



## **Latinx College Students in a PWI: Perceptions of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA), Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction, and Access to Mentorship**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Latinx students' college enrollment has dramatically increased. However, Latinx students in predominantly White institutions (PWIs) still face challenges given the racial disparities in inclusion, diversity, equity, access (IDEA), and psychological wellbeing (autonomy, competence, and relatedness). In addition, first-generation college students (students whose parents did not receive a four-year US bachelor's degree) also encounter challenges given the lack of institutional knowledge compared to their non-first-generation peers (students whose parents have at least one US bachelor's degree from a four-year higher education institution). The current study elicited responses from 404 students. Results showed that Latinx and first-generation college students reported lower perceptions of IDEA and a lower sense of basic psychological needs satisfaction than their White and non-first-generation peers. Practical and policy implications are provided for higher education administrators, faculty, and staff when working with Latinx and first-generation students. Results indicated the urgent need to respond to basic psychological needs among Latinx students and first-generation college students through policy-making and prioritizing student events to support Latinx students' academic and social activities.*

**Keywords:** basic psychological needs, first-generation, inclusion, diversity, equity, access, Latinx

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## INTRODUCTION

Individuals who identify as Latinx are the second largest ethnic-racial group in the United States and comprise about 18% of the population (Rodriguez et al., 2021), with predictions suggesting that this number will grow to 29% by 2060 (Colby & Ortman, 2015). In line with this population growth, U.S. college campuses have witnessed Latinx college student enrollment increase from half a million in 1980 to 3.8 million in 2018 (Mora, 2022). By 2020, Latinx students accounted for 20% of all students in postsecondary institutions, which makes them the second highest population after their White peers (54%), and ahead of Black (13%) and Asian (8%) students (Mora, 2022).

Nonetheless, research indicates that Latinx students frequently encounter social and educational challenges, resulting in reduced student involvement (Green & Wright, 2017) and elevated dropout rates (Burke, 2019). Over a third of Latinx students enrolled at higher education institutions are first-generation (Santiago et al., 2019; Raab, 2022), lacking equal opportunities for information, support, networks, and exposure as their counterparts who are not first-generation (Dueñas & Gloria, 2020). Research demonstrates that these factors make them less likely to receive their bachelor's degree than their peers in other ethnic-racial groups (Mora, 2022; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006).

To illustrate, after commencing their university education, 35% of Latinx students discontinue their studies without obtaining a degree within six years, while this figure stands at 27% for White students (Loveland, 2018). The previous underscores the intricacies surrounding degree completion, particularly as institutional factors can impede the progress of Latinx students (Bensimon et al., 2019). Given the evolving demographic landscape in the United States, higher education institutions have formulated new approaches to improve enrollment, retention, and graduation that effectively cater to this demographic shift.

In recent decades, universities have expanded their commitments to campus inclusion, diversity, equity, and access (IDEA) initiatives, significantly contributing to the increased number of underrepresented students attending higher education institutions. Today, scholars continue to participate in a national conversation regarding how academic institutions can facilitate real and productive change for Latinx students attending predominantly White institutions (PWIs). Although existing research has documented that these university initiatives have improved conditions for Latinx students' attending college (Rios-Ellis et al., 2015), there is still considerable work that needs to be accomplished in terms of Latinx students' retention and graduation rates, especially regarding their experiences and perceptions of the initiatives that universities implement around IDEA, psychological wellbeing, and access to mentorship on campus. In the current study, we explore Latinx students' college experiences compared to those

of their White peers at a PWI. We also consider the intersectionality with college generation statuses of Latinx and White students.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Self-Determination Theory and Basic Psychological Needs: Connections to Latinx College Students**

Self-determination theorists argued that autonomy, relatedness, and competence are three basic psychological needs universally crucial for individuals' flourishing (Deci & Ryan, 2004). Autonomy refers to a sense of volition where students feel their agency is respected, their voices are heard, and their feelings are attended to. Additionally, autonomy does not mean independence. Instead, faculty support of students' autonomy can also include providing guidance and support to foster a sense of volition. Relatedness means a sense of connection, being part of a community where students feel cared for by others and want to care for others as well. Finally, competence is a sense of confidence. It does not mean students can competently do everything, but that they can feel encouraged to face and tackle challenges confidently. When these basic psychological needs are supported and satisfied, individuals can flourish and be motivated to pursue academic success and enjoy social competence and wellbeing (Su-Russell & Russell, 2021; Wei et al., 2005).

There is a wealth of literature providing robust evidence of the benefits of supporting college students' basic psychological needs satisfaction, such as academic motivation (Faye & Sharpe, 2008), mental health (Wei et al., 2005), and student athletes' recovery (Bejar et al., 2019). Existing research primarily focuses on racially and socioeconomically privileged college students instead of considering racial minorities from PWIs or first-generation students. Given the importance of basic psychological needs among college students, the most vulnerable and underserved students deserve research attention instead of focusing on students from WEIRD (western, educated, industrial societies, rich, and democratic) backgrounds (Henrich et al., 2010). Identifying the disparities in basic psychological needs between Latinx students, especially those who are also first-generation students compared to their peers, will help researchers and administrators implement macro-level policies and take micro-level actions to support these underserved college students further. Ultimately, these efforts could potentially enhance retention and graduation rates.

### **Latinx Students' Perceptions of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access**

Despite the increasing amount of attention from some of the predominately White institutions to address inclusion, diversity, equity, and access, Latinx students might still be far from satisfactory regarding these IDEA efforts. Though Latinx students have positive perceptions of faculty support

(Arellanes & Hendricks, 2022; Arellanes et al., 2024), their experiences can still be highly racialized due to racial microaggressions and racialized aggressions from some of their instructors and peers (Cuella & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2023).

Depending on their academic programs, Latinx students' experiences and perceptions of IDEA efforts might be negative, given their marginalized status in a given academic field. For instance, Latina students are marginalized within the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) majors. According to a qualitative study, Latina students in STEM encountered skepticism and experienced self-doubt, which led them to feel a sense of isolation (Rodriguez & Blaney, 2021).

Latinx students at predominantly White institutions believe that inclusion should be further addressed (Campbell-Whatley et al., 2021) due to the lack of interracial interactions and ignorance, which deteriorate the existing racial divide (Cuella & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2023). These exploratory studies encouraged us to address the different levels of perceptions of IDEA efforts between Latinx students and their White peers.

### **Latinx Students from PWIs and Their Access to Mentorship**

Despite significant college enrollment improvement (Mora, 2022), Latinx students' retention and graduation rates remain concerning (Capers, 2019). Only 23% of Latinx students (25-29 years old) obtained a bachelor's degree or more in 2021, which was lower than that of Black (26%), White (45%), and Asian peers (72%). Latinx students are also more likely to be first-generation students (44%) compared to their peers of any other racial background, Black (34%), Asian (29%), and White (22%) (Santiago et al., 2019). Compared to non-first-generation students, first-generation students may face more challenges because they might not receive adequate guidance from their parents, who did not have college experiences to help them navigate the higher education system. Given the barriers that Latinx first generation students face, such as academic unpreparedness, a sense of displacement due to ethnic-racial identity, and a lack of institutional knowledge and social capital (Rodriguez et al., 2021; Clayton et al., 2019; Sánchez-Connally, 2018; Rios-Ellis et al., 2015), they are more likely to have to negotiate their space and sense of belonging due to their status. This might explain the Latinx educational crisis where Latinx graduation rates remain lower than their peers of other racial backgrounds despite the continuously increasing number of college enrollment (Gándara & Contreras, 2009).

Strayhorn (2012) emphasized the importance of a sense of belonging by connecting with their peers and faculty/staff. In essence, students believe they are integral to a specific community (Dueñas & Gloria, 2020) and are valued by their peers within that group (Luedke, 2019). Scholars have observed a positive correlation between Latinx students' sense of belonging and their ability to persist

academically (Luciano-Wong & Crowe, 2019; Romo et al., 2020). Consequently, despite persistent challenges, students access the emotional and educational assistance required to recognize their potential for obtaining degrees (Rios-Ellis et al., 2015).

Relatedly, research illustrates that students with supportive professors and mentors form trusting relationships (Holloway-Friesen, 2021) and have higher degrees of belonging, self-esteem, and socialization that ultimately help them succeed academically (Michel & Durdella, 2018; Green & Wright, 2017). Two decades ago, Harrell and Forney (2003) argued the importance of mentorship in preparing first-generation and Latinx students as they transitioned from high school to college. College students, especially those at a disadvantage given their social statuses, found mentorship beneficial to their academic success. For example, non-first-generation and first-generation students perceived it essential to have positive and frequent conversations with faculty members (Hutchison, 2017). Guidance and mentorship might spontaneously spring and potentially benefit students academically and psychologically, especially those from underrepresented populations. Evidence suggests that emotional and educational support may help Latinx students persevere despite the continuous challenges (Rios-Ellis et al., 2015). The source of support from faculty mentors may become vital, especially for Latinx first-generation students to develop a sense of community on campus.

Garriott and Nisle (2019) found that institutional support included assistance from a teacher or tutor, access to a mentor for advice or encouragement, help from the academic advisor, and support from peers to make them feel included and motivated. According to Romo and colleagues (2020), student support services increase optimism for degree attainment and impact a student's sense of belonging, leading to higher GPAs, finding additional support, and increasing persistence (Tovar, 2015). These types of support significantly helped reduce stress for first-generation students. Being a first-generation student can be disadvantageous, but other social positions, such as being a racial minority and low-income, might add additional challenges as first-generation students navigate the higher education system. Kezar and colleagues (2022) labeled these students as "at-promise" students as they discussed the benefits of having a comprehensive support system. It takes a whole university campus and all the active members of the institution to form a culture of ecological validation that emphasizes structures, processes, and norms. Mentorship from faculty, advisors, and peers was among many factors that can help these at-promise students. Diversity and inclusion were also at heart when designing training programs and building relationships between at-promise students, staff, and faculty (Kezar et al., 2022). Given this evidence, the current study investigates access to faculty mentors at a PWI. Unequal access to faculty

mentors could display a systemic barrier that would limit at-promise students from achieving their academic goals.

### **Faculty Efforts on Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA): Diverse Experiences of IDEA among Students on Campus**

Faculty efforts can substantially impact students' diversity-oriented values (Hurtado et al., 1998). For example, faculty-student discussions on political and religious diversity and students taking courses on historical, political, and social events can help students appreciate diversity and step out of their comfort zone (Parker & Trolan, 2020). However, whether these perceptions and experiences would differ given students' statuses being racially minoritized or first-generation students is unclear.

Recent efforts across university campuses to address IDEA-related issues have substantially increased nationally and at the research site where students were recruited in the current study. The training opportunities for faculty and staff have increased. Intentional conversations have also taken place to support minority students, especially Latinx and first-generation students, through student-registered organizations and campus-wide events and activities to raise awareness of inclusion, diversity, equity, and access. Though we should applaud these efforts to address critical issues, we should also consider (1) whether students' perceptions of faculty efforts to address IDEA differ due to their diverse social and racial backgrounds and (2) whether these efforts benefit students psychologically.

Despite the increasing efforts on college campuses to address IDEA initiatives (Harrison-Bernard et al., 2020), students, especially marginalized ones, might still feel a lack of belonging, empowerment, or success due to their disadvantageous statuses. Given that faculty has a lot of direct and indirect interactions with students, faculty's efforts to address IDEA-related issues may directly impact students' lives (Hurtado et al., 1998; Parker & Trolan, 2020). A recent effort from Parker and Trolan (2020) showed that faculty's equitable treatment was associated with racial minority students' positive perceptions of the diverse campus climate. However, this equitable treatment construct was a one-item question to tap into the frequency (never too often) of fair treatment. To the best efforts of the authors, there remains no gold standard way of measuring IDEA. Thus, the current study attempts to fill this need by creating a more in-depth measure of IDEA to be able to effectively conceptualize students' perceptions of faculty efforts related to IDEA.

### **The Current Study**

Given the ever-changing demographics among college students and the considerably low graduation rates among Latinx students who are also likely to be first-generation, it is urgent to explore and identify associates and contributors to

enhance college retention and increase graduation rates across U.S. university campuses. In addition, faculty efforts to address IDEA issues on campuses deserve critical attention, given its benefits for college students (Parker & Tralian, 2020). It is worth investigating if students who are racial minorities and/or first-generation would perceive these efforts differently compared to their peers with more advantageous backgrounds.

Despite faculty's efforts to address IDEA issues, our understanding is still limited in terms of the perceptions of Latinx students on the issues of inclusion, diversity, equity, and access. Previous research that investigated Latinx's perceptions and experiences is exploratory and lacks comparisons between Latinx's perceptions of IDEA issues and their White peers (Cuella & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2023; Rodriguez & Blaney, 2021).

Furthermore, a wealth of theoretical and empirical efforts demonstrated the benefits of basic psychological needs—autonomy, relatedness, and competence, including but not limited to academic motivation (Faye & Sharpe, 2008). These critical factors may lead to academic success. It is important to be able to provide empirical evidence regarding the disparities in perceived basic psychological needs among underserved college students who may benefit from higher education in addressing these issues, given its close relevance to academic success and graduation rates that many Latinx and first-generation students are still facing.

To address these gaps, we sought to explore the following research questions:

RQ1: Are there differences in IDEA perceptions, access to faculty mentoring, and basic psychological needs satisfaction among Latinx students at a PWI compared to White students?

RQ2: Are there differences in IDEA perceptions, access to faculty mentoring, and basic psychological needs satisfaction among first-generation college students as compared to non-first-generation college students?

RQ3: Do first-generation Latinx have different perceptions of faculty IDEA efforts, different access to faculty mentoring, and different levels of basic psychological needs satisfaction as compared to Latinx students who are not first-generation college students, first-generation White college students, and non-first-generation White college students?

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Procedure and Participants**

The University Institutional Review Board approved the current study. Data from the current study were drawn from a mixed-methods project that included students' IDEA-related experiences at the beginning and the end of the semester. The current study only focused on students' experiences at the beginning

of each semester. Students for this study completed a survey. First, some students who completed the survey utilized an existing system from the Department of Psychology to involve students in research projects. We compensated these students with course credit. Second, we specifically recruited from classes that discussed topics related to diversity and/or the Latinx community. Students from these courses received compensation via gift cards. We acknowledge that our sample might not represent the chosen campus since students self-selected to participate in the current study and were recruited through the courses the authors taught.

To address the equity issues that Latinx students and first-generation students still face and the lack of attention to these populations regarding their psychological wellbeing, the current study aims to compare the experiences of Latinx and White peers in consideration of their college generational statuses; we selected only students who self-identified as Latinx ( $n= 105$ , 26%) or White ( $n= 299$ , 74%) in the resulting sample. Most participants were women ( $n= 281$ , 69.6%), and many identified as first-generation students ( $n = 122$ ; 30.2%). Detailed demographics are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
*Demographics (N =404)*

	N (%)	Mean (SD)
Race		
Hispanic	$n = 105$ (26%)	
Non-Hispanic White	$n = 299$ (74%)	
Generation Status		
First generation college students	$n = 122$ (30.2%)	
Non-First generation	$n = 280$ (69.3%)	
Gender		
Female	$n = 281$ (69.6%)	
Male	$n = 107$ (26.5%)	
Non-binary/third gender	$n = 9$ (2.2%)	
Transgender	$n = 2$ (.5%)	
Cisgender	$n = 1$ (.2%)	
Genderqueer	$n = 1$ (.2%)	
Prefer to self-describe	$n = 1$ (.8%)	
Prefer not to say	$n = 1$ (.2%)	
Age		19.99 (2.60)

**Measures**

Given that limited resources provided established measures to evaluate students’ perceptions of IDEA, we used examples (Buckle, n.d.; Fatoric, 2021;



Garvey, 2019) to create questions that reflect students' perceptions of faculty's efforts to address IDEA in the university. Factor loadings of the IDEA measures are presented in Table 2.

### ***Inclusion***

Inclusion was calculated by the mean scores of eight inclusion questions that asked how much the student agreed or disagreed with the statements on a 5-point scale, from 1= *strongly disagree* to 5= *strongly agree*. For example, one of the items was, "I feel a sense of belonging through faculty." Reliability analysis was performed, and we found that the inclusion questions have excellent internal consistency ( $\alpha=.90$ ).

### ***Diversity***

Diversity was calculated by the mean scores of the four diversity questions that asked how much the student agreed or disagreed with the statements on a 5-point scale, from 1= *strongly disagree* to 5= *strongly agree*. One of the items was "Faculty invests time and energy into building diversity." Reliability analysis was performed, and we found that the diversity questions have good internal consistency ( $\alpha=.82$ ).

### ***Equity***

Equity was also calculated by the mean scores of the three equity questions that asked how much the student agreed or disagreed with the statements on a 5-point scale, from 1= *strongly disagree* to 5= *strongly agree*. One of the items was "Faculty has been effective in increasing equity." Reliability analysis was performed, and we found that the equity questions have good internal consistency ( $\alpha=.71$ ).

### ***Access***

Also, our measure of access was calculated by calculating the mean scores of the ten access questions, which asked how much the student agreed or disagreed with the statements on a 5-point scale, from 1= *strongly disagree* to 5= *strongly agree*. For example, one of the items was, "Students are given opportunities to learn about people from different races, ethnicities, and/or cultures through faculty." Reliability analysis was performed, and we found that the access questions have excellent internal consistency ( $\alpha= .92$ ).

### ***Faculty Mentor***

The faculty mentor variable was a single item asking students, "How many faculty members are you close enough with to call a mentor?" About 48.1% of

students reported that they did not have any mentors. Among the students who reported having at least one mentor, 18% reported having one mentor, 18.8% reported having two mentors, 9.8% reported having three mentors, 3% reported having four mentors, and 2.3% reported having five mentors. Given the dispersion of this variable, a dichotomous variable was created as access to mentorship, 0 = *having no mentors*, and 1 = *having at least one mentor*.

**Table 2**

*Factor Loadings for Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access Subscales (N = 404)*

Items	I	D	E	A
1. I feel my unique identity, attributes, traits, characteristics, skills, experience, and background are understood by faculty.	.81			
2. I feel my unique identity, attributes, traits, characteristics, skills, experience, and background are valued by faculty	.82			
3. I feel comfortable being myself around faculty	.73			
4. I feel a sense of belonging through faculty	.84			
5. I feel respected by faculty	.76			
6. I feel connected to faculty	.79			
7. I can identify people similar to myself in leadership positions or positions of power in faculty	.71			
8. Faculty fosters an inclusive environment characterized by cultural understanding, engagement, ethical behavior, and a commitment to social justice	.76			
1. I feel valued by faculty		.70		
2. Faculty invests time and energy into building diversity		.85		
3. Faculty supports having diverse faculty and staff		.80		
4. Faculty supports the mentorship of diverse student populations		.87		
1. Students from all backgrounds and identities have an equitable opportunity to become successful in/through faculty			.84	
2. There are resources available that support my ability to achieve academic success within/with faculty			.78	
3. Faculty has been effective in increasing equity.			.77	
1. Students are given opportunities to learn about people from different races, ethnicities, and/or cultures through faculty				.75

2. Faculty often think about what students of different races, ethnicities, and/or cultures experience	.76
3. Faculty can have honest conversations about different races, ethnicities, and/or cultures	.80
4. Students are encouraged to think more deeply about different races, ethnicities, and/or cultures with faculty	.79
5. Students are able to have important conversations about different races, ethnicities, and/or cultures, even if conversations may be uncomfortable with faculty	.81
6. I feel comfortable to discuss issues related to different races, ethnicities, and/or cultures with faculty	.72
7. Faculty provides a safe and supportive environment for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color	.70
8. I can gain resources to learn more about issues related to different races, ethnicities, or cultures through faculty	.79
9. Faculty provides an atmosphere to speak out against injustices, inequalities, and inequities that affect marginalized communities	.82
10. Faculty provides opportunities to participate productively in a global society	.74

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*Note:* I=Inclusion, D=Diversity, E=Equity, A=Access

### ***Students' Social Positions***

We created four groups based on students' race and generational statuses to reflect students' social positions: first-generation White ( $n = 13$ ; 9.8%), first-generation Latinx ( $n = 35$ ; 26.3%), non-first-generation White ( $n = 52$ ; 39.1%), and non-first-generation Latinx ( $n = 32$ ; 24.1%).

### ***Basic Psychological Needs***

College students' basic psychological needs were assessed with a basic psychological need satisfaction scale (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Gagné, 2003). Participants were asked to respond to 20 questions on a 7-point scale from 1 (*not at all true*) and 7 (*very true*) to reflect students' perceived autonomy, relatedness, and competence. The example item for the autonomy subscale is "I feel like I am free to decide for myself how to live my life;" the example item for the relatedness subscale is "I get along with people I come into contact with;" and the example for the competence subscale is "I have been able to learn interesting new skills recently." The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values are .70 (5 items of autonomy), .80 (7 items for relatedness), and .67 (5 items for competence).

## **Positionality Statements**

The first author identifies as a Chinese cisgender female. Her research focuses on the influence of quality caregiving on young children's socioemotional wellbeing and the impact of contextual factors (race, culture, socioeconomic status, etc.) on caregiving. She has developed research projects with college students about their reflections on the experiences of racial socialization with parents and siblings.

The second author is a White cisgender male. He is fluent in Spanish, has traveled extensively throughout Latin America for service and leisure, and has lived and worked as a Peace Corps Volunteer in the region. His primary political science research focuses on Latin America, principally related to resource-extractive community-led protests.

The third author identifies as a White cisgender male. One of his primary foci in research is the educational attainment of Latino families and the importance of father involvement and support.

All contributing authors have extensive experience teaching courses that highlight diversity and inclusion with college students. The second and third authors teach courses that focus on Latinx culture and community.

## **ANALYSES AND RESULTS**

First, we conducted a series of independent sample t-tests to address our first research question: Are there differences in IDEA perceptions, access to faculty mentoring, and basic psychological needs satisfaction among Latinx students at a PWI compared to White students? Access to mentorship did not vary between Latinx and White students,  $t(397)=-.18, p = .858$ . Perceived faculty efforts to address inclusion,  $t(397)=4.44, p < .001$ , diversity,  $t(397)=3.92, p < .001$ , equity,  $t(397)=3.13, p < .001$ , and access,  $t(397)=3.30, p < .001$ , were significantly higher among White students than Latinx students. White students scored higher than their Latinx peers on perceived autonomy,  $t(393)=2.58, p = .010$ , and relatedness,  $t(393)=2.24, p = .013$ , and marginally significantly higher on perceived competence,  $t(393)=1.96, p = .051$ .

Second, we conducted a series of independent sample t-tests to address our second research question: Are there differences in IDEA perceptions, access to faculty mentoring, and basic psychological needs satisfaction among first-generation college students compared to non-first-generation college students? We found that access to mentorship did not vary between first and non-first-generation college students,  $t(395)=-.66, p = .513$ . Perceived faculty efforts to address inclusion,  $t(395)=3.48, p < .001$ , diversity,  $t(395)=2.78, p = .006$ , equity,  $t(395)=3.94, p < .001$ , and access,  $t(395)=2.80, p = .003$ , were significantly higher among non-first generation college students than first-generation college students.

No significant differences were found between first-generation college students and non-first-generation college students in terms of perceived autonomy,  $t(391)=1.34, p =.182$ , relatedness,  $t(391)=1.72, p =.087$ , or competence,  $t(391)=.55, p =.582$ .

**Table 3**

*One-Way ANOVA Comparisons Post-hoc Results of Faculty IDEA and Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction between First-Gen Hispanic Students versus Their Peers (N = 404)*

Constructs		Comparisons	Statistical Significance Levels	
IDEA efforts by faculty	Inclusion	First-Gen Hispanic < non-First-Gen White	$p < .001$	
		First-Gen Hispanic < First-Gen White	$p < .001$	
		First-Gen Hispanic < non-First-Gen Hispanic	$p = .024$	
	Diversity	First-Gen Hispanic < non-First-Gen White	$p < .001$	
		First-Gen Hispanic < First-Gen White	$p = .013$	
		First-Gen Hispanic < non-First-Gen White	$p < .001$	
	Equity	First-Gen Hispanic < non-First-Gen Hispanic	$p = .036$	
		First-Gen Hispanic < non-First-Gen White	$p < .001$	
	Access	First-Gen Hispanic < non-First-Gen White	$p < .001$	
		First-Gen Hispanic < First-Gen White	$p = .013$	
	Basic Psychological Needs	Autonomy	First-Gen Hispanic < non-First-Gen White	$p = .029$
			First-Gen Hispanic < First-Gen White	$p = .050$
Relatedness		First-Gen Hispanic < non-First-Gen White	$p = .026$	
Competence		All comparisons	ns	
Access to Mentorship		All comparisons	ns	

Third, we conducted a series of one-way ANOVA tests to address our third research question: Are there differences in IDEA perceptions, access to faculty mentoring, and basic psychological needs satisfaction among first-generation college students compared to non-first-generation college students? Findings revealed no mean-level differences in terms of access to mentorship [ $F(3, 392) = .71, p = .547$ ]. However, there were mean-level differences for all IDEA measures: perceived inclusion [ $F(3, 393) = 10.08, p < .001$ ], perceived diversity [ $F(3, 393) = 6.40, p < .001$ ], perceived equity [ $F(3, 393) = 7.03, p < .001$ ], and perceived access [ $F(3, 393) = 5.95, p < .001$ ]. Mean-level differences were also found in terms of perceived autonomy [ $F(3, 389) = 3.00, p = .031$ ] and relatedness [ $F(3, 389) = 2.76, p = .042$ ], but not competence [ $F(3, 389) = 1.51, p = .212$ ]. Tukey post hoc analyses showed that first-generation Latinx students' perception of faculty efforts to address inclusion, diversity, equity, access, perceived autonomy, and relatedness were significantly lower than their peers. Detailed mean-level comparisons and probability levels are presented in Table 3.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Latinx students generally perceived their faculty's efforts to address inclusion, diversity, equity, and access, and their sense of autonomy and relatedness lower than their White peers. First-generation students perceived their faculty's efforts to address inclusion, diversity, equity, and access lower than their non-first-generation peers. Latinx first-generation college students scored lower than their peers on inclusion, diversity, equity, access, autonomy, and relatedness. Overall, no group (by race or college generational status) differences were found regarding their access to faculty mentorship.

### **Latinx versus White Students: Perceptions of Faculty IDEA Efforts, Basic Psychological Needs, and Access to Mentorship**

First, Latinx students' perceptions of their faculty to address IDEA are lower than that of their White peers. Likely, Latinx students may not feel their unique identity, attributes, traits, or other characteristics and background were well understood or valued by faculty given the PWI context that they might see themselves reflected on campus or identify those in power to be similar to themselves. Consequently, they may not feel connected to, comfortable around, or respected by faculty. Despite the university's efforts to provide IDEA training to faculty members, students may not be aware of the faculty's efforts if they feel intimidated by the authority figures and are therefore inclined to distance themselves from faculty. Other than IDEA training on campus, it is worth considering cultivating a culturally enriched campus by hosting cultural festivities and designing interior and exterior environments with cultural symbols to help

cultural learning. Furthermore, there might be a mismatch between the efforts of faculty to address IDEA versus the perceptions of Latinx students. Despite the increasing awareness and efforts by faculty and campus-wide initiatives, Latinx students might not have been the beneficiaries of these changes due to their daily experiences. Depending on their academic program, their membership in Latinx student organizations, and their interracial relationships (Cuella & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2023), Latinx students might still experience a frequent sense of isolation (Rodriguez & Blaney, 2021), and racial microaggressions from instructors and peers (Cuella & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2023). Therefore, Latinx students in predominantly White institutions expressed that there is a strong need for further work to address inclusion and diversity (Campbell-Whately et al., 2021), including the respect for diversity within the Latinx student group (Gonzalez et al., 2018).

Suggested evidence from early childhood education (Rasheed et al., 2019) showed that race/ethnic matching between teachers and school-aged children was associated with children's more active engagement in learning and motivation. The mismatch was not associated with poor child engagement when the classroom was highly diverse. In contrast, when the classroom is less diverse, the mismatch is associated with insufficient engagement or motivation (Rasheed et al., 2019). However, a researcher from a recent critical review (Redding, 2019) argued that evidence on the effectiveness of race/ethnicity matching for Latinx students is far from conclusive. Regardless of ethnic matching, students can still form positive relationships with supportive mentors, which can help nurture socioemotional wellbeing and academic success (Green & Wright, 2017; Holloway-Friesen, 2021; Michel & Durdella, 2018). A mutually respectful and trusting relationship between students and faculty mentors may outweigh the benefits of ethnic matching (Arellanes & Hendricks, 2022; Bordes & Arredondo, 2005)

Second, compared to their White peers, Latinx students reported lower basic needs, specifically autonomy and competence. Possible explanations are that Latinx students may not perceive a sense of agency given that their environment might not nourish their identity and allow them to nurture a sense of unique self, in addition to a lack of guidance and support, which are essential aspects of autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2004). The distance from faculty might also undermine their sense of connectedness and hamper a sense of community on college campuses, resulting in lower levels of sense of relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2004). Given the importance of basic needs satisfaction (Faye & Sharpe, 2008; Su-Russell & Russell, 2021; Wei et al., 2005), it is crucial to continuously explore the differential experiences of Latinx versus White college students and how these disparities may have implications on their wellbeing and academic successes.

Third, even though Latinx and White students did not differ in terms of their access to mentorship, possibly due to the operationalization of the construct,

the influence of mentor-mentee relationship quality and mentoring activities on Latinx and White college students should still be considered in future investigations.

### **First VS Non-First-Generation Students: Perceptions of Faculty IDEA Efforts, Basic Psychological Needs and Access to Mentorship**

First-generation students scored their perceptions of faculty's IDEA efforts lower than their non-first-generation peers. Non-first-generation students likely have more institutional knowledge and social capital, making them feel more comfortable contacting their faculty, making connections, and discussing their needs. Such opportunities may help non-first-generation students feel comfortable around faculty, develop a sense of belonging through faculty, and feel they are respected, valued, and understood by faculty. Frequent interactions can present more opportunities for non-first-generation students to learn about faculty's academic work and possibly efforts to address IDEA. Similar to previous research (Pike & Kuh, 2005), first-generation students perceived college environments as less favorable than their peers and reported lower integration and gains. Likely, first-generation students were less actively engaged socially and academically than their peers when interacting with faculty (Arum & Roksa, 2011). As Wang (2014) documented, when students feel empowered by faculty and when faculty minimize power distance with students, first-generation students may perceive this as a significant turning point to help further connections with faculty and integration into college.

Surprisingly, first-generation and non-first-generation students did not differ in their perceived basic psychological needs satisfaction or access to mentorship. Previous research explored first-generation students' challenges and successful experiences (Demetriou et al., 2017) some identified the effectiveness of intervention programs for first-generation students (Schwartz et al., 2017).

Future research may investigate the changes in perceived psychological needs satisfaction among first-generation students before and after the intervention programs. Faculty mentorship is potentially crucial to first-generation students' belonging and academic success. It is likely that the operationalization of access to mentorship in the current study did not capture the quality relationships from the faculty mentoring experiences. Future research should continue investigating faculty mentorship with a focus on relationship quality, different aspects of mentoring, and the intersectionality of race and college generational statuses.

### **Latinx First-Generation College Students**

As revealed in the current study, Latinx first-generation students perceived their faculty's IDEA efforts and autonomy and relatedness much lower than their



peers, putting them in a disadvantageous position. Like Kezar and colleagues (2022), students with multiple disadvantageous social identifiers, or “at-promise” students, desire a comprehensive support system that considers multiple levels of ecological systems in which Latinx first-generation students can be influenced. Latinx students likely faced barriers relating to peers or faculty/staff on campus. Given that most peers and faculty/staff are White, Latinx first-generation students might not perceive that their voices are heard or respected since these thoughts might differ from the “mainstream.” Among all participants from the chosen PWI, Latinx first-generation students might not have the opportunity to know what faculty/staff have been working on to address IDEA-related initiatives. It is also likely that Latinx first-generation students’ perception of the processes and products of the IDEA efforts did not profoundly address IDEA issues that are relevant to them, especially regarding race and college generation status.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

Despite the importance of exploring Latinx first-generation students’ campus experiences, we acknowledge several caveats in the current study. First, the current study only focused on Latinx and White college students and their perception of faculty IDEA, basic needs satisfaction, and access to mentorship. Other racial groups are also important to include in future investigations. Second, the construct access to mentorship was operationalized based on the number of faculty members that students believe are close enough to call a mentor. Students likely may not understand “mentor” and have different assessments on “close enough.” The numeric data that capture the number of faculty mentors may not reflect the quality of mentor-mentee relationships or different aspects of mentorship that students receive. Future research may consider expanding the assessment of access to mentorship by evaluating different aspects of mentorship and levels of mentoring activities students receive. Qualitative investigations may also give additional insight regarding faculty mentorship and the navigation to gain access to faculty mentorship.

### **CONCLUSION**

The current study investigated how race and generational status influence college students’ perceptions of faculty IDEA efforts, perceived basic needs satisfaction, and access to mentorship in a PWI in the Midwest. Although the findings were disheartening that Latinx first-generation students perceived their college environment as less favorable and their college experiences as less satisfying than their relatively privileged peers, the current research calls for urgent action to face these disparities, given the importance of IDEA and basic needs satisfaction. Relationship building between faculty and students, cultural learning

for faculty and staff, and culturally enriched interior and exterior environments on campus are likely to encourage Latinx first-generation students to be engaged in classrooms and on campus. A campus climate that is fundamentally respectful to racial minority individuals and socially and economically disadvantaged groups will help shape a positive and nurturing environment for faculty and students.

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