

HISPANIC AND LATINE UNDERGRADUATE MOTIVATIONS TO PURSUE AN AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE DEGREE



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Abstract

Hispanic and Latine students are the fastest growing demographic across colleges and universities in the United States (Cottrell, 2021). Are agricultural higher education institutions adequately supporting this demographic? Disproportionately lower graduation rates, grade point averages, and post-graduation employment would suggest administrators, faculty, and staff have room for improvement in their efforts in supporting Hispanic and Latine students (Alcocer & Martinez, 2017). This study employed hermeneutic phenomenological methods to provide direction in supporting their Hispanic and Latine students. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 undergraduate students in the College of Agriculture at California State University, Chico. In-vivo and axial coding efforts were employed to generate nine themes. Both motivating and demotivating factors were described by participants. Motivation stemmed from a sense of community within the college. Family, importance of education, and an internal drive were noted as motivating factors. Discrimination, both witnessed and personally experienced, led to assimilation or isolation and demotivation. Recommendations include intentional community building, inclusion of the family in the higher education institution, agricultural experiences for those with non-traditional agricultural backgrounds, representation of Hispanic and Latine agriculturalists, and discrimination response training for all students, faculty, staff, and administration. Funding for this project was provided by a Board of Governors' Award.

Keywords: Hispanic Serving Institution, undergraduate motivation, student support

Hispanic students are the fastest growing demographic of college students (Cottrell, 2021), doubling from 1.2 million in 2005 to 2.4 million in 2021 (Hernandez & McElrath, 2023). This growth is partially due to a rising Hispanic population in the United States (Funk & Lopez, 2022) but also includes an increase in the percentage of Hispanic young adults completing secondary education and pursuing post-secondary education (Hernandez & McElrath, 2023). Heavily concentrated in California, Florida, and Texas, Hispanic populations are rapidly expanding throughout the U.S. (Funk & Lopez, 2022). In an environment of student enrollment and retention concerns for post-secondary institutions, Hispanic students are an important population for student recruitment and support efforts (Meyer, 2023).

Census records producing these statistics tend to refer to all people with ethnic ties to Mexico and Central, South, and Latin America as Hispanic (Lopez et al., 2023). However, not all people groups from these geographical areas identify as Hispanic (Lopez et al., 2023; Miranda et al., 2023). Therefore, this study will use Hispanic and Latine, a gender-neutral form of Latino and Latina, to refer to students with ethnic identities in Mexico, Central America, South America, and Latin America (Miranda et al., 2023).

Review of Literature

While important to note Hispanic and Latine student experiences are not monolithic (Crosnoe, 2005), their cultural lenses provide a unique perspective to educational experiences (Storlie et al., 2013; Taggart & Crisp, 2011; Weissman et al., 1998). Hispanic and Latine students have

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reported a maladjustment to college, feelings of isolation, and discriminatory experiences (Taggart & Crisp, 2011). Moving away from home and family members can result in losing a sense of community and cultural identity (Kezar et al., 2020). Bilingual students can experience language barriers within a formal educational setting, leading to communication breakdowns and missed resources (Garcia, 2010). Intersectionality also plays a part in Hispanic and Latine college student experiences (Kim et al., 2021). Hispanic and Latine students are more likely to be the first members of their immediate family to attend post-secondary education (Storlie et al., 2013). First-generation students tend to bring fewer social connections and socioeconomic resources to higher education (Kim et al., 2021). Additionally, female Hispanic and Latina students have reported gendered differences and familial expectations from their male counterparts (Crosnoe, 2005).

The historic positionality of Hispanics within agriculture, particularly as manual farm laborers, impact Hispanic and Latine secondary and undergraduate students within an agricultural context (Ford et al., 2022; Russell et al., 2019). The public and personal perceptions of Hispanic and Latine agricultural workers may demotivate students to pursue careers in the agricultural industry (Russell et al., 2019). Further, family influences may steer students from what are perceived as less desirable jobs to careers with more social status (Medina et al., 2021). The lack of representation of Hispanic and Latine professionals at higher echelons within the agricultural industry can create barriers for students exploring career options (Russell et al., 2019). The struggles and barriers experienced by Hispanic and Latine students are often evidenced in negative educational outcomes, such as lower graduation rates and grade point averages and longer time to graduation than other college student demographics (Cottrell, 2021). This leads to the concern that colleges and universities may be enrolling Hispanic and Latine students, but not providing adequate supports once students are on campus (Venegas, 2021).

Intentional support for Hispanic and Latine students have shown significant impact on student outcomes (Green, 2011). Services which provide accessibility to financial resources, physical and mental health services, basic needs support, academic advising, and faculty connections impact Hispanic and Latine students' self-efficacy and increase student retention and graduation rates (Olive, 2008). Targeted curriculum and school activity opportunities increase Hispanic and Latine student engagement and participation (Roberts et al., 2009). Positive faculty relationships have a strong correlation with student academic success, graduation rates, and post-graduation employment (Wheeler, 2021). Alcocer and Martinez (2018) highlight the importance of peer mentoring in creating a sense of belonging for Hispanic and Latine students. "Serving Latino students does not mean institutions serve them at the expense of other students. This is not an either/or proposition. Rather, institutions can build on what works in serving Latino students to better serve other students as well." (Green, 2011, p. 79).

There are currently 526 Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) in 27 states (U.S. Department of Education, 2024) where Hispanic and Latine students make up at least 25%

of enrollment (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). The designation of HSI provides institutions with additional funding sources and opens competitive grant opportunities (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). HSIs and other institutions enrolling minority students have a moral obligation to create opportunities for student success (Becker & Cox, 2022). California State University, Chico (Chico State) is an HSI, where in the 2022-2023 school year nearly 50% of students enrolled in the College of Agriculture identified as Hispanic or Latine (California State University Chico, 2024). Therefore, we were interested in students' motivations to begin and continue their higher education to better inform Hispanic and Latine student support. Funding for this project was provided by the Board of Governors' Award.

Conceptual Framework

Expectancy value theory (EVT) provided the conceptual framework of the study. EVT describes choice motivation as expectations of success regulated by personal utility and related costs (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). First used to explain gender differences in mathematical performance and persistence, EVT postulates individuals are more likely to engage in activities when they are confident in their likelihood to succeed and may avoid activities where they are in doubt of the likelihood of success (Wigfield et al., 2016). Anticipated success or failure includes environmental and contextual factors in addition to an individual's self-efficacy (Wigfield et al., 2016). Further development of the theory identified the additional constructs of utility and cost to better predict levels of motivation and persistence (Day, 2020). Utility, sometimes referred to as task value, describes the subjective worth of the activity to the individual (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Cost encompasses the actual and opportunity costs associated with choosing to engage in the identified task (Wigfield et al., 2016). Individuals are more motivated in tasks with greater perceived success rates, more utility, and lower costs (Day, 2020).

EVT has been employed across the field of education, from early childhood to postsecondary and graduate education (Wigfield et al., 2016). Loh (2019) suggests EVT can inform educational settings to impact student motivation. Rubach et al. (2023) found empirical evidence of the relationship between environment, teacher support, and student motivation using EVT. Additionally, EVT is informative in studying educational motivation in a cultural setting (Wigfield et al., 2004). "This model (EVT) is an exceptionally appropriate starting point for investigating motivational and behavioral choices in cultural context" (Wigfield et al., 2016, p. 68). All students develop a sense of ability and expectation of success in a similar fashion while cultural influences shape their perceived utility, or value, of that task (Wigfield et al., 2004). According to EVT, colleges and universities may be able to influence Hispanic and Latine student success rates by addressing expectations of success, utility, and associated costs (Venegas, 2021). These constructs were used to guide the interview protocol and data collection methods of this study.

Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of the study was to provide direction for higher education programs to better serve their Hispanic or Latine students. We sought to answer the research question of, “What does it mean to be an undergraduate student identifying as Hispanic or Latine in the College of Agriculture at Chico State?”

Methodology

To meet the purpose and research question above, we employed a hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative approach (van Manen, 1990). The identified phenomenon was the lived experiences of Hispanic and Latine undergraduates in the College of Agriculture at Chico State (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2002). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 participants during the Spring 2023 semester. Prior to data collection, an interview protocol was established and reviewed by experts in qualitative methodology and cultural studies. Items included questions on background, educational and career goals, challenges experienced, and support systems. Once permission was obtained through the California State University, Chico Institutional Review Board (IRB-2022-122), participants were recruited through snowball sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018). An initial mass email to all College

of Agriculture undergraduates was followed by recruiting additional participants through recommendations from study participants and faculty members. Each participant chose a pseudonym to protect their identity.

Demographic information was collected from all 14 participants, 11 of whom were first-generation college students. Most participants identified as female with two males and one nonbinary participant contributing interview data. These 14 participants consisted of 13 Mexican or Mexican American nationalities with 1 other Latin America country represented. Participants included 3 freshmen, 1 sophomore, 5 juniors, and 5 seniors from all majors in the College of Agriculture. Aged 18 to 31, all participants reported holding paid employment while also being involved in campus organizations. All participants noted interest in graduate or terminal degrees. Twelve individuals have participated in a minorities in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) program. Participants with their chosen pseudonym and selected demographic information are included in Table 1 below.

Transcriptions of interview recordings were hand-coded using in-vivo procedures (Saldaña, 2016). Both authors individually coded each participant’s transcript (Creswell & Poth, 2018) in the initial round using the constant comparative method (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Codes from each author were then compared to the transcripts to find consensus, resulting in 350 unique in-vivo codes. The consensus building process provided triangulation in the data analysis process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through axial coding (Saldaña, 2016), these codes were organized

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Major(s)	Gender	First-Generation
Brittany*	Plant and Soil Science	Female	Yes
Camilia*	Plant and Soil Science and Agribusiness	Female	Yes
Coa*	Agricultural Education	Male	No
Confetti*	Plant and Soil Science	Female	No
Destiny*	Animal Science	Female	Yes
Estrella*	Animal Science	Female	No
Juliet	Agricultural Education and Agribusiness	Female	No
Kay*	Animal Science	Female	Yes
Lily*	Agricultural Education	Female	Yes
Martha*	Plant and Soil Science	Female	Yes
May*	Animal Science	Female	Yes
Raquel ⁺	Agriculture Science	Female	Yes
Sam*	Plant and Soil Science	Nonbinary	Yes
Vinvente*	Plant and Soil Science	Male	Yes

Note. * = Students in minority in STEM Program, ⁺ = Students in other HSI support programs

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into nine themes to produce the final codebook (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Transcripts were analyzed using the codebook to create an audit trail and further develop confirmability and trustworthiness in the study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking was used to build trustability (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Reflexivity Statement

At the time of the study, we were members of the College of Agriculture at Chico State. Vite was an undergraduate researcher in a minorities in STEM program who identifies as a Hispanic, bilingual female. Toombs was an assistant professor of agricultural education who identifies as a White, non-Hispanic, monolingual female with a pragmatic interpretive framework. We took strides to bracket our experiences. While we acknowledge our positions allowed us unique access to participants and understanding of the context, it also created potential avenues for bias to influence the study. Independent coding followed by completion of a unified codebook was used to address this potential bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, we consulted outside subject and methodology experts on the design and data analysis of the study. This reflexivity and peer debriefing provided additional credibility and confirmability as components of the trustworthiness of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Findings

The following nine themes emerged from the interview transcripts through extensive constant comparative in-vivo coding and data analysis. While many similar codes were expressed from multiple participants, unique perspectives, when present, are detailed below.

Familia

The theme of *Familia* included codes relating to familial support of higher education pursuits and the importance of education in the home. Repeatedly, parents were referred as the main support systems with siblings and cousins also mentioned as sources of knowledge and inspiration. Estrella emphasized that her parents play two different roles in support by stating that, “my mom is more on the emotional side of ‘you can do it.’” She described her dad to respond, “in more of the objective side” about her educational journey. Juliet expressed, “the one person that has kept me going is my mom.” Kay stated, “My parents have always been very supportive of like, lo que quieres estudiar (whatever you want to study).” Coa became emotional in expressing his thankfulness for the support of his family. Older siblings were mentioned as trailblazers and role models while participants felt a duty to inspire and be an example for younger siblings. Estrella found motivation in “knowing that my little sister looks up to me.” Raquel explained how her older brother and sister helped to shape her college choices from their experiences.

Each participant shared a strong importance placed on education by their family. Sam expressed this as “in my household, that (education) was the backbone of everything.” This importance was communicated through an expectation of good grades and college degrees. Coa shared his parents expected academic results because “we (he and his siblings) were a representation of them (their parents).” The emphasis on education stemmed from social mobility opportunities and family duty responsibilities. Raquel identified the American dream in her family, “(Parents) wanted us to have a better life than what they had.” Confetti explained, “I just don’t want to let them down... especially for my mom who immigrated here.” Confetti expressed that her parent prepared her by having her “take calculus one and two at (a community college) before high school senior year in the summer.” Informal college preparation was also present in Estrella’s household since her father “was always putting on documentaries” and her mother would help her with homework.

However, the opportunities for social mobility in agriculture was questioned by some participants’ family. Parents were often skeptical about opportunities in the agricultural industry. Martha’s mother reacted, “I wanted you to get an education, so you wouldn’t have to be out there in the fields, yet you’re getting an education, and you’re gonna be out there on the field by choice.” Brittany said, “If you go in there (the fields) without any education, you’re going to be stuck on the bottom (the) majority of your life. But if you come to a college, get at least a degree. You’re going to be high up there doing research and you’re going to get a good position.”

First-Generation Experiences

The ten participants who were first-generation college students lacked a post-secondary educational foundation from their parents. Some participants elaborated that at least one parent did not obtain an education past elementary. Martha identified economic necessity as the reason her dad had to forego education and “go to work, provide for his family and then move to (a) different country”. Limited formal educational experiences made it difficult for participants’ parents to understand components of undergraduate education. Camilia shared her father’s confusion about her class schedule after a midday phone call where he asked, “why aren’t you at school?” because he assumed college courses were scheduled similar to high school. Vicente expressed he did not feel that his parents understood what he did since “it is very hard for me to communicate to them [about] working in the soils lab or aquaponics unit.” When compared to the life experiences of her peers, Destiny remarked, “I’m the only one in my family going to university and it’s a STEM degree.”

With minimal college guidance from family, first generation participants navigated college blindly. Destiny recalled, “I got to Chico State with no classes on my schedule. Like, I didn’t know how to enroll, I saw the classes but did not know.” Camilia laughed remembering asking a mentor, “if people still use backpacks in college” since “I was doing it (college) by myself.” Raquel was overwhelmed

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and asked herself, “how am I going to be able to navigate college? Like, what are my resources? Who do I go to for help?” Some participants pursuing a pre-veterinary science option were not aware of university structures, including the inclusion of their major within the College of Agriculture.

Personal Agricultural Experiences

The depth and breadth of agricultural experiences varied amongst participants. Some, such as Martha, Brittany, May, and Coa, described agricultural experiences from early childhood. Most of these experiences stemmed from parental employment. Participants witnessed their parents and other family members perform manual labor as field workers in fruit and vegetable production. These connections to parents’ occupations opened doors for participants to become involved in the agricultural industry. Brittany stated, “my dad has always worked the fields, 50 plus years. He would always take us with them.” Coa told stories of joining his father in their family business and slowly gaining responsibilities as he grew older. Local school-based agricultural education programs also provided entrance into the agricultural industry for some participants. These agricultural backgrounds were motivators in choosing agricultural majors and future careers. Others, such as Confetti and Lily, did not identify agricultural connections in their backgrounds. For Sam and others with limited production agriculture backgrounds, they perceived this as a limitation to their potential within the College of Agriculture and agricultural industry. Camilia recognized a difference between herself and peers in the College of Agriculture with “my agricultural background is very humble compared to many other people.”

Perceptions of Hispanics and Latines in Agriculture

Across all participants, Hispanic and Latines were viewed as manual laborers primarily employed as farm workers in fruit, vegetable, and tree nut production. Participants identified with the image of the Hispanic and Latine farmworker, using “I,” “we,” and “us” to describe roles traditionally played by Hispanics and Latines in agriculture. The owners, bosses, or managers were seen as members of the “other” group. As Vincente described, “When I see people from my experiences, they are usually just like supervisors, or below supervisors.”

Participants witnessed the mistreatment of their families and community members in the fields. They made statements such as, “we are the help, we are not the boss, like we’ve always been put down,” “the lowest of the food chain in the industry,” and “are treated like dirt.” Eight out of the fourteen participants mentioned that Hispanics and Latines are stereotypically associated as hardworking individuals but are not accredited for their hard labor and commonly exploited in the workplace. Sam, Brittany, Destiny, and Kay internalized inferiority as Hispanics and Latines pursuing agriculture in higher education. Self-doubt arose from their perceived Hispanic and Latine roles in agriculture where they questioned their own credibility in the industry.

Sam believed others questioned their presence in research facilities with, “what are you doing here? You’re supposed to be in the field, what are you doing in the lab?”

There remained a shared sense of pride for Hispanics and Latines in agriculture. Coa, Sam, Camilia and Brittany described Hispanics and Latines as the “backbone” of the agriculture industry. Brittany defended her philosophy by stating, “We are the hardest working people. Without us, there would technically be no ag industry”. Kay highlighted Hispanics’ and Latines’ value in the agricultural industry by acknowledging that “they’re more than a farmer. Behind the farmer, there’s those who help them, and that’s our people.”

There was an internalized moral obligation to contribute to their communities through their agricultural higher education. Confetti expressed that having more Hispanics and Latines in higher positions in agriculture would give the community a voice and protection for those who cannot speak for themselves. Agricultural education majors, Lily, Coa, and Juliet, hoped to motivate their future students as the “one teacher that minorities look up to.” Participants mentioned they hoped to see the Hispanic and Latine role in agriculture change. Camilia looked forward to interacting with and advocating for field workers. As she explained, “I understand the culture of the field workers, and that’s going to give me a special type of connection and a level of comfort with the workers, that I will be able to be a better leader.”

Hechale con Ganas (Give it Your All)

Codes aligning to participants’ strong sense of intrinsic motivation were grouped into the *Hechale con Ganas (Give it Your All)* theme. Participants commonly used this phrase to identify overcoming past struggles or witnessing family sacrifices which have provided the motivation to continue pursuing their goals. Brittany expounded, “I’ve already invested too much time... to just give up at the last lap of the race.” After spending years away from family, Destiny said she had “sacrificed way too much to give up.”

Sacrifices were commonly expressed as their economic and academic efforts to obtain their education while they spent time away from family. Many participants worked tirelessly in applying for scholarships, working 40-60 hours a week, and one participant worked three jobs to afford necessities along with remaining their full-time student status. Confetti shared that the semester prior, “I was taking 21 units, plus the internship and working because I pay for my own rent and groceries.” Juliet also admitted she was also responsible for her sister and “had to work for everything (she) had” by “working three jobs so that I could afford the apartment and... could put food on the table.”

Much of this intrinsic motivation seemed to be tied to career opportunities. Participants acknowledged college is difficult but projected a return of investment in future income, ability to give back to community, and representing their family as a college graduate. Camilia explained it this way, “As Hispanics, because our parents have such a limited educational background, we really want to, like, stand out and make a difference for our communities”. May agreed with, “We come here for a better opportunity and what we want to do for future generations.”

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Non-Familial Support Received and Requested

Participants identified a variety of resources they have pursued and additional assistance they believed would benefit their undergraduate experience. Peers, high school teachers, faculty, financial aid, student employment, therapy, and religious groups were credited with providing additional support by participants. These resources relieved financial pressures or provided emotional outlets through interpersonal relationships. Opportunities to celebrate culture was the most common requested support from participants. Juliet identified opportunities to “incorporate the holiday” and hear more spoken Spanish in official settings. Destiny and others looked for more informal events to “just talk about our culture. Let’s have fun and *cafecito*.”

While appreciation was shown for the minorities in STEM group, wishes to expand the program were expressed by several participants. The minorities in STEM program provided participants tutoring, financial assistance, and professional opportunities. Participants spoke about the impact during their undergraduate career. Brittany felt lucky to be part of the program since it gave her the opportunity to do undergraduate research. Destiny shared that the program provided a study center where students with similar backgrounds related to how difficult it was to be a part of the college and in return gave each other support. Members of the program wished to see more student participation and a larger, more adaptable meeting space.

Representation and community among peers amplified pride in their culture and place of belonging in the college. When asked what experiences made participants feel most connected with their ethnic culture at Chico State, Camilia expressed that the minorities in STEM program allowed her to meet people from her culture that can relate to her interests and experiences that she considers “a way of life.” To others, pride in their intersectionality of race and sex was apparent from their participation in the program. Martha described the impact as:

If it weren't for [the minorities in STEM program], I probably wouldn't be as proud of my culture as proud as of a woman from Latino community like now I see all these women and I know they're gonna go somewhere and I know we are capable of greater things even if the world society everybody's telling us 'no, you you have to have babies and settle down.'

Discrimination

Racial discrimination was a lived or vicarious reality for College of Agriculture Hispanic and Latine students. Some participants had been called explicit racial slurs both on campus and within the college town community. For Juliet, this was a new experience, “I have never in my life been called (racial slur) until I moved here.” Brittany, Camilia, Coa, Juliet, Kay, Martha, May, Sam, and Vincent reported witnessing incidents of discrimination against their fellow Hispanic and Latine students. Exclusion and microaggressions were a common experience among participants. Coa and Destiny described feeling othered within classes and extracurricular opportunities. Camilia was hesitant to report discrimination

for fear of “opportunities that close because I brought this issue up.”

Participants felt a lack of representation both in the College of Agriculture and the wider agricultural industry but also recognized instances of cultural taxation when asked to be “the diversity marker” as Sam described. Destiny and Sam recited a lack of recognition for the achievements and contributions of Hispanic and Latine students, feeling like a “hidden gem.” They associated the omission from social media and other public recognition of achievements as racial discrimination. Participants who had not personally experienced overt racism considered themselves “one of the lucky ones” as Brittany, Coa, Camilia, Martha, and Vincent described. Lily, a freshman, hoped she will not personally experience racism during her college experience.

Assimilation or Separation

After adverse college experiences, there was a tendency amongst Hispanic and Latine students to feel a need to either fully assimilate to the White culture, thereby suppressing cultural identity, or separate themselves from White peers. The distance from home and family culture contributed to this sensation. Confetti felt “like I slowly lost several parts of my culture.” As Vincent explained, “I do feel like I'm more whitewashed now” yet “it's a lot easier to make friends with people in the same culture as me.” Hispanic and Latine peers were a refuge of cultural expressions. Estrella recognized this separation across racial lines in her friend group but also in her classes “you can tell the little group in the front of white people and then you can see all the other brown people in another corner.” Brittany stated, “since I have lighter skin, I can assimilate more into the Caucasian side of town... because I could kind of get away with being White sometimes.” Participants described actions of code switching to better fit within their surroundings. They reserved speaking Spanish for audiences of other Hispanic and Latine students. For Martha, these challenges have fortified her Latina identity while Vincent complained of a decreased fluency in Spanish.

Lack of Representation and Networking

Participants identified a need to see others like themselves highlighted by the College of Agriculture, both as students and industry professionals. As Vincent explained, “I would love to see people my color, in my background when I go to take (agricultural industry) tours.” Some participants felt defeated by their effort to be involved in the college and industry. Kay noted she felt demoralized by unfruitful efforts in breaking perceived racial lines. May mentioned that she felt behind due to her lack of agricultural experience making it difficult to compete with her White classmates. Destiny, a graduating senior, stated that there was “no peace” in trying to get her foot in the industry after working non-stop in networking and taking part in research projects. Lack of community and representation made it more difficult for students to be involved and questioned their desire to stay or participate in the college. Raquel mentioned that it was easier to obtain leadership roles in

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her predominantly Hispanic community college but felt culturally disconnected from her peers therefore sought opportunities in the wider Chico State setting to feel more connected. Others remained optimistic about the future. Martha was delighted at the thought that “once we Latinos start getting a higher education, and reaching levels in our careers where we can access higher positions, maybe we’ll be in the [College’s distinguished alumni].”

Discussion

In describing what it meant to be an undergraduate student identifying as Hispanic or Latine in the College of Agriculture at Chico State, our participants noted:

- a strong connection to family who placed a heavy importance on education,
- varied agricultural backgrounds,
- motivation to make change in an industry where people of their ethnicity commonly serve as manual laborers,
- an intrinsic motivation to continue in the face of adversity in pursuit of future economic opportunities,
- support from multiple sources,
- experienced or witnessed racial discrimination, and
- limited opportunities for cultural expression and representation.

Participants expressed motivation in pursuing their agricultural undergraduate degree when they felt a sense of community amongst their peers and College of Agriculture faculty and staff. They felt demotivated when isolated from the community.

Figure 1 displays the relationships between themes and identifies the factors of motivation, both positive and negative. *First-Generation Experiences*, *Hechale con Ganas (Give it Your All)*, *Perceptions of Hispanics Latines in Agriculture*, and *Personal Agricultural Experiences* were influenced by *Familia*. This stems from the integral role of family in the Hispanic and Latino cultures (Espinoza, 2010). The sense of family-first can cause discord with intrinsic motivation when family needs conflict with educational demands. If perceived costs to family outweigh the utility of education, students are likely to become demotivated in continuing a higher education (Espinoza, 2010; Rubach et

al., 2023). Educators throughout the primary, secondary, and post-secondary levels must affirm their Hispanic and Latine students’ families (Preuss et al., 2020). We recommend faculty support Hispanic and Latine college students by including flexible deadlines, attendance options such as hybrid instruction, and accessible course resources for students with family responsibilities.

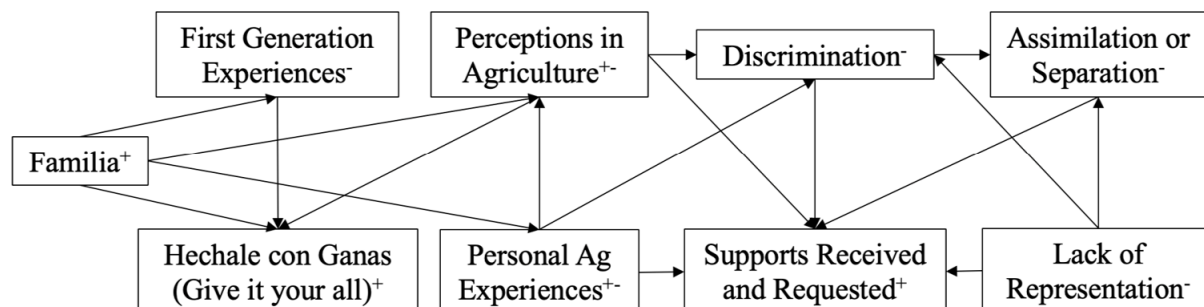
Participants noted the emphasis on education within their family and households. Hispanic and Latine families should be included throughout the college recruitment, application, and adjustment processes. We recommend that colleges and universities host events to invite family members to meet faculty and witness student life. For first-generation students, this shared experience may decrease the disconnect felt between students and their families. Targeted, specific supports for first-generation and underrepresented minority students have shown to be impactful in student success and retention (Green, 2011). Some of the first-generation college student participants were unclear on the roles of various university offices upon arrival to campus. A first-generation orientation class could provide a built-in community where students are able to ask questions without fear of judgement.

The sense of community is paramount in Hispanic and Latine culture (Espinoza, 2010) and was the undercurrent for the requested support of additional events for Hispanic and Latine students and cultural awareness. We recommend all HSIs provide multiple opportunities and meeting spaces for Hispanic and Latine students to conduct both formal meetings and informal social occasions. Students connected to campus life are more likely to complete their degree with higher GPAs and are more employable after graduation (Padilla, 1999).

Our participants represented a variety of backgrounds in production agriculture, like many other colleges of agriculture (Foreman et al., 2018). While those with deep backgrounds in the agricultural industry were motivated to continue their education in this field, the diversity of experiences created a sense of inferiority in some participants, potentially limiting a student’s motivation in pursuing their degree. The internalizations of *Perceptions of Hispanics and Latines in Agriculture* may contribute to this barrier (Bandura, 1997). Our participants recognized the opportunities in agriculture

Figure 1

Relationships Between Study Themes



Note. ⁺ = Motivators, - = Demotivators

to support their families and communities, with some motivated to advocate for farm workers and advancing Hispanics and Latines in the industry. We recommend Chico State's College of Agriculture and sister institutions provide additional experiential learning opportunities for students without agricultural backgrounds and highlight minorities throughout the agricultural industry. These opportunities have the potential to provide career exploration while also creating a more equitable competition for jobs and internships. Intentional representation of Hispanics and Latines in leadership and management roles will bolster a student's expectations of their personal success in the industry (Bandura, 1997), thereby creating motivation to pursue a college education (Wigfield et al., 2004).

Discrimination was felt or witnessed by all participants in this study. Witnessed discrimination can become internalized and create trauma as if it was personally experienced (Wofford et al., 2019). Lack of representation, racial slurs, exclusion, and microaggressions are demotivators in the pursuit of a college education (Alcantar & Hernandez, 2020). We recommend faculty, staff, and administrators in colleges of agriculture be fully trained and supported to identify and respond to instances of racial discrimination and microaggressions. Negative experiences with diverse peers may perpetuate a choice between assimilation and separation. Students of color are often encouraged to forego cultural expressions or isolate within members of their own culture (Schmitz, 2004). We recommend colleges and universities promote full inclusion of cultural expressions by honoring holidays, using inclusive language, and highlighting the diverse agricultural workforce to increase student motivation and outcomes (Schwartz et al., 2013; Venegas, 2021; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). HSIs should be listening to the lived experiences of their Hispanic and Latine students to build systems based on student needs.

There is a clear connection between a sense of community and motivation in our participants. Intentional community building is key to supporting Hispanic and Latine students (Nuñez, 2011). Participants commonly referred to the College of Agriculture's minorities in STEM program which is a grant funded program to enable underrepresented students to participate in undergraduate research through financial support and faculty and peer mentoring. This community was key to essential supports for many participants. All HSIs should be committed to providing community as Hispanic and Latine students are adjusting to college and integrating into industry. This community can be built through physical spaces and virtual platforms to support both formal and informal events. Relationships with peers and faculty are key to a sense of community. Cultural clubs and other minority-targeted student organizations are an important step in providing community for underrepresented minority students (Simpson & Bista, 2021). Coupled with intentional cross-cultural opportunities, these communities provide essential cultural learning and personal growth for students (Harper & Quayle, 2007). Resources dedicated to building community for Hispanic and Latine students will be returned and multiplied in the economic opportunities and impact of graduates (Santiago & Stettner, 2013).

Summary

Higher education institutions have experienced a spike in Hispanic and Latine student enrollment (Meyer, 2023). Therefore, we sought to explore the motivations of Hispanic and Latine undergraduate students to pursue their agricultural studies using hermeneutic phenomenological methods. The profound impact of both motivational and demotivational factors became transparent among our 14 undergraduate students. A sense of community and support programs were motivational. Internal motivations included students' value of education instilled by their familial support system as a steppingstone to give back to their community. Instances of discrimination, both experienced and witnessed, along with a perceived lack of representation were noted as demotivators, often leading participants to isolation or assimilation with their white counterparts. Recommendations include community building efforts through ethnic heritage celebrations, family engagement efforts, faculty interactions, peer mentorship, and representation of Hispanic professionals. Additional recommendations include flexible options for students with family obligations and discrimination response training. Further research is needed to explore Hispanic and Latine agriculture students' experiences nationwide. With such information, educational institutions can better serve Hispanic and Latine students.

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