

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

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Incorporating families in the high school to college transition is important to increase the success rate of first-generation and low-income college students. Traditional institutional programming and student orientation processes often fail to consider the needs of diverse families, especially those whose main language is Spanish. By establishing a Hispanic community that better guides families with no prior experience or exposure to the college experience, Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) can provide stronger support to incoming students and families. We present recommendations for practice from observations during two parent and family college orientation sessions in Spanish at our Texan institution, the feedback from attendees, and our experiences as committee members.

Keywords: Hispanic families, orientation programs, diversity, inclusion, higher education

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

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

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

Overview of the College Orientation in Spanish

In 2022, college orientation sessions for parents and families in Spanish were resumed after a few years of not materializing for various reasons, including the COVID-19 pandemic. Research has shown that parents value when universities and colleges develop bonds with them by including them in campus tours and new student orientations, which, consequently, leads them to feel supported and assured about leaving their students at the university (Harper et al., 2020). By resuming the orientation sessions in Spanish, the institution sought to engage families of Hispanic

and Latino/a/x first-generation students whose primary language is Spanish as part of its commitment as a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) and the increase in Hispanic and Latino/a/x undergraduate student enrollment (West Texas A & M University, 2023). The 25 parents who participated in the college orientation in Spanish reported similar feedback, believed that the program was valuable, and said they would recommend it to other Spanish-speaking parents.

Planning

A good starting point is identifying a contact person for the Spanish programming who will commit to leading the initiative as a campus volunteer, orientation intern, or even better, a paid position. While Spanish proficiency is not necessary to lead the project, it will be helpful and reduce issues in communication with Spanish-speaking parents during the sessions. A contact person who speaks Spanish can also serve as a resource for parents who have questions before visiting the campus during orientations. The second step would be to determine the information (i.e., financial aid, residential living, academic advising) that is essential to share to help the parents support their students as they navigate the institutional process. Consider including panels with Spanish-speaking faculty and students who can answer the parents' questions about scholarships, FAFSA and TAFSA, academic credits, cafeteria and meal plans, how to read the bill, and campus safety, to name a few.

It will also be helpful to put together a committee of Hispanic and Latino/a/x faculty and staff around campus who are interested in contributing to the development of the program and providing cultural insight. This committee can meet at least once a month (about 4-6 months in advance) to plan and coordinate the student orientations (i.e., sessions, panels, tours, etc.). Recruitment will vary depending on your institution, but word-of-mouth is one of the best methods. Typically, Hispanic and Latino/a/x faculty and staff are already connected and can help bring others to the team. Our institution's committee was made up of Spanish-speaking faculty and staff from across campus who provided recommendations for programming, helped plan sessions, and translated materials.

Promoting

Promoting the college orientation in Spanish will require marketing through multiple sources and approaches. All promotional materials should be in Spanish or a bilingual format. Also, consider traditional forms of marketing, such as sending postcards to families' homes and local television and radio commercials in Spanish, in combination with digital forms, such as social media, emails, and websites. Spanish-speaking parents frequently share their students' email addresses or phone numbers when

asked for contact information. Trying to contact them using those outlets may have limited success and depends on the student sharing that information.

Execution

On the day of the college orientation, there should be Spanish or bilingual signage to guide the parents to the check-in table, where someone who speaks Spanish will welcome them and explain the day's process. The sessions should happen in a comfortable location where the parents can interact with each other and ask questions. We invited other faculty, staff, and students from three of our student organizations who speak Spanish to participate in the sessions.

Evaluation

We created bilingual evaluation forms and printed them (See Appendix A). While most family members attending the sessions feel more comfortable communicating in Spanish, some younger attendees (i.e., siblings, cousins, etc.) might prefer English. Providing evaluation forms in both English and Spanish allows attendees and staff members to understand the information during the process and later when doing the data analysis. The parents who attended the college orientation at our institution provided positive feedback and expressed deep gratitude for inclusive programming that embraces culture and language.

Recommendations

We have five recommendations based on our observations during two parent and family college orientation sessions in Spanish at our institution, the feedback from attendees, and our experiences as committee members.

1. *Communicate in Spanish*

Provide opportunities for communication between the Spanish-speaking parents and the institution beyond the college orientation by offering content in Spanish or sharing contact information for people they can contact if they have any questions. To do so, one can identify individuals who can translate university information from English to Spanish or secure a professional translation service. Universities can also sponsor community events in Spanish during the semester to maintain effective relationships with Spanish-speaking parents.

2. *Plan for the Logistics*

Plan the logistic process ahead of time to improve the flow of the orientation. For instance, strive to meet at least once monthly (the semester prior to holding the event) to design the agenda of the orientation, gather sufficient resources or help, locate a comfortable session space, order food, invite the families, and prepare for the event.

3. *Secure Funding*

Allocate financial resources to support the Spanish programming efforts, including signage, promotional materials, food, translation fees, and wages/stipends for staff and faculty involved in the programming. Funding was limited for our student orientations, which reduced the potential for further growth of the student orientation program, especially when it comes to staffing. Offering stipends and compensation for translation services and helping carry out the sessions may increase interest and participation from bilingual Hispanic and Latino/a/x faculty, staff, and especially students who, on many occasions, had to take time off from their jobs to participate. Potential funding opportunities may include donors and campus and community partnerships.

4. *Invest in Marketing*

Invest in culturally relevant marketing, print and digital, designed specifically for Spanish-speaking parents. The messages should be relevant and speak to their unique experiences. Email communication might not be the most effective route for this group, so consider mailing information directly to parents to increase participation.

5. *Assess the program*

It's important to collect survey assessments for each family orientation event. Obtaining feedback from the parents is crucial for improving and enhancing future university orientations.

Conclusion

Planning and executing a program orientation for Spanish-speaking parents was a successful effort at our institution. With the collaboration of Hispanic and Latino/a/x faculty, staff, and students, the parents could obtain important college information to understand the higher education experience, and they built new social networks with faculty and staff. University transitions among Hispanic and Latinx students

are challenging; however, sponsoring Spanish program orientations at universities can help parents understand what college is like and what resources are available to ensure student success in a “culturally friendly” campus environment. Orientations can also inspire important communications between parents and incoming students about the overall college experience.

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Appendix A: Family Orientation in Spanish

Demographics/ *Datos Demográficos*

1. Hometown (City/State) / *Ciudad de origen (Ciudad/Estado)*
2. Relationship to the student attending New Student Orientation / *Relación con el estudiante que asiste a la Orientación para Nuevos Estudiantes*
3. Select the option that best describes you: / *Selecciona la opción que mejor te describa:*
 - a. Not fluent in English, fluent in Spanish / *No fluido en inglés, fluido en español.*
 - b. Fluent in English but prefers Spanish / *Habla inglés con fluidez pero prefiere el español.*
 - c. Fluent in both English and Spanish / *Fluidez en inglés y español.*
4. How did you hear about the Family Orientation in Spanish? / *¿Cómo se enteró de la Orientación Familiar en Español?*
5. How easy was the registration process for the Family Orientation in Spanish easy to follow? / *¿Qué tan fácil fue seguir el proceso de registro para la Orientación Familiar en Español?*
 - a. Very difficult / *Muy difícil*
 - b. Difficult / *Difícil*
 - c. Neutral / *Neutral*
 - d. Easy / *Fácil*
 - e. Very easy / *Muy fácil*

Family Orientation in Spanish Feedback

1. How satisfied are you with the following sessions from the Family Orientation in Spanish? / *¿Qué tan satisfecho está con las siguientes sesiones de la Orientación Familiar en Español?*

Check-In / *Registro*

- a. Not at all satisfied / *Nada satisfecho*
- b. Slightly satisfied / *Un poco satisfecho*
- c. Moderately satisfied / *Moderadamente satisfecho*
- d. Very satisfied / *Muy Satisfecho*
- e. Extremely satisfied / *Extremadamente satisfecho*

Residential Living and Dining Hall / *Dormitorios y Comedor*

- a. Not at all satisfied / *Nada satisfecho*
- b. Slightly satisfied / *Un poco satisfecho*
- c. Moderately satisfied / *Moderadamente satisfecho*
- d. Very satisfied / *Muy Satisfecho*
- e. Extremely satisfied / *Extremadamente satisfecho*

Money Matters / *El Dinero Importa*

- a. Not at all satisfied / *Nada satisfecho*
- b. Slightly satisfied / *Un poco satisfecho*
- c. Moderately satisfied / *Moderadamente satisfecho*
- d. Very satisfied / *Muy Satisfecho*
- e. Extremely satisfied / *Extremadamente satisfecho*

Academic and Student Panel / *Panel Académico y Estudiantil*

- a. Not at all satisfied / *Nada satisfecho*
- b. Slightly satisfied / *Un poco satisfecho*
- c. Moderately satisfied / *Moderadamente satisfecho*
- d. Very satisfied / *Muy Satisfecho*
- e. Extremely satisfied / *Extremadamente satisfecho*

2. [Likert Scale] How helpful was the staff at the Family Orientation in Spanish? / *¿Qué tan útil fue el personal de la Orientación Familiar en Español?*

- a. Not helpful / *Nada útil*
- b. A little helpful / *Un poco útil*
- c. Neutral / *Neutral*
- d. Helpful / *útil*
- e. Very helpful / *Muy útil*

3. What was the most helpful information you learned at the Family Orientation in Spanish? / ***¿Cuál fue la información más útil que aprendió en la Orientación Familiar en Español?***
4. What do you wish would have been covered at the Family Orientation in Spanish? / ***¿Qué te hubiera gustado que se cubriera en la Orientación Familiar en Español?***
5. What questions do you still have? / ***¿Qué preguntas tienes todavía?***
6. Would you recommend the Family Orientation in Spanish to other parents and family members? Why or why not? / ***¿Recomendarías la Orientación Familiar en español a otros padres y familiares? ¿Por qué o porque no?***