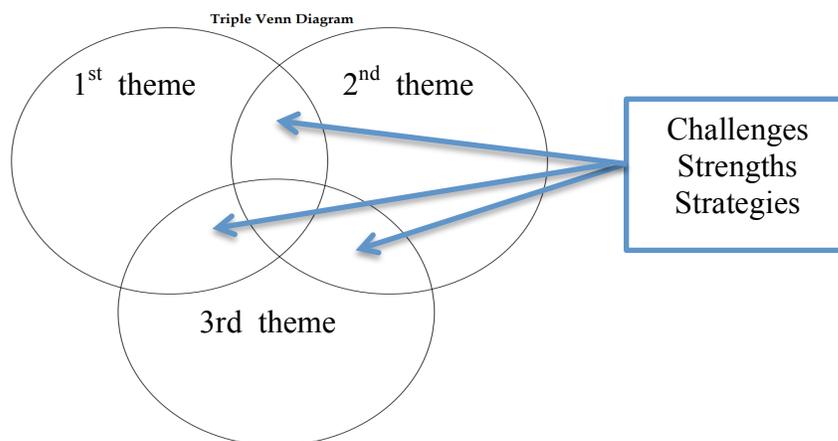
Step 2: Mapping Out and Sharing Out

In a small group, answer the following questions:

1. What story resonated the most with you and why?
2. Give examples of instances where *testimonialistas* crossed borders from familial to new territory.
3. How did they engage within these borders?
4. What strengths, knowledge or skills did the *testimonialistas* display?

Once your group has answered the questions above, create a triple venn diagram map, showing the top three themes and trends from the *testimonios* and then within the circles incorporate shared challenges, strengths and strategies across *testimonios*.

Share out: once all small groups have finished contributing to the map, share out your three themes and discuss. *Note: large poster sheets will be used for this activity.*



Step 3: Creative performance – in small groups, taking the common themes and orientation lesson plan, discuss ideas on incorporating creative expression to share your collective *testimonios* during the orientation utilizing poetry, spoken word, theatre, music, art and any other medium. Utilize the space below to organize your ideas.



Step 4 Closing thoughts: In this section, there will be an opportunity to reflect on the following questions. You can write them down and if you feel comfortable, you can share them out with the wider group.

1. What did you learn during the process of sharing and map out?
2. What there anything missing that could be explored further?
3. Any other questions or comments?

Advisor will close out with feedback on the next steps.