

# ¡Bienvenidos!: Committing to Diversity and Inclusion with College Orientations in Spanish for Parents and Family

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## LITERATURE

Hispanic and Latino/a/x students make up a growing share of all students enrolled in higher education (Mora, 2022). However, Excelencia in Education reports that only 24% of Latino adults (25 and over) had earned an associate degree. Research shows that there are five barriers that Hispanic and Latinx college students face that decrease student success and college persistence, including financial challenges, lack of institutional support, educational preparation, psychological considerations, and family/cultural issues (Genthe, 2022). In addition, first-generation Hispanic and Latino/a/x students are likely to report that their parents need to be more involved in the college-going experience (Sax & Wartman, 2010).

The communities where students live, along with their parents and families, influence their views, expectations, and experiences about college, especially for Hispanic and Latino/a/x students. Parents of first-generation students value education, believe a college degree is important, and support their students in many ways, including financially (i.e., tuition, transportation, housing, meal plans, and allowances), emotionally (i.e., staying positive and motivating the students), and with guidance or problem-solving techniques to encourage autonomy (Harper et al., 2020). However, limited opportunities to participate in the college experience exist for parents and families whose primary language is Spanish, the most common non-English language spoken in the U.S. (Dietrich & Hernandez, 2022).

Hispanic families place a high value on education, but many Spanish-speaking parents have a limited understanding of the process and struggle to provide adequate support. Recognizing the importance of la familia, the family, for Hispanic and Latino/a/x students is vital in successfully developing orientation programming inclusive of Spanish-speaking families' cultural and communication needs (Rodríguez et al., 2021). What follows is an example of the process and suggestions for planning, promoting, executing, and evaluating family orientations for Spanish-speaking audiences. The process outlined comes from our observations during two parent and family college orientation sessions in Spanish at our institution, the feedback from attendees, and our experiences as committee members.

## OVERVIEW OF THE COLLEGE ORIENTATION IN SPANISH

In 2022, college orientation sessions for parents and families in Spanish were resumed after a few years of not materializing for various reasons, including the COVID-19 pandemic. Research has shown that parents value when universities and colleges develop bonds with them by including them in campus tours and new student orientations, which, consequently, leads them to feel supported and assured about leaving their students at the university (Harper et al., 2020). By resuming the sessions in Spanish, the institution sought to engage families of Hispanic and Latino/a/x first-generation students whose primary language is Spanish as part of its commitment as a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) and the increase in Hispanic and Latino/a/x undergraduate student enrollment (West Texas A & M University, 2023). The 25 parents who participated in the college orientation in Spanish reported similar feedback, believed that the program was valuable, and said they would recommend it to other Spanish-speaking parents.

## CONCLUSION

Planning and executing a program orientation for Spanish-speaking parents was a successful effort at our institution. With the collaboration of Hispanic and Latino/a/x faculty, staff, and students, the parents were able to obtain important college information to understand the higher education experience, and they built new social networks with faculty and staff. University transitions among Hispanic and Latinx students are challenging; however, sponsoring Spanish program orientations at universities, it can help parents understand what college is like and what resources are available to ensure student success in a “culturally friendly” campus environment. Orientations can also inspire important communications between parents and incoming students about the overall college experience.

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