Designing a Latinx-Centric Leadership Program

Carlos Sanchez

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MASTER OF ARTS IN DESIGN
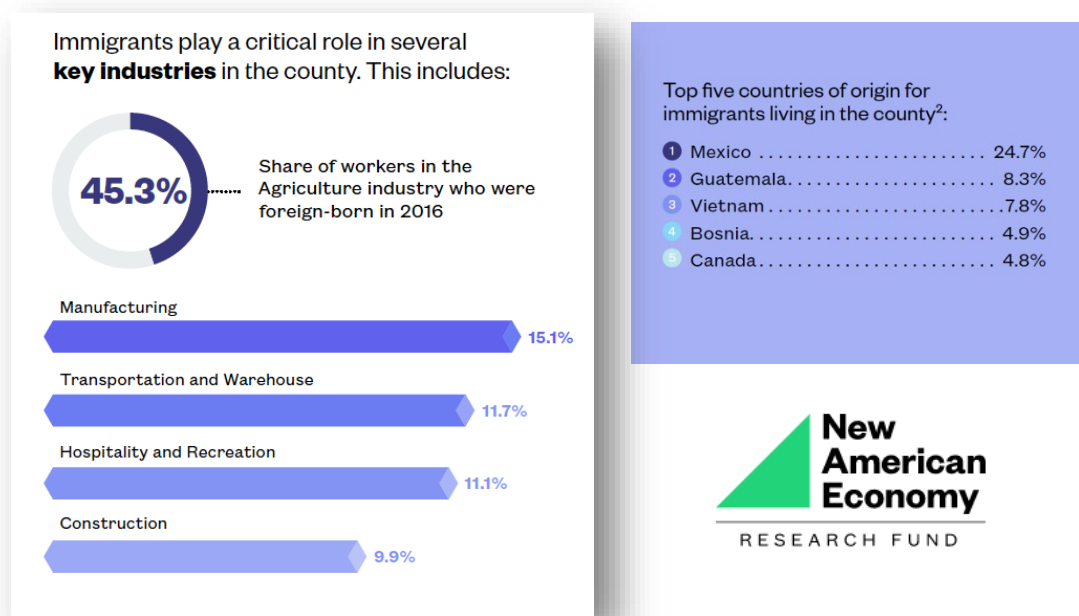KENDALL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN, FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

According to the recent study "New Americans in Kent County", commissioned by the New American Economy, the top two countries of origin for immigrants living in Kent Co. account for one-third of the entire immigrant population: Mexico and Guatemala. The same study reveals that, close to 50% of all immigrants work in the "backbone industries" (New American Economy, 2018). Latinx immigrants in West Michigan are the backbone of this community. However, representation is limited when it comes to higher levels of decision-making positions, even when more Latinx students are graduating from college than ever before. Further, some highly educated and prepared Latinx professionals lag behind when it comes to promotions in the workplace.

Immigrants play a critical role in several **key industries** in the county. This includes:

45.3% ······· Share of workers in the Agriculture industry who were foreign-born in 2016

Manufacturing — 15.1%

Transportation and Warehouse — 11.7%

Hospitality and Recreation — 11.1%

Construction — 9.9%

Top five countries of origin for immigrants living in the county[2]:

1. Mexico 24.7%
2. Guatemala 8.3%
3. Vietnam 7.8%
4. Bosnia 4.9%
5. Canada 4.8%

New American Economy

RESEARCH FUND

In 2013, a group of Latinx professionals designed what would be the first Latinx-centric leadership program in West Michigan with the goal of increasing Latinx representation at higher-level positions in the corporate and non-profit sectors. To date, over 150 individuals have graduated from the program and this program itself has adapted to the times and needs of the community. Leaders in the for-profit and not-for-profit organizations

recognized the value of the program by enrolling its Latinx staff in the program and financing the registration fees. The program has been financially supported by both the corporate and philanthropic sectors which have recognized and endorsed additional Latinx representation.

The work is far from done. In this document my intention is to record the design of the curriculum, from ideation to development, its failures and successes, its highs and lows. I offer this document as a starting point for a future visionary who might develop the program into a much grander design of something better and which will address the societal issue of Latinx representation in decision-making spaces.

Acknowledgments

With or without knowing, many people have had an impact on me. To try listing every single one of them would take pages and pages so I must apologize for not mentioning every one of you, but please know I am thankful.

- From the day I arrived in the U.S. it was obvious to me that if I wanted to succeed, I had to complete my college journey. Davenport University and people like Dave Veneklase and President Richard Pappas gave me the opportunity to not just complete but to develop a mindset of continuous education.

- My colleagues at the Grand Rapids Chamber, Sonya Hughes and Jeanne Englehart who showed me how to navigate the corporate world and helped me to develop my professional network. It was during the Leadership Advantage sessions where LEADeres was first conceived in concept.

- My friends and colleagues at Ferris State University- Dr. Tony Baker who brought me to Ferris State University, former Provost Fritz Erickson who encouraged me to aim higher, former Provost Paul Blake whose unwavering support guided me for seven years and, of course, President David Eisler who has been my number one supporter from day one.

- The Program Facilitators, former and current, Kristin Ekkens (co-conspirator), David Luna, Allison Lugo-Knapp (you are missed), Ana Ramírez-Saenz, Milinda Ysasi, Marlene Hernandez, Raul Alvarez and Caryn Zavala. Special mention to Paola Mendivil, first cohort participant and current Program Manager.

- To every single one of you LEADeres graduates who continue to inspire me.

- My parents, Carlos Sanchez Morales, an engineer and entrepreneur, and Esperanza Olvera a teacher whose teachings continue to motivate me.

- Last but not least, my wife, Lynne E. Pope, my wife and partner who has always been supportive and whose example of perseverance, resiliency and humility guides me and inspires me to keep doing what I love every single day. I love you.

1.

Introduction

Latinx have been in the U.S.A. for centuries. While some immigrated here, other have been here since before the birth of this country. The Latinx experience is as similar but at the same time, as different as any other minority group in the United States. It is necessary to underscore and make clear that this experience, the Latinx experience, is not more or less important than that of any other racial, gender, or ethnic group. But for the purposes of this project, the focus will solely be on the Latinx experience. Understanding the perennial debate on the "proper" or "correct" way to describe the group (Latino or Hispanic) I've chosen to use the term Latinx.

This project serves as supporting argument for the need to develop more Latinx leaders in our communities, at the neighborhood, city, county, state and national levels. Leaders already are as diverse as the group itself because Latinx come in different colors, origins, religions, political leanings, etc. All of them need to be prepared to lead, not just the Latinx community, but everyone. As such, the goal of the program is to work with young, emerging Latinx professionals in helping them develop their own leadership style, to give them the tools needed to succeed in their professional environments. Our communities need high-performing and culturally intelligent professionals in finance, the arts, elected officials, and membership of for-profit and non-profit Boards. Further, Latinx leaders need to continue developing the pathways for younger generations. This project will also explore and address questions such as: What are the elements of a leader? What are the characteristics of a Latinx leader? Is there a difference between mainstream leadership and

leadership for the Latinx professional? Lastly, is there a defined Latinx leadership style?

While it will be inevitable to address topics that some might consider controversial, such as discrimination, racism, documented and undocumented persons, immigration, etc., I believe addressing them will add context to the need to scale the efforts nation-wide and intensify the development of Latinx leaders in West Michigan. Further, it will highlight the negative and insidious discourse about the Latinx community, which discourse was designed specifically to subjugate that community.

Latinx professionals celebrating at graduation.

From left to right: Dante Villarreal, Maria Mier, Tony Banks, Omar Cuevas and Luis Perez.

A chapter is dedicated to describing the birth of the Latino Talent Initiative, the Latinx-centric leadership program that would later become LEADeres. I will discuss how it came about and what was involved in the program design. It has been seven years since inception and throughout its life, the program has responded to the needs of the participants as well as the circumstances in the community, testing and adding areas of study as well as going through a rebranding process that has become the current LEADeres Program.

The last chapter explores the future of Latinx leadership as it relates to the future of work. What else is needed to develop high-performing Latinx leaders? What competencies will the future demand from young professionals and how can the program deliver them?

This is not by any means, the only leadership program for the Latinx community. In a recent report, Lideramos, the National Latino Leadership Alliance, found 111 leadership programs across the U.S. hosted by Chambers of Commerce, non-profit and community organizations, as well as universities. (Lideramos 2020). LEADeres was designed with the West Michigan Latinx professional in mind. In fact, the program has borrowed elements from others around the country and the LEADeres designers have consulted with content experts and attended conferences on the topic. LEADeres is also the product of local experts in their respective field who have facilitated dozens of sessions in the course of these seven years. For this, I will be forever grateful.

First Latino Talent Initiative (LEADeres) cohort. From top left to right: Victor Ramirez, Paola Mendivil, Lilibeth Marvin, Eleonor Moreno, Perla Ramirez, Juan Carlos Rodriguez, Israel Ledesma. Bottom-left: Jessica Ledesma, Nancy Perez, Jacqueline Villegas, Leydi Roa. Not pictured: Andrew Lebron, Perla Ramirez, Laura Urzola Rivas, Maria Vilagomez.

2.

Methodology

This work is divided into sections which convey the reasons why this program became important work and further gives some history to contextualize the topic.

The Birth of the Latinx Experience is a quick history of the evolution of the Latinx community in the U.S. The section of *the Program* narrates how it was designed, its needs, wants, those involved and also describes its evolution. Lastly, the *Future*; not just the future of the program but how it relates to the changing demographics in the U.S. and how can we adapt to the future of work. Worth mentioning is the use of the "Design Thinking" process in the development of the leadership program.

Valuable information used to design the program was obtained during informal interviews with young Latinx professionals, Human Resources practitioners at corporations in West Michigan, managers of leadership programs in the region and the nation, Life and Business coaches and Latinx-centered and observation of mainstream leadership programs as well.

Literature on subjects such as leadership, coaching, Latino leadership, the Future of Work, was read and analyzed and a bibliography is included at the end.

Invaluable information that was captured over the years, often in anecdotal form, has proven to be the most important source to refine the program.

3.

The Birth of the Latinx Experience

By the time the English established Jamestown in 1607, the Spaniards had been on the continent for about a hundred years. Having colonized the continent, it is safe for Hispanics to assert that their ancestors were Americans before this land was known as "America". In the following centuries, all Latin American countries would achieve independence from Spain as well as the thirteen English colonies, forming the United States of America. However, while the U.S. was becoming stronger, many Latin American countries would suffer from revolutions and several iterations of military regimes, pushing people to seek for a more stable place to live, politically and socially, thus emigrating to the new United States.

The U.S. – Mexico war (1846-1848) and the subsequent Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo are transcendent factors in the relationship between the two countries. First, because under the treaty, the U.S acquires almost half of Mexico's territory and second because everyone who lived in that territory, mostly Mexicans, became U.S. citizens, resulting in the first Hispanics.

Between the years 1942 and 1964, the Bracero program[1] allowed 4.5 million Mexican citizens to the US in order to work temporarily, supporting the few available American workers, providing the necessary production

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[1] The Bracero Program grew out of a series of bi-lateral agreements between Mexico and the United States that allowed millions of Mexican men to come to the United States to work on, short-term, primarily agricultural labor contracts.

requirements of the country.   This resulted in a second large wave of Hispanics.

The Cuban revolution in 1959 brought about 200,000 Cubans to the Florida shores and subsequent events like the Mariel exodus[2] have since increased those numbers. The military unrest in Latin America during the 1960's and 1970's caused many Salvadorians, Columbians, Nicaraguans, and Guatemalans to migrate, some as refugees, but many others seeking a better life with new opportunities. It was also during this time that Mexico suffered several financial crises prompting many to seek better opportunities north of the border. Figure 1, taken from "Latin American Immigration to the United States" (Tienda and Sanchez 2015) shows how each decade the number of *Foreign-Born Population from Latin America* has increased almost two-fold from 1960 to the last Census in 2010, with Mexicans the largest segment of that population.
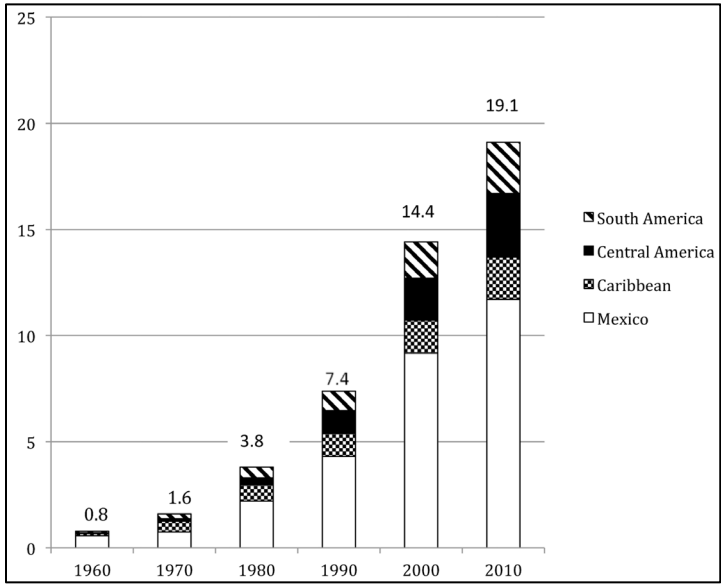

Figure 1.
"Latin American Immigration to the United States"
(Tienda and Sanchez 2015)

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[2] Between April and October 1980, some 125,000 people migrated from Mariel Harbor, Cuba to the U.S.

Of course, one cannot talk about immigration without touching on the subject of "Unauthorized Immigrants". The Pew Research Center estimates that in 2017, there were 10.5 million unauthorized immigrants in the U.S. (Passel and Cohn 2019) with most coming from Latin American countries, Mexico being the country of origin of the majority. However, it is hard to know if all immigrants have been fully counted.

So, with so many different and distinct nationalities, how do we refer to them collectively with a term which would be encompassing and yet not offensive? The term Chicano, for example, is a term given to people born in the U.S. of Mexican descent but only for those living mostly in California but some who also reside in Texas and Arizona. The term "Chicano" became nationally known in the sixties due to the Chicano Movement. The Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity in America, at Brown University describes the Movement as "A youth movement represented in the struggle against discrimination in schools and the anti-war movement; the farmworkers movement; the movement for political empowerment, most notably in the formation of La Raza Unida Party; and the struggle for control and ownership over "homelands" in the US Southwest." (The Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity in America 2005)

The issue of self-descriptive terminology still remains a debate primarily between generations. The older generation grew accustomed to identifying themselves by their country of origin (Mexican, Guatemalan, Cuban, etc.) However, a younger generation, particularly those born in the 1970's are more accustomed to the term "Hispanic". This is a result of Directive 15 from the Office of Budget Management and Budget "Race and Ethnic Standards for Federal Statistics and Administrative Reporting" which initially introduced the term Hispanic to define "A person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race." (Office of Management and Budget 2019). Still, a 2012 Pew Research Center

report (Taylor, et al. 2012) showed that "*Half (51%) say they have no preference for either term. When a preference is expressed, "Hispanic" is preferred over "Latino" by more than a two-to-one margin—33% versus 14%.*".

In the past few years, in an effort to bring equity to the conversation, a gender-neutral term has born - Latinx to identify the community regardless of gender or sex identification. The 2015 article "Student groups shift toward use of Latinx to include all gender identities", published in the Columbia Spectator, reported what may have been the first noticeable use of the term "Latinx", at Columbia University, with the purpose to be more reflective of a gender-inclusive student organization. (Armus 2015)

LEADeres participants at graduation.

From left to right: Andrea Velazquez, Lourdes Flores, Karina Zárate, Reyna Masko, Leonard Vielma and Raul Fermín

It is also important to note the use of terminology to stigmatize and offend. For many years "Mexican" was used negatively to offend. I was once asked by a supervisor if it was OK to say "Mexican" when referring to me. Some pejorative terms such as "Wetback", "Beaner" have been used in past years, but the use of the term "Illegal Alien", is one of the terms that negatively impacts the most as it is meant to define one's identity- an identity that is permanently outside of the law. The term "Undocumented", although still uncomfortable, is more acceptable. This Program has intentionally utilized the newer terms in order to redefine the public discourse around Latinx, particularly those in the professional sector.

Trying to define the Latinx Identity has been one of the hardest tasks for researchers and scholars alike. The dominant culture (White) has had the first opportunity at defining who is Latinx, mostly to serve their purposes but also because it's been constantly evolving. It is a fluid concept. When the 2020 Census showed the significant number of Latinx in this country, all eyes focused on that community, for better or worse. While for decades, Latinx had to endure the frequent inquiries as to where they are from, it now became even more prevalent. Not realizing that most Latinx are U.S. born, the constant questioning of one's origins, "real" origins, has become insidious. Why is this important? Because when a young Latinx professional is trying to find its place in the world and in the workplace, the constant "Othering"[3] keeps undermining self-confidence, particularly for first-generation Latinx. Refusing to speak Spanish, the language of their ancestors, is seen in the Latinx community as negative; non-Latinx enough. For some in the dominant culture (White), the skin color of Latinx people plays a factor as well. Those with a lighter hue are considered assimilated, therefore accepted. However, some in the Latinx community may regard this as being a sell-out. All these considerations create an identity crisis in the individual, negatively affecting performance and adaptability to the new professional environment.

Dr. Robert Rodriguez and Andrés Tomás Tapia explain in their book Auténtico, the paths some Latinx executives have created for themselves in order to succeed (Rodriguez and Tapia 2017):

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[3] Othering is a strategy that reinforces the mainstream by differentiating individuals and groups and relegating them to the margins according to a range of socially constructed categories. Othering occurs via a wide range of practices from language differentiation to geographical assignation, native/nonnative status (despite legal citizenship), and photographic and filmic techniques that foreground and center some characters while backgrounding and obscuring others. Valdivia, Angharad N. "Othering." *Keywords for Media Studies*, edited by Laurie Ouellette, and Jonathan Gray, New York University Press, 1st edition, 2017. *Credo Reference*, https://ferris.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/nyupresskms/othering/0?institutionId=723. Accessed 05 Aug. 2020.

- **Unapologetic Latinos.** Fully embraced their Latino identity, choosing not to hide it even in the most non-Latino environment.
- **Equivocal Latinos.** Some boundaries about their Latino identity due to European-American values they were exposed to in formative years.
- **Retro Latinos.** May have grown equivocal but are going back to their roots.
- **Invisible Latinos.** Fully denied and disowned any connection deliberately.

Photo by Bella Photography

These paths are created reflecting upbringing, effects of a dominant culture, family dynamics and, of course, the country of origin or heritage.

So, why now? First, because even with all the gains the Latinx community has achieved, significant representation is still a major issue. While the Latinx community represent almost 15% of the U.S. population, there are only 47 Latinx Members of Congress (3% in the Senate and about 5% in the House of Representatives). Second, because while Latinas represent 3% of all people employed in management, professional and related occupations, they hold

only 0.3 percent of corporate officer positions in the Fortune 500." (Network of Executive Women 2008). Third, because of the Latinx community's economic power- according to the Selig Center for Economic Growth at the University of Georgia, "the $1.5 trillion Hispanic market is the largest ethnic market in the U.S. and includes more than one out of every six Americans." (Weeks 2019). And lastly, because of demographics, the U.S Census estimates that by 2060, the Hispanic Population will reach 111 million people and will be 28% of the U.S. population (United States Census Bureau 2018).

Figure 2.
United States Census Bureau.
Hispanic Population to Reach 111 Million by 2060.
Washington, October 9, 2018.
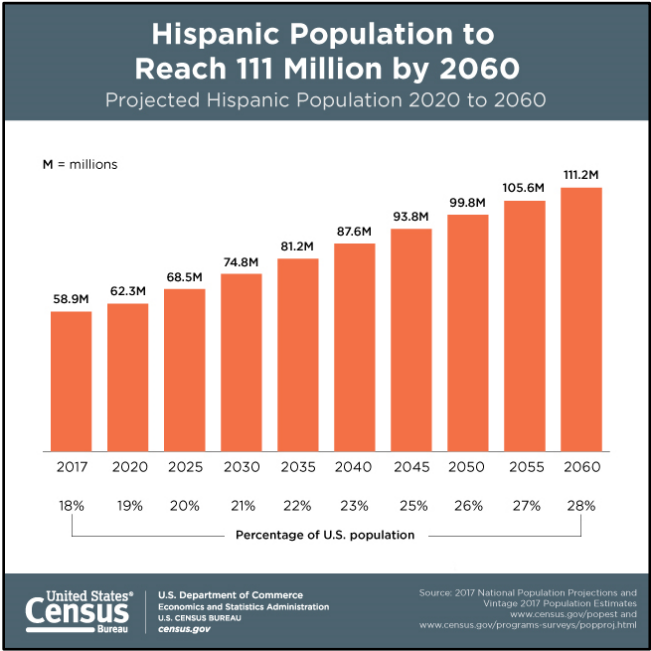
Our country is in a crossroads. We can choose to continue building barriers around a young, bright and energetic population that will represent more than a quarter of our population or we can rally around them, support their professional aspirations, just like we do with the dominant culture, and develop high-performing Latinx professionals. In designing this program, we chose the latter.

4.

The Program

The Latino Talent Initiative was born when a small group of Latinx professionals in Grand Rapids, Michigan, identified a recurring practice in the younger generation of emerging Latinx professionals. Many of whom were hungry for opportunities for professional development and/or mentorship. Some older professionals had been advising and mentoring them with some success but there was a need for a systematic approach. These younger professionals were often first-generation college graduates, the oldest sibling whose parents lacked the knowledge and social capital to provide support. These younger Latinx were already paving the way for future generations and needed support.

An initial curriculum was developed and presented to Ferris State University which agreed to host the program and provide support. The Dyer-Yves Foundation approved a developmental grant to design core program segments and the financial runway to pilot three sessions. In 2013, the first cohort of the Latino Talent Initiative was launched.

The informal research conducted included conversations with Human Resources executives at local corporations as well as with Latinx professionals in higher positions within their organizations- those who "have been there before". The experiences from these seasoned Latinx professionals shed light on what they had to do to succeed, the tools they had and the tools they wished

they had. These HR executives provided information on the competencies they look for in candidates interviewing for positions in corporate as well as non-profit positions. Some of the answers from HR professionals included:

- Critical Thinking: The ability to think strategically rather than only tactically. The skill to "see the forest over the trees".
- Synthesize Information: The ability to process large amounts of information, process it and explain in simple and digestible terms.
- Communication Skills: The ability to adapt and express thoughts and information depending on the audience.

Seasoned Latinx professionals pointed to resiliency as one of the main characteristics -the ability to continue the task at hand regardless of the micro-aggressions inflicted on them in the workplace, as well as the ability to adapt to changing situations. Some pointed out also the conundrum of assimilation vs. acculturation and most wished they had a program similar to what we were embarking on.

Raul Alvarez, Facilitator and Franklin Corniele, Program participant. Photo by Bella Photography

Since its inception, the program addresses whether there is such thing as Latinx Leadership and Mainstream Leadership, meaning "can a leadership program designed for the dominant culture be used on the Latinx Community"? At the time, very few leadership programs addressed the particular cultural nuances of the Latinx culture. Most, if not all of them, where designed for white males. Culture, being such an important piece in an

individual's life, should be incorporated in a leadership curriculum in order for the individual to leverage those innate traits and their lived experiences, meaning acculturate rather than to assimilate.

After the 3-year pilot period, the program was formally introduced as the Latino Talent Initiative. Corporations began to show interest in supporting the program through sponsorships in order to sustain the program and provide scholarships, and partners in the community supported the recruiting efforts by promoting the program amongst their Latinx staff.

The program is best described on the website as: "...a non-credit leadership lab designed to support Latinx professionals as they pursue their individual career and life goals. ***The program emphasizes identity formation and personal development in the areas of cultural awareness, leadership, professional development, and community and civic engagement.***" (Latino Business and Economic Development Center 2019) It covers four main areas of focus: Cultural Awareness, Professional Development, Leadership and Civic Engagement (Fig #3 expounds on each of the areas of focus) (Latino Business and Economic Development Center 2019).
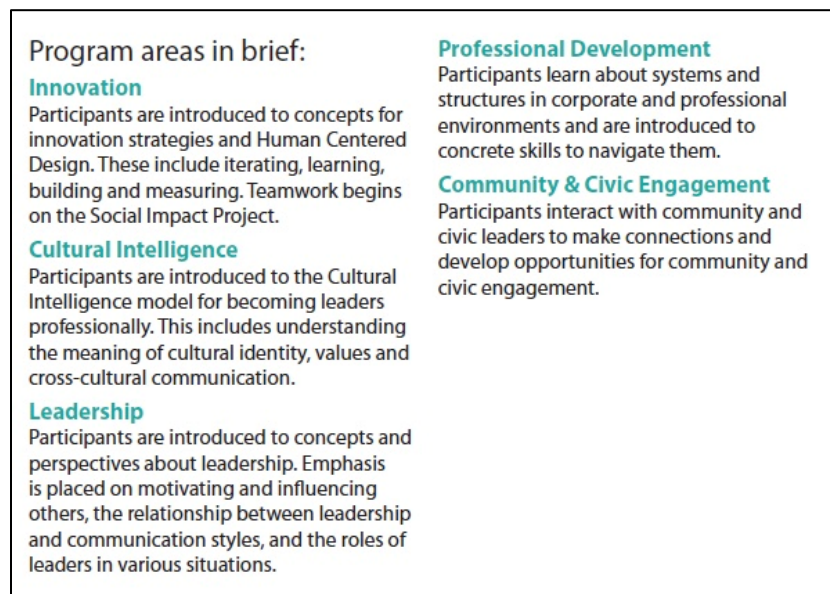
Program areas in brief:

Innovation
Participants are introduced to concepts for innovation strategies and Human Centered Design. These include iterating, learning, building and measuring. Teamwork begins on the Social Impact Project.

Cultural Intelligence
Participants are introduced to the Cultural Intelligence model for becoming leaders professionally. This includes understanding the meaning of cultural identity, values and cross-cultural communication.

Leadership
Participants are introduced to concepts and perspectives about leadership. Emphasis is placed on motivating and influencing others, the relationship between leadership and communication styles, and the roles of leaders in various situations.

Professional Development
Participants learn about systems and structures in corporate and professional environments and are introduced to concrete skills to navigate them.

Community & Civic Engagement
Participants interact with community and civic leaders to make connections and develop opportunities for community and civic engagement.

Figure 3. LEADeres Main Areas of Focus, https://leaderes.ferris.edu

The program is organized in five areas of focus (Innovation, Cultural Intelligence, Leadership, Professional Development and Civic and Community Engagement), two events (Orientation and Graduation) and the Capstone.
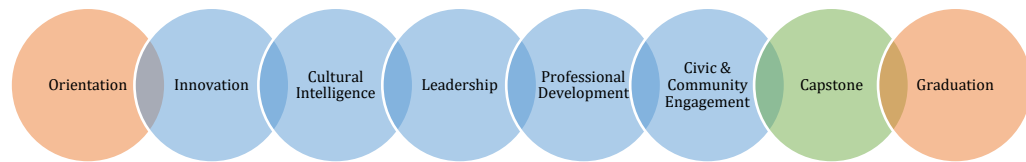
Orientation

In this short social event, participants introduce themselves to fellow cohort members through icebreaker activities. Center staff introduce all facilitators who have a few moments to present highlights of their day-sessions. The Program Manager as well as the Director take time to set the guidelines for communication, expectations from the group and participants are asked to establish their own guidelines and expectations for the sessions such as attendance and participation. The event lasts for a couple of hours and it is held at a social venue on the eve of the Innovation Session. The main goal of the event is to begin developing a sense of community and establish trust amongst the cohort.

Innovation

In 2016, a survey was conducted with the current cohort about their knowledge of the term "Design Thinking" and the way in which they were using the discipline. The survey showed that only about 10% to 20% of them had heard the term and fewer than that were using the process. Knowing that the Design Thinking process was widely used in the corporate and non-profit worlds, facilitators and staff decided to include the instruction of elements of

Design Thinking into to the curriculum and find the appropriate Latinx professional to facilitate.

Innovation Session at Steelcase.

Invited guests: Raul Hernandez, Herman Miller and Gillian Giem, USGBC West Michigan

We found the right facilitator in Mr. Roberto Peña, who had been facilitating Design Thinking sessions for Amway North America for a couple of years and was trained in the Design Thinking process. Years later, when Mr. Peña was no longer able to facilitate, Ms. Marlene Hernandez, Director of Learning and Development at Steelcase Inc., joined the team of facilitators and thanks to a collaboration with Steelcase Inc. Marlene has been facilitating the session at Steelcase HQ since 2018 and including Design Thinking and Agile methodologies.

The Design Thinking methodologies provide a unique, integrated way to solve challenges which LEADeres participants may face in the workplace. Part of the learning is practical, and as such, participants are tasked with using the Design Thinking process to solve a challenge in their community.

Cultural Awareness

During this session, participants explore what it means to be Latinx in a multicultural, professional environment. Discussions on microaggressions and how to prepare and respond to them, developing a resilient attitude are also part of this session. We pay particular attention to the way the Latinx community segregates and discriminates their own based on a colonized point of view.

Leadership Session at Kendall College of Art and Design.

From left to right: Rolando Bocanegra, Jennifer Taveras, Claudia Covarrubias and Juan Rosario

Participants are introduced to a research-based Cultural Intelligence Model as well as the Cultural Intelligence[4] (CQ) assessment. This assessment helps them to develop the necessary skills to prepare for and succeed in settings where they will encounter people from other cultures (culture, defined as a group of ten or more people who share the same values, language, customs, etc.). Once participants know where they stand in the CQ continuum, facilitators help them develop a plan to increase their knowledge, drive, and to create an action plan. Cultural Awareness is the foundational piece in the journey to self-

Cultural Intelligence or CQ, is a globally recognized way of assessing and improving effectiveness in culturally diverse situations.

discovery which then allows the participant to develop further awareness. This awareness in then instrumental to successful leadership. Ms. Kristin Ekkens has been the Cultural Awareness facilitator since the first cohort and helped develop much of the current curriculum. Along with Ms. Ekkens, Mr. Caryn Zavala co-facilitates the session.

Leadership

As with the Innovation session, once our first Leadership facilitator, Mr. David Luna was unable to continue with the program we asked Ms. Ana Ramirez-Saenz to take over the day session, making it her own. In designing this session, we wanted to ensure participants would learn what their non-Latinx (white) counterparts were learning as it is understood that we don't live in a Latinx professional environment but rather a multicultural one. For that purpose, Ms. Ramirez-Saenz chose to bring John Maxwell's leadership theory to the session. Mr. Maxwell is considered one of the foremost leadership experts in the U.S., who has sold over 20 million books and is one of the most sought-after speakers on the topic in the world. In one of his most popular books, "The Five Levels of Leadership," Maxwell shares how an individual can achieve the highest level, but he fails in considering challenges that present based on the individual's gender, ethnicity and/or race as well as the aforementioned cultural qualities of diverse individuals. The first level, "Position", is the easiest to achieve as one can be appointed. The second level is "Permission" where, in his words, "they (followers) give the leader Permission to lead them" (Maxwell 2013).

While levels Three – "Production", Four – "People Development" and Five – "Pinnacle", are not in opposition to traditional Latinx culture, they just don't take culture into consideration. At times it seems that Maxwell encourages the individual over the team which is contrary to a collectivist type of community such as Latinx. In their book, Latinization and the Latino Leader, Christina

Benitez and Marlene Gonzalez explain "The concept of family and the collective nature Latino families hold dear maybe difficult for mainstream companies to understand. Whereas U.S. culture encourages independence, Latinos yearn for the togetherness of family …" (Benitez and Gonzalez 2011)This disparity of cultural upbringing is why we have intentionally taught Maxwell's approach, through a Latinx lens, incorporating our culture and elevating our values and teachings to a new way of leadership that works for us.

In the Application process, close to 80% of applicants' response to the question *What do you want to do with the learned skills?* Is: "I want to give back". While this is commendable and reflects the cultural axiom of taking care of family, their elders, etc., it is believed that this may be a reflection of a sense of having reached the highest level of their career. Participants are encouraged to, shift their thinking from "giving back" to instead see this opportunity to "pay it forward". This way, future generations will benefit from their work. These LEADeres are changing their genealogical tree, building a legacy.

Professional Development

Participants gain deeper insight into the systems and structures that exist in the professional environments they currently are and in ways to successfully navigate them.

Facilitators introduce topics that for some are new, such as networking, developing a network, coaching, mentorship and sponsorship. In the topic of networks, we encourage participants to see this program as their primary, professional support network, one comprised of people with similar experiences as well as plans for the future. Participants are also presented with ways to access other networks where they may find professional opportunities different from what they are accustomed to in their

communities. They are encouraged develop their own professional identity and bring their true selves to these networks.

These topics are particularly new to first-generation college graduates, those who have never known the power of networks and how to leverage them. Further discussing how to choose a coach and a mentor as well as asking for sponsorship to spaces where Latinx are normally not represented. At the end of the session, participants have developed the necessary tools and awareness to help them navigate interviews, job reviews, salary negotiations and other kind of work-related interactions. We are grateful to Allison Lugo-Knapp for her work during the first cohorts and have welcomed Milinda Ysasi Castañon as the current facilitator.

Civic & Community Engagement

During this session, Mr. Raul Alvarez helps participants in identifying spaces to exercise influence and/or serve their community: boards, committees and even running for public office[5].

Community and Civic Engagement Session at West Michigan Center for Arts and Technology

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[5] In collaboration with the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy, at Grand Valley State University, we are developing a new Board training program, different from what is currently being offered. One that puts culture at the forefront of the training.

The session explores reasons why the Latinx community may not seem as engaged as other communities and, conversely, ways in which the Latinx community over-indexes others in areas such as volunteerism. Invited guests are asked to share their own experiences in volunteerism, politics and civic engagement in general. The Program has hosted State Representatives, City Mayors, City Council members, as well as Latinx working "behind the scenes" in the political process who all share their experiences in various capacities. This demonstrates the many ways in which a person can engage in civic life.

Capstone

This day-session was incorporated for the 2019-20 cohort as participants' feedback showed the need for time to work as teams on their presentations and individual Professional Development plans. During the course of this day-session, participants attend a short Public Speaking workshop designed to enhance their Public Speaking skills in preparation for their final presentation at the Graduation and spend time with session facilitators finalizing the two Program deliverables: The Social Impact Project and the LEADeres Personal Plan[6]. All facilitators are invited to this day-session and participants are encouraged to connect with them one-on-one to develop their professional network.

Deliverables

Social Impact Project. Using Design Thinking methodologies, participants interview stakeholders and learn how to synthesize the information received in order to make recommendations. They also learn how to prototype by

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[6] Although plans were made to introduce the Capstone session to the 2019-20 cohort, the COVID pandemic made that impossible. The 2020-21 cohort will be the first to experience the session.

creating a pilot of their proposed solution to the challenge, seek out feedback from the end-user and apply the lessons learned to continue the iteration process.[7]

Past examples of the Social Impact Projects include: "How might we entice Latinx professionals in pursuing careers in financial services", "How to support a philanthropic mindset in the Latinx community", and the latest challenge: Wellbeing - where all four teams chose a sub-challenge to solve for within the overarching topic of Wellbeing including: "How to develop a Collective of Latinx Mental Healthcare Providers, "Increasing the Number of 2nd and 3rd Generation Latinx Individuals Working on their Mental, Physical and Spiritual Health" and "Developing a Better Way of Communicating Wellbeing Resources in the Community". Participants are divided into groups curated to work with people whom they are unfamiliar, who are from different sectors, ages and educational attainment. Groups work throughout the duration of the Program and present their findings at Graduation.

LEADeres Adaptive Leadership Plan. The LEADeres Adaptive Leadership Plan (figure 4) is designed to help participants develop personal and professional goals in the core areas of the LEADeres program: Cultural Intelligence; Leadership, Professional Development; and Community and Civic Engagement. For each of these core areas, they identify and develop their own ambitions and create S.M.A.R.T.[8] goals. Once they have identified ambitions and established goals, they will monitor and adapt said goals using a variety of methods designed to ensure they have enough support and create the accountability needed to succeed.

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[7] Participants continue the process by applying the feedback received to their proposed solution and presenting it back to the same group of end-users.

[8] S.M.A.R.T. Goals is an acronym to guide the individual in the setting objectives. The acronym stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound.

Community & Civic Engagement

LEADERES

AMBITION(S) *at home, at work, and in community...*	ACTION(S)
	S.M.A.R.T. GOAL 1
	S.M.A.R.T. GOAL 2
	S.M.A.R.T. GOAL 3
	S.M.A.R.T. GOAL 4
	S.M.A.R.T. GOAL 5
ADAPT	
ACCOUNTABILITY	
ASSET REMINDERS	

Figure 4. Adaptive Leadership Plan

At the end of each session, participants are tasked with imagining how they would like to develop themselves at home, at work, and in the community in each of the Program areas. LEADeres participants identify potential barriers to progress and success, develop a system of accountability and create asset reminders (assets the participant already possesses). Finally, throughout the program, participant check on their progress towards goals and identify how and when they will monitor progress after graduating from the program. LEADeres graduates are encouraged to follow up with their own designated accountability partners.

Elements of the LEADeres Adaptive Leadership Plan

- Identifying **Ambitions:**
  - How would they like to develop themselves?
  - What changes would they like to see in themselves by the end of the program?

- o   What changes would they like by the end of the calendar year?

- **ACTION.** Connecting goals to ambitions by creating **S.M.A.R.T.** goals.
  - o   What 3-5 **S.M.A.R.T.** goals do they need to reach in order to make their ambitions a reality?
  - o   Ensuring goals are **S**pecific, **M**eaningful, **A**ction Oriented, **R**ealistic, and **T**imely.
  - o   Determine what is important vs. urgent.

- **ADAPT.** Detecting possible barriers to achieving goals and adjusting goals as needed.
  - o   What is something that could be a barrier to their aspirations and completion of goals?
  - o   Do they need to adjust or change an action associated with their goals based on current circumstances?
  - o   What strategies can they utilize to ensure goals are reached?

- **ACCOUNTABILITY**. Creating support systems to help them stay on track and reach their goals.
  - o   Who will they share their ambitions and goals with?
  - o   Who will be on their personal board of directors?
  - o   Do they need different accountability partners for different goals?

- **ASSESS.** Developing a schedule to check in and reflect on progress towards goals.
  - o   Are they making monthly progress?
  - o   Are they experiencing movement towards their aspiration?
  - o   If not, what new **S.M.A.R.T.** goals must they complete to achieve their goals?
  - o   Being self-reflective and look for root cause to challenges.

- **ASSET REMINDERS.** Creating self-care reminders that are needed to help them reach their goals.
    - What self-care reminders are important and needed for them to progress towards their goals?
    - Focus on using "asset-based language."
    - Only apologize when they have actually been wrong.

Presenting at Graduation. From left to right: Ricardo Meraz, Consuelo Poland, Juan Martinez and Alberto Calvillo

What have we accomplished?

To date, almost 150 young Latinx professionals from West Michigan have graduated from the 40-hour, six-month program. Although the program does not carry college credits, participants' perception of the program is similar to a college certificate. Figures 5 through 7 portray the diversity of the program's alumni. Worth noting is the overwhelming number of females compared to males that apply and are accepted into the program (Fig 5).

In order to bring more males to the program, an intentional effort to recruit males has been in place for more than two years now. We believe that it is of utmost importance for Latino males to hear from their female counterparts.
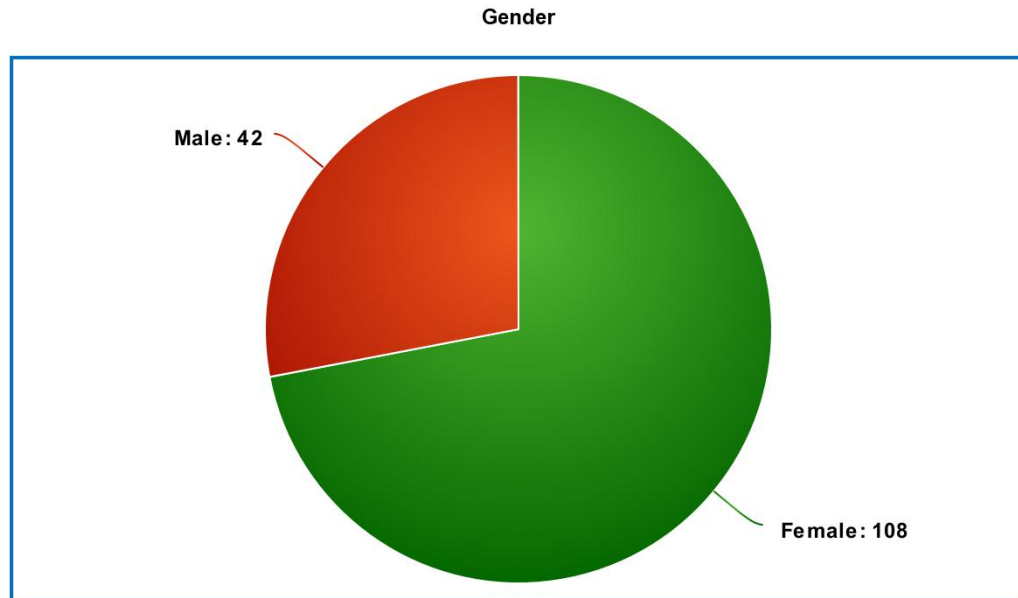
Gender

Figure 5. Distribution by Gender

Figure 6 reflects the level of educational attainment of Latinx in West Michigan and Figure 7 echoes the over-indexation of Latinx in the Non-for-profit sector: this nation-wide.
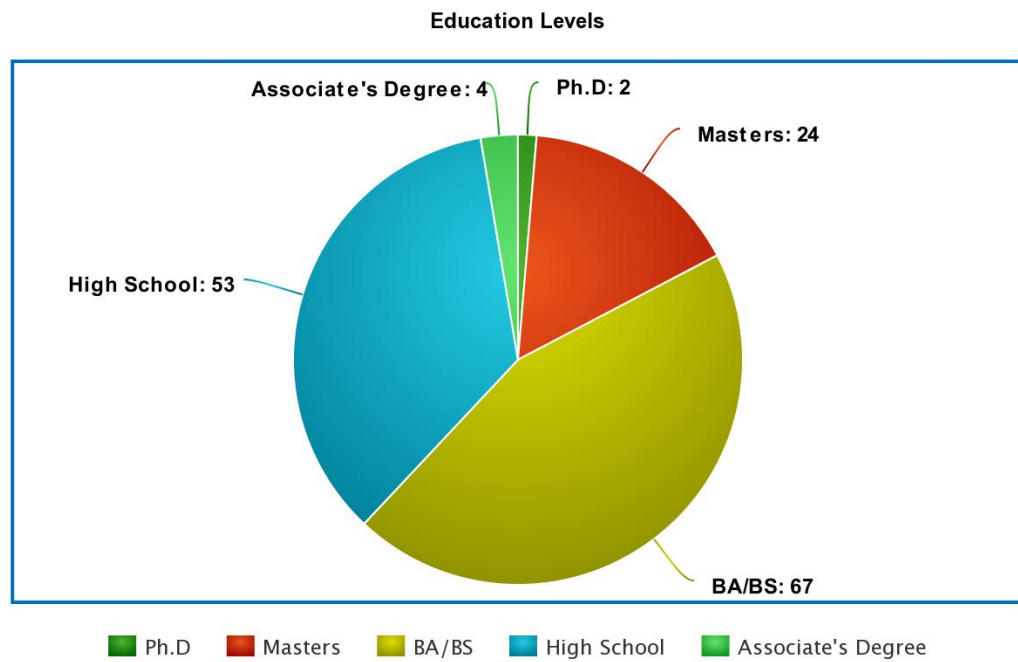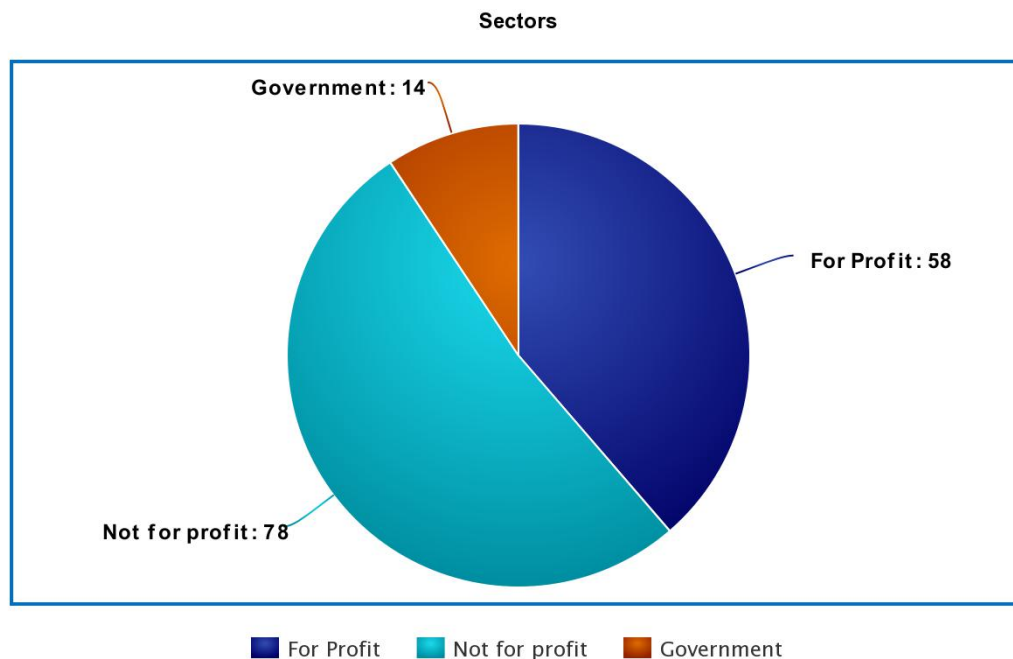
Education Levels

Figure 6. Distribution by Education Levels

Figure 7. Distribution by Sectors

The one question that consistently keeps arising is "*Is Latinx leadership different?*" As with many topics, we can find conflicting studies on leadership and ethnicity or race. Some studies suggest that ethnicity has no influence or effect in the relationship leader-follower while others assert the contrary. In 2005, Eric Romero presented findings from a controlled research study on Leadership categorization. He writes, "Leadership categorization and relational demography theory suggest that ethnicity has a major impact on how people work together and perceive leaders. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between leader ethnicity (Hispanic) and perceptions of leader behaviors." (Romero 2005). While he concludes that "…ethnicity did not have a significant effect on leader behavior perceptions", he also cautions on the results of the study as he acknowledges the limitations of it. Only 409 students at the University of New Mexico, a state with a significant Latinx population which may have acculturated to mainstream as well as being seen as acculturated by other populations. He proposes that more research needs to happen in the future.

5.

The Future

Since its formation, the spirit of the Program has been to be an ever-developing and adaptive program that would be at the forefront of new business theories and practices for the benefit of the participants. This is how Design Thinking was incorporated to the curriculum. Participants' feedback is analyzed, and some suggestions make their way into the curriculum, the way it is delivered and the voices that need to be heard.
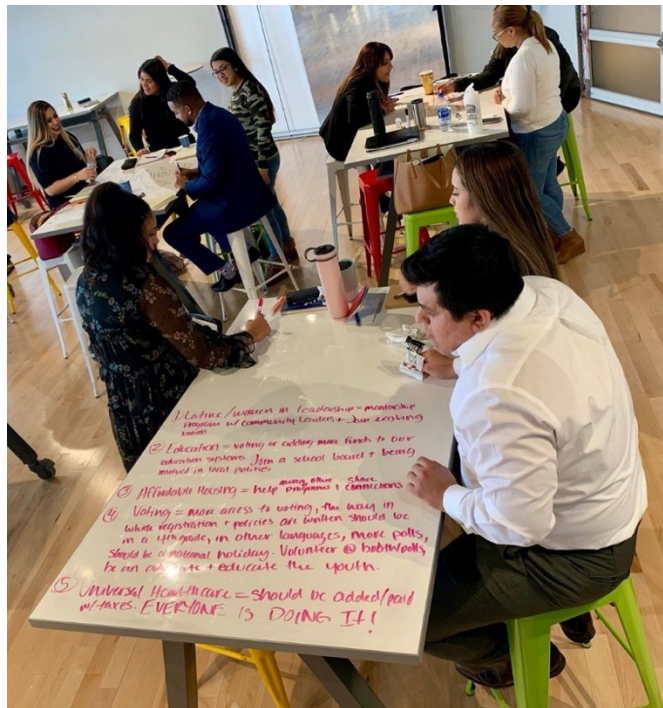
Civic and Community Engagement Day Session at WMCAT.

Top left: Vanessa Cervantes, Sarai Gamez, Alexandria Hamilton and Juan Rosario.

Top right: Jennifer Taveras, Maria Barreiro and Lydia Cruz.

Bottom: Alyson Ramirez, Yesica Duran and Angel Barreto Cruz

As such, in 2018, the LEADeres program joined Lideramos, the nation-wide organization of Latino Leadership Programs, to explore best practices and share the current awareness of how the LEADeres program was designed and how it has developed. Industry conferences and symposiums on Leadership

were identified and attended because of their importance in the field. Some of these conferences are the United States Hispanic Leadership Institute's (USHLI) Annual Conference, the Hispanic Alliance for Career enhancement (HACE), UNIDOSUS (formerly The National Council of La Raza) and Lideramos.

Attendance at these conferences has provided the Program the opportunity to compare and contrast with other programs offered nationally. An informal evaluation of this compare-and-contrast reveals that the LEADeres program is as valuable and comprehensive as other, similar programs in the country, particularly those in our target demographic which is management and supervisor level-professionals.

Secondary, but very important factors, have become apparent at these conferences: 1. the importance of preparing Latinx professionals to face the ever-evolving work environment, and 2. upskilling these professionals for success in a constantly changing world. Common questions posed to presenters at these conventions have been "*What are the necessary skills for the 21st century?*" and "*How can we help position a younger generation of Latinx professionals for success?*"

Another important issue is the one presented by Dr. Robert Rodriguez at a conference in 2018; the Over-Mentoring and Under-Coaching of the Latinx professional. Dr. Rodriguez explains that for several years now, Latinx professionals have been the focus of many, well-intended mentoring programs, to position them in line for promotions. However, reality shows that this is not the result. Dr. Rodriguez suggests that, in order to truly develop a pipeline of high-performing Latinx leaders and professionals, a combination of scaffolding initiatives must be deployed: Coaching-Mentoring-Sponsorship.

Inspired by this, the LEADeres program is embarking, in the next few years, in these actions:

a. Identify and infuse the current curriculum with the skills deemed necessary to succeed in the 21st Century. **The Future of Work**

b. Monitor and record changes in which workplaces are evolving and/or adapting due to the **impact of COVID19** in order to develop rapid-response workshops for LEADeres alumni

c. Design a **coaching** program that enhances the innate cultural characteristics of the Latinx professional and leverages them to connect LEADeres grads to potential sponsors

d. Identify and bring the program to communities in which Latinx professionals may benefit from the LEADeres program. **Expand**

The Future of Work

Scholars and authors like Heather McGowan, Chris Shipley, David Epstein and others have been theorizing and writing about the necessary skills for the 21st Century. McGowan and Shipley write, in *The Adaptation Advantage*, that the ability to be nimble and adapt to changes in the marketplace will be an asset that should be developed. Epstein in his book *Range*, proposes that generalization, rather than specialization, should guide younger generations when selecting their career paths. For his part, Dr. Rodriguez in *Auténtico* adds that Identity could be a key differentiator for Latinx professionals.

Another characteristic that has been identified during the current COVID pandemic is the ability to adapt. Adaptation is key to continue performing when a sudden unexpected occurrence disrupts normal activity. When the crisis hit West Michigan, the LEADeres program paused for a few days but within a couple of weeks an alternate plan was developed. Virtual meetings were held with each participant work team to check on their well-being and ensure their Service Projects, as well as the Adaptive Leadership Plans were on schedule. As shared before, regretfully, the Capstone session wasn't possible, rather a virtual graduation replaced the usual in-person celebration.

Strategizing Community Service Project. From left to right: Lydia Cruz, Alexandria Hamilton, Angela Reyna, Sebastian Ramirez, Rolando Bocanegra and Marlene Hernandez

The disruption in the Program caused by the pandemic gave participants the opportunity to experience dramatic shift in process – and to incorporate that ability in their own tool chest. However, this is not the case across the board in the Latinx community. A recent report of the UCLA Latino Policy and Politics Initiative titled "Latino Workers and Digitalization" showed that "…Latinos face one of the highest risks of displacement by digital technology compared to other racial and ethnic groups in the U.S." (González, et al. 2020) The report points that Latinx have a displacement rate of 25.5% compared to just 22.4% for non-Latinx. Latinx professionals must therefore develop deeper digital and technology skills. These numbers are a combination of the high number of Latinx in sectors where digital skills are not widely used such as hospitality, agriculture, construction, etc. and the relative low level of technological and digital skills required in those communities.

The UCLA report highlights digital skills as one set of the necessary skills to succeed. Further, McGowan and Shipley, in their book "*The Adaptation Advantage*", quote the Emerson Collective's XQ that "digital familiarity, collaboration skills and creative thinking are part of the set of "learner goals" or fundamental literacies needed in the 21st Century" (McGowan and Shipley 2020).

"*The Adaptation Advantage*" by McGowan and Shipley is a good example of the Latinx experience. The book, unknowingly, elevates the lived experiences of Latinx professionals. For example, immigrants had to adapt to a country that was not their own and to a language which they may have never heard. These immigrants gave birth to New Americans who had to navigate the cultural landscape of looking like immigrants but conducting themselves as "regular" Americans. This adaptation is also called "Assimilation".

Latinx frequently adapt for current conditions that the act of adaptation is seldom recognized. Imagine this: a young Latinx wakes up in the morning in an environment where everyone speaks Spanish with objects and activities which are common in that culture. The individual then travels to the workplace where most of the coworkers are white or non-Latinx, the language and activities are non Latinx-specific, so the individual has to shift from one culture to another. Here is where the significant adaptation occurs. This "advantage" however, has not been formally codified in a way that Latinx professionals can leverage it in the workplace. This individual is successfully navigating, adapting from one culture to another everyday but, since this ability has not been properly codified, it is very seldom seen as an advantage.

Lastly, McGowan and Shipley quote Dr. Theo Klimstra's notes on identity formation. Dr. Klimstra notes that "identity formation is a negotiation between internal beliefs and external narratives" (McGowan and Shipley 2020). LEADeres participants are challenged with identifying the external narratives that may be hindering their success. One, for example, is the narrative of the Latinx individual as "hard worker" which, while it may be well intentioned, it seems to be centered on manual labor, leaving behind other types of activities, activities which require a higher level of education and skill. LEADeres participants are encouraged to change that narrative by using the term high-performer instead of hard-worker.

Working on "Outside the Box Solutions" at Steelcase Inc.

From left to right: Angela Reyna, Julio Nuñez, Maribel Villaseñor, René Guzman, Zaira Vicario and Yadira Alcantar

As shared before, hiring managers agree that a set of skills needed in the 21st Century are Critical Thinking skills. An individual with critical thinking skills is capable of thinking outside the box, to see the forest rather than the trees. David Epstein, in his book "*Range*" shares that the Outsider Advantage, meaning the solution that comes from seeing the problem with a different set of eyes, as "another kind of opportunity for those who want to create and invent …". (Epstein 2019)

Latinx professionals, due to their collective nature, are one step ahead of their white counterparts in this area. For many years, this community (like other minorities) in the U.S. has been developing solutions to challenges and problems with limited resources. The Latinx community has had to think "outside the box" solutions even when there was no box.

Future revisions of the LEADeres curriculum will have to include some of these learnings to ensure the program is preparing our young Latinx professionals for the 21st Century.

COVID19 Impact

At the time of this writing, the plan for the 2020-21 cohort is an in-person delivery, following the University's and CDC guidelines. One of the most noticeable changes will be the cohort size, usually of 20 to 25 participants, the cohort size had to be downsized to 15 anticipating safe-distancing guidelines from our hosts. Some of the program's usual corporate hosts have declined requests to hold sessions in their facilities since, for the foreseeable future, they will not be allowing visitors in. Other minor modifications include a personalized pouch that includes all the writing materials they would need, intentionally minimizing the exchange of items between individuals during the session. Prior to attending the session participants are also required to answer a health survey, similar to the one used by Ferris, to gauge symptoms and potential exposure. Those showing symptoms, are asked to stay home.

While minor, some of these changes are already impacting the program's budget. However, more concerning is the way in which participants will experience the program, constant monitoring and evaluation responses will determine if more actions need to be taken in order to deliver a valuable program experience.

At ten months from the beginning of the COVID19 Pandemic in the U.S., we have not seen the full scale in which the workplace will have to change in order to bring some normalcy to the workday. One useful skill that will continue to serve our alumni well is **Critical Thinking**.

We have seen that COVID 19 is affecting minorities, Latinx, African Americans, etc. in a much greater proportion than Whites. However, our community's distrust for vaccination programs is, sadly, significant. The number of falsehoods related to the pandemic as well as the vaccine is causing havoc in our community due to conspiracy theories propagated by uninformed

individuals. Those who possess critical thinking skills can help educate the Latinx community.

According to the Center for Creative Leadership, **Resiliency** is the "ability to bounce back from adversity". This is an ability that most immigrants learn to develop as they try to adapt to the new environment. Said ability is passed on to the next generations but often not identified as a skill that can be developed and nurtured; "it is just something we do".

Latinx leaders need to know what it means to be a resilient leader, how to develop and nurture resilient skills in order to be able to face future crisis.

Latinx leaders and mentors. From left to right: Roberto Peña, Dante Villarreal, Ana Ramirez-Saenz, Omar Cuevas and Ricardo Meraz

Coaching

In 2018, during a presentation in Grand Rapids, Dr. Robert Rodriguez, author of books like "*Auténtico: The Definitive Guide to Latino Career Success*" and "*Latino Talent*", expressed his idea that *"Latinx professionals are over-mentored and under-sponsored"*. His comment highlighted the fact that while there are many mentoring programs in West Michigan for Latinx professionals to take

advantage of, there are two other important parts in the professional development journey: Coaching and Sponsorship.

- Coaching - someone that works with the individual
- Mentoring - someone that talks to the individual
- Sponsorship - someone that talks about the individual

These are three separate and very different levels of professional support. The Coach is next to the individual, teaching the techniques and modeling the behaviors that the individual needs to adopt. The Mentor shares the wisdom based on lived experiences, showing the individual where the "land mines" are and how to avoid them, sharing mistakes made and how to avoid making the same. The Sponsor comes after to open doors for the individual. This last relationship is crucial as the sponsor puts their reputation on the line, sharing the earned social capital of an entire professional career with the sponsored. This introduction brings the sponsored to spaces that, otherwise, would have been close to impossible to access. Hence the importance of Sponsorship for Latinx professionals.

There are many, good mentoring programs already in place in West Michigan, however, very few, if any, coaching programs specifically aimed at the Latinx professional. We believe that a Coaching program would be a great fit for LEADeres graduates; this new offering would be designed to leverage the innate cultural traits of the Latinx professional for their benefit.

We have opted for a collaborative approach were LEADeres would partner with like-minded organizations such as the Urban Core Collective for example, which is best suited to try to solve the issue of under-coached professionals of color. Leaders from both programs have already attended the Coaching for Equity training hosted by the National Equity Project and plan to train a group

of Master trainers who, in turn, would continue training others and offer coaching sessions. As with other initiatives, COVID19 impacted the planning and subsequent launch in 2020. Plans are in place to move forward in 2021, hoping for a launch in the very near future.

In the fall of 2021, the LEADeres team plans to develop a network of Latinx and non-Latinx professionals at C-suite levels who, in turn, will bring high-performing, younger, Latinx professionals along and open doors for them (Sponsoring them). Members of said network will have to possess a high-level of cultural competency to understand the professional needs of the younger generation of Latinx professionals rather than utilizing a stereotypical approach. Sponsors along with LEADeres graduates decide which activities will be beneficial for the young Latinx professional as well as the spaces to be considered. One of the goals of this approach is to position younger, Latinx professionals in places where they would normally not be able to be, thanks to their sponsors' social capital.

Expansion

The LEADeres Management Team recognizes its program is not the only program in the State such as the ELLAS program in Kalamazoo and the Great Lakes Bay Hispanic Leadership Institute in Saginaw/Midland. However, the growing number of Latinx professionals in West Michigan presents an opportunity and a challenge to bring the program to other communities. Throughout its life, the LEADeres program has had participants from Holland, Grand Haven and Muskegon areas and even had conversations with Latinx and non-Latinx leaders in the Holland/Zeeland area as well as representatives from corporate and non-profit sectors interested in offering the program in those communities.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 24% of the population in Holland, MI are of Hispanic descent (U.S. Census Bureau n.d.) and projections from the City of Holland estimate the Latinx population will only grow in the next decade. Some leaders have expressed that "if we don't prepare our leaders, they will end up leaving for other, more welcoming places". It is just a matter of time before we can offer the program in the lakeshore.

Latinas in leadership

Of equal importance is to redefine the terminology that currently stigmatizes our community and practice language that elevates Latinx narrative. High-performing vs. hard-worker for example, while the latter stereotypes Latinx as low-level skilled vs. the former implies a more advanced skill level. And of course, the term Latinx vs Latino or Latina which as explained before, Latinx is a more inclusive term, one that elevates everyone in our diverse community.

In the past seven years, we have come to realize that leadership has many faces, and it is as diverse as the individuals we serve. In 2020, Arturo Vargas, Executive Director of the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO), penned a commentary in the Harvard Journal of Hispanic Policy (Vargas 2010) where he shared his point of view on Latinx leadership. In it, he quotes a 2010 Pew Hispanic Center's poll result in which Latinx, when asked, could not identify a single Latinx leader. Some are still looking for the next Cesar Chavez, but Mr. Vargas argues that because of the collectivistic

nature of the Latinx community, it is futile to hope for one person. "It is unreasonable and impractical".

In conclusion, there is no better time for a program of this nature. National, State and local demographics show the Latinx population will continue to grow and will not wait for anyone to help them search and find pathways to success. It is up to us to design solutions for the challenges ahead. It is up to us to deliver the best program possible for the challenging times ahead. It is up to us to educate our white counterparts on the necessity, importance and benefits Diversity, Inclusion and Equity bring, not just to the workplace but to our community. We are our ancestors' wildest dreams and, to quote Arturo Vargas, Chief Executive Officer of NALEO Educational Fund; "We are the Leaders we've been waiting for."

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