The Latina Graduate Experience at Hispanic Serving Institutions

Melanie Flores-Fragoso, Ed.D

Introduction
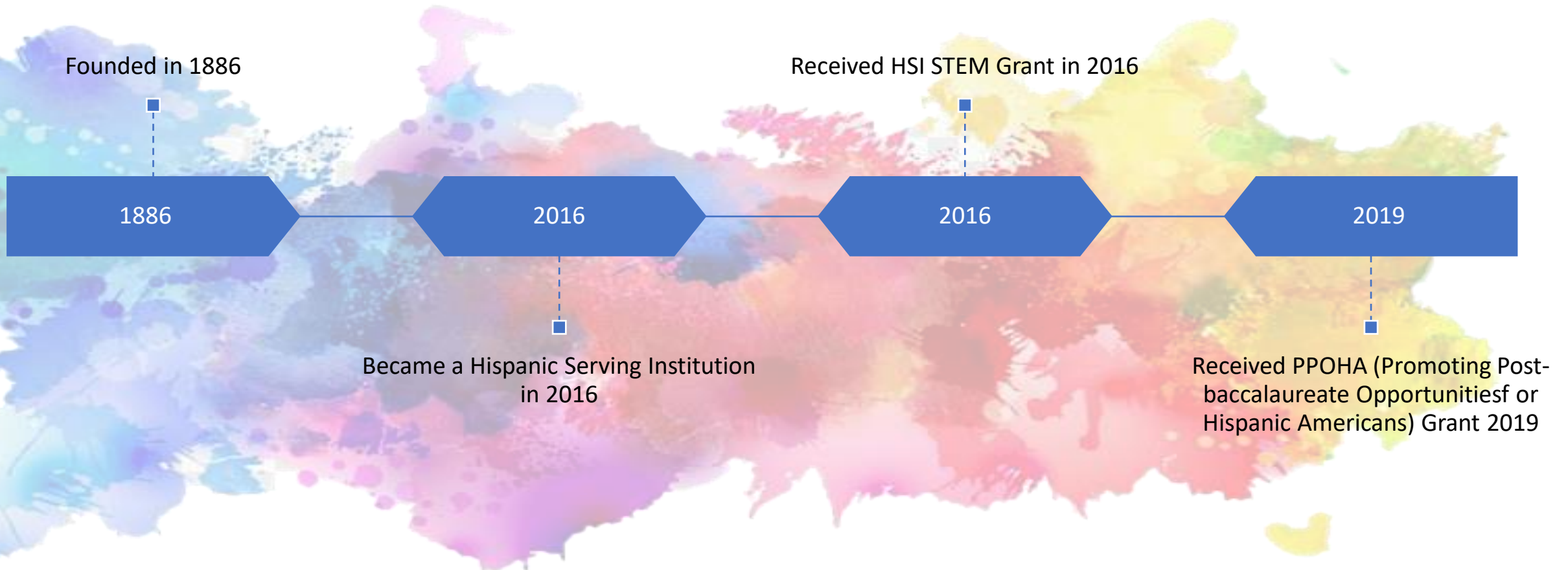
Education instilled at a young age

First Generation Graduate Student

My lived experiences in higher education/doctoral program

Postdoctoral Fellow at National Louis University

National Louis University Background

Founded in 1886

Received HSI STEM Grant in 2016

| 1886 | 2016 | 2016 | 2019 |

Became a Hispanic Serving Institution in 2016

Received PPOHA (Promoting Post-baccalaureate Opportunitiesf or Hispanic Americans) Grant 2019

Student Centered Research- *Testimonios*

Capture the stories and lived experiences of Latinas at Hispanic Serving Institutions at the graduate level

Testimonios: "The objective of the *testimonio* is to bring to light a wrong, a point of view or an urgent call to action" (Reyes & Rodriguez, 2012)

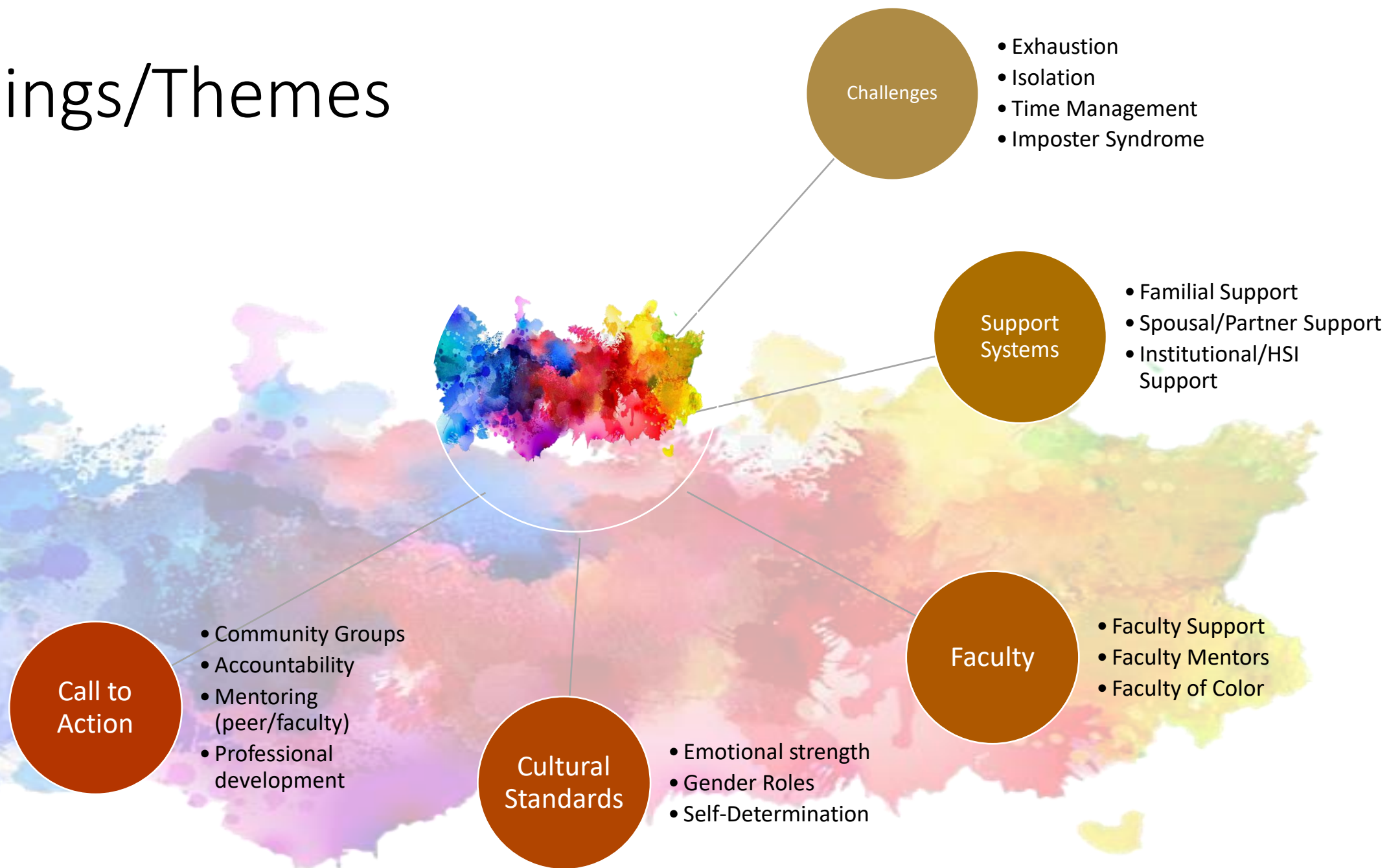*Testimonios* are <u>intentional</u> & political

Participant Profile

Latinas from Hispanic Serving Institutions in Illinois, California, and Texas

Masters and Doctoral Programs

One HSI had PPOHA funding

Findings/Themes

Challenges
- Exhaustion
- Isolation
- Time Management
- Imposter Syndrome

Support Systems
- Familial Support
- Spousal/Partner Support
- Institutional/HSI Support

Faculty
- Faculty Support
- Faculty Mentors
- Faculty of Color

Cultural Standards
- Emotional strength
- Gender Roles
- Self-Determination

Call to Action
- Community Groups
- Accountability
- Mentoring (peer/faculty)
- Professional development

Challenges

Time Management	Imposter Syndrome	Exhaustion	Isolation
• *"It's really, really difficult. I give preference of my time to my job for multiple reasons, and so I'm either carving time out of my sleep or carving time out of time that maybe I would spend with family or friends. you know, and, and that's why too, I didn't go back until my children were old enough to understand what I'm doing."*	• *"I didn't develop this academic confidence. For my doctorate, I was procrastinating to even apply because part of me felt like I wasn't ready"*	• *"It's hard. It's, stressful. I think it's stressful. It's overwhelming. And it's exhausting. I think I felt it [take] like a physical toll."*	• *"Truth is that being a Latina in a doctoral program is very lonely. I couldn't say it out right because I have taught myself to be strong and only show that I am confident. Latinas are strong, you have to make yourself stronger to be able to endure the challenges of balancing work, family, and graduate school.*

Cultural Standards

Emotional Strength	Self-Determination	Gender Roles
• *"Things like anxiety and depression, it's just like, Oh, well just cheer yourself up or just get over it. You know, don't complain about things."* • *"I think part of that comes from just a personal thing, but also a cultural thing, just kind of being raised [like] just being strong, you don't give up"*	• *"You have to really want it for yourself because that support might not come"*	• *"I often feel that a lot of the traditional things still fall on me. I think he just doesn't recognize it."*

Support Systems

Familial Support	Partner	Friends
• ""*My family doesn't fully understand what I'm studying. There's a lot of stigma around mental health, still in my family. So even though my parents are a little bit more open to it and they see the importance of mental health, I don't think that they really get like, what exactly I want to do. So in that regard, it's just kind of like, Oh yeah, that's, that's your thing that you do.*"	• ""*My husband stays up with me, even if he's just watching TV. He will not leave the room until I'm done with my homework. So even, you know, even though he's in something, I'll throw things at him and he'll give me his feedback. I heard him the other day literally telling his parents, Oh, I'm not going to bed anytime soon until she finishes her homework. So it just makes me feel that even though he's not typing, he's there, you know, he's supporting me in some way or another. So he's actually the one that encouraged me to go back to school*" • "*I don't get support from family. Part of the contributing factor in my divorce from my husband is that he didn't support either.*"	• "*We hold each other accountable. She's also the way, the reason why it worked so well, because, we both want more out of our careers and we have kind of very similar work ethics*"

Support Systems

General Institutional Support

"Well, there's the writing help assistance with papers"

"They do have some writing workshops. They have a summer writing fellowship."

"We do get a lot of support as far as like the writing"

HSI Support

"Being in this fellowship with this group is, is a great sense of community and support"

"There's nothing that you can say, not as an undergrad, not as a master student, not as graduates. I don't, I don't see it.

"Now that I'm in that CLAVE group, I feel like that's, you know, starting to form its own community too. So I was really excited about that"

Faculty

Faculty Support	Faculty of Color	Faculty Mentors
• Because our instructors work in that field, some of the instructors have similar roles as we do. So there has been a better understanding, and we're not going to penalize you because life does happen. And we all need some, you know, a little bit of grace. So I think had we not had that type of flexibility? I think it would have been extremely hard for me."	• "No. I don't have any faculty of color that's teaching. I do think it would make a difference." • "It makes me wonder sometimes, and I know if it's just me getting into my head, but like, it makes me wonder sometimes like if there's going to be room for me as a Latina right. ... I noticed the difference when I look at some of the classes that I've taught and a lot of graduate students are like, Oh my goodness, you're the first Latina professor that we've had. Even though technically I'm not like a full time professor. I don't have a doctor next to my name yet. But I noticed a difference in engagement and just their learning experiences." • "I would appreciate if we had more professionals of color or at least like adjuncts or faculty of color that we could choose to be our advisors"	• "I would appreciate if we had more professionals of color or at least like adjuncts or faculty of color that we could choose to be our advisors"

Call to Action

Professional Development

- "Professional development regarding like cultural identity development, or even a celebration of our identity. And how within those affinity spaces specifically just like, there's a lot of healing that needs to happen."
- "I think opportunities for professional development"
- "At my level, I would love to see a professional organization at least across, across disciplines, perhaps across positions, because as you're getting ready to, you know, pursue the next thing, what do you have in mind? What am I going to do next? What can I do next? We don't have that at a doctoral level."

Visibility

- "It needs to be out there more that XUniversity is an HSI and more, you know, like what's available to students. What does that mean to students? Cause I didn't know, I had no idea."

Community Groups

- "I think I would like to see just for future cohorts or just future, for students who do identify as Latin X, is some sort of like mentor or peer. I don't even know how to describe it, but basically like a peer mentor or something where, you know, students can come together and ask us those questions."
- "But I would like to see more of that, more representation of like, I don't know, clubs or collaboratives. Yeah. Something like that. Coalition, something that brings people of either the same professional views or, experience. It's something that just kind of makes it a little bit more together, for sure."
- "I think that what's helpful in having some Latino peers is in terms of being able to talk to them about some of the personal stuff that's going on. So just kind of having that support system in that way."

Closer Look at NLU- CLAVE

Participants who participated in PPOHA Programming described a more positive experience at their institution

CLAVE, an acronym for "Comunidades Latinas Académicas con Visión de Éxito," [Latino Academic Communities with Vision of Success]- a PPOHA program

Goals: increase enrollment of Latinx students in Masters and Doctoral programs, develop and support a network of promising diverse doctoral scholars through the CLAVE Fellowship Program, and increase graduate students professional networks, writing capacity, and financial and professional knowledge base through establishment of CLAVE Graduate Student Institute

Activities Include: Doctoral Fellowships, Postdoctoral Fellowships, Last Dollar Scholarships, Writing Support, Professional Development Opportunities

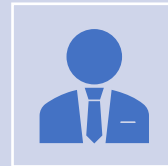# Lessons Learned/Recommendations

Apply for Grant Funding for all levels of students
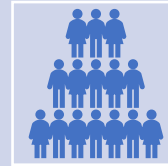
Create Community through culturally relevant mentoring, professional development, faculty mentoring and community/affinity groups

Create Community in the Classroom (culturally relevant pedagogy)

Audit your campus environment; is it culturally engaging? (Museus, 2014).

References

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Questions

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