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Somos Tejas: A Narrative Project to Document the College Experiences of First-Generation Latinx Students

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ABSTRACT

This study reports on a project that collected and documented narrative reflections of first-generation Latinx students at a large Research 1 public university in the US southwest. The team (2 faculty members and 4 undergraduates) interviewed 23 students (20 undergraduate and 3 graduate) on topics including family, community, sense of belonging in their institution and major experiences as first-generation students, future goals, and advice and recommendations for others. Their responses were analyzed with a modified version of Garriott's (2020) Critical Cultural Wealth Model, with the help of the software MAXQDA. The first important takeaway is that undergraduate and graduate students had different perceptions, with the latter respondents expressing more critical views. The second finding was that several institutional resources were highly effective in achieving students' integration, including culturally congruent organizations and traditions. That said, participants also experienced academic dissonance navigating the financial and academic complexities of college life, which led to feelings of isolation, marginalization, and tokenization. The final takeaway is that students turned to support from their families and communities to overcome challenges, which suggests that measures to integrate family and school will benefit these students.

1 | Introduction

How do first-generation Latinx students perceive and reflect on their college life? How does their college experience at US majority-White institutions affect their well-being and their sense of belonging? What do students perceive as their main challenges and strengths as they navigate predominantly White institutions (PWIs)? Who and what do they rely on, on and off campus, for personal and academic support? These were some of the questions we set out to document when we started Somos Tejas, a service-oriented project whose objective was to collect personal narratives from first-generation Latinx students at a PWI Research 1 university in the US Southwest.[1] The resulting stories were then shared with the public through a website with information for prospective and current students, parents, school counselors, and the university community at large. This study provides both a summary of the data and an analytical framework capable of accounting for the information.

Latinx students' perspectives on their own education are increasingly important in the US higher education context, since their enrollments have grown at an accelerating pace for the past half century (Mora 2022). By 2019 the number of Latinx students in US colleges and universities peaked at 3.8 million, more than doubling the figure for 2000 (1.5 million), which in turn represented a threefold increase from 1980. Gains in enrollment have led to an increase in the percentage of Latinx between the ages of 25 and 29 with bachelor's degrees. Thus, while all ethnic groups in the US increased college completion rates between 2016 and 2021, the Latinx college completion

increased 53%, more than double that for African Americans (18.2%), triple that of Asians (14%), and five times that of Whites (9.8%) (Mora 2022).

Even with these relative gains, Latinx graduation rates continue to lag when compared to other ethnicities (23% vs. 26%, 45%, and 72% for African Americans, Whites, and Asians, respectively). Part of the reason for this disparity lies in the higher rate of first-generation students among Latinx. Lack of parental educational attainment (whether one/both parents did not attend/complete college) has a cumulative effect on high schoolers' behavior, including taking college placement exams, applying for, and enrolling in higher education (Toutkoushian et al. 2018). Once in college, first-generation students have the lowest persistence and the poorest academic outcomes (Latino et al. 2020). Latinx students in particular are more likely to attend 2-year institutions, with only 37.2% of them transferring into 4-year institutions (Unidos 2021).

First-generation status comes with a constellation of financial, social, and familial challenges that stand in the way of student academic success, which intersect with the specific characteristics of Latinx students and of the institutions they attend. At the same time, these students show remarkable resilience and resourcefulness to mobilize assets and achieve their goal of college completion. In the following section, we consider these various factors.

1.1 | Factors Affecting First-Generation Students' Experiences

Since the late 20th century, disparities in college success between first generation and continuing generation students have been studied to design effective interventions to close this gap. Analyses have focused on the social, familial, and individual hurdles that stand in the way of academic success. Some of these accounts have placed the burden on the students themselves (e.g., lack of preparation, poor fit) or their early environments (e.g., poverty, poor schools, lack of social support). Critical analyses underscore that tying scholastic failure to first-generation students and their communities obscures the lack of preparedness of higher education institutions to fulfill the mission of educating them. This has led to a reconsideration of how to best cater to the needs of students through interventions and pedagogical practices that ameliorate institutional deficiencies. More recent accounts have moved away from deficit perspectives altogether. Noting that in fact most first-generation students do graduate, the focus has now turned to the strategies and support systems behind their success. In what follows, we summarize the literature that focuses on these three distinct themes.

1.1.1 | The Burden of Coming First

The most tangible obstacle in the way of first-generation students' success is financial, since they often represent the lowest income quartiles and cannot cover the cost of college (Crisp, Taggart, and Nora 2015; Ishitani 2016). First-generation students attempt to make college more affordable by transferring from community colleges to four-year institutions, delaying enrollment, or working while in college (Adams and McBrayer 2020), but those added responsibilities cut into study time. Ironically, even students eligible for financial aid may fail to claim it because of difficulties demonstrating need due to immigration status, inability to provide identification, and complexities in the application process (Unidos 2021). As a result, they are more likely to take out loans, a risk parents are reluctant to take (Unidos 2021). In fact, the amount and type of financial support often determines college choice, and it is also closely connected with persistence and odds of first-generation retention (78% vs. 60% between first and second year) and degree completion (Latino et al. 2020).

A second type of hurdle for first-generation students is academic, including both experiences before and during college. For example, high school accelerated learning offerings, performance, and GPA are linked to college grades, persistence, and graduation (Crisp, Taggart, and Nora 2015; Latino et al. 2020). More subtle handicaps can arise from attending high schools that lack an advanced curriculum or fail to socialize students into the mores of higher education. For instance, Jack's (2016) study on Black and Latinx first-generation students found that those who had attended poorly resourced high schools were reluctant to seek out their professors' mentoring. Once in college, certain pedagogical modalities, such as self-paced virtual learning, may place first-generation minoritized students at a particular disadvantage. For example, in a study conducted through the COVID-19 pandemic comparing perceptions of virtual engineering courses, Chernosky (2022) found that first-generation students were more likely to report negative impacts due to environmental factors (lack of study space, discomfort, distractions), lack of guidance, and loss of community and belonging, which outweighed the advantages of multimedia instruction.

First-generation students may encounter challenges to their emotional wellbeing, especially in Predominantly White Institutions (PWI), including heightened risk of depression and anxiety, loneliness, marginalization, and negative emotions (McCarron 2022). Some of these are the result of familial pressure to succeed, achievement guilt, and difficulty navigating the transition from community to academic life. For Latinx students, this becomes especially acute when parents have low levels of English competence and must rely on their children to translate information, which limits their practical support (Unidos 2021). Thus, students often feel the need to be self-sufficient to spare others the worry (McCarron 2022).

Other mental health issues stem from environmental pressures and university norms and climate (Crisp, Taggart, and Nora 2015). While the majority White student body can be responsible for hostile stereotyping and microaggressions, institutions themselves can also contribute if they value privilege. For example, Allan et al. (2023) showed that perceptions of institutional barriers that exclude students with lower class privilege (*institutional classism*) predicted decreased academic and life satisfaction for lower class and first-generation students, while disparaging attitudes (*citational classism*) were linked to decreased life satisfaction. Distress can be exacerbated by perceptions of tokenism, that is, being valued as a

demonstration of institutional diversity, which both burdens members of underrepresented groups with the responsibility of standing in for a class while simultaneously being ignored as individuals (Allen-McCombs 2022; Niemann 2003). First-generation students may also be hurt if they are expected to adopt institutional values of independence at the expense of the interdependence values of their communities, to the extent that this leads to measurable differences in aversive states (cortisol levels, negative emotional speech) with respect to continuing generation students (Stephens et al. 2012).

1.1.2 | Successful Institutional Contexts

Institutions can support first-generation students from minoritized backgrounds through practices such as social contact with and mentoring from faculty and advisors, community support, study skills development, participation in study groups, and student-centered instruction (Allen-McCombs 2016; Ishitani 2016). Social integration with other students through participation in political organizations with co-ethnics (Crisp, Taggart, and Nora 2015) and in fine arts activities, intramural sports, and school clubs (Ishitani 2016) has also been shown to be beneficial. Support can come from providing students with evidence that they do in fact share values of independence and self-reliance with their institution (Tibbetts et al. 2016).

To understand the value of these affordances, Schreiner et al. (2011) interviewed 10 academically successful students from high-risk groups about their mentoring relationships. Students described successful mentors as faculty and staff who showed a genuine desire to make a difference, were authentic, approachable, demanding, motivating, and positive, and enjoyed being with students inside and outside of class. Interestingly, the mentors in question were not aware of their influence on retention, which was not an explicit job duty. The findings suggest the need to implement institutional hiring practices based on characteristics that impact students positively, to encourage existing faculty to reach out to students, and to articulate these priorities in the institutional mission.

An institutional emphasis on multiculturalism has also been proposed to support the integration of first-generation students from racially minoritized groups. For instance, Benítez (2010) discusses the role of race-specific and multicultural centers that eschew a false sense of unity and instead promote political spaces of resistance and social justice. Acknowledging power relations can promote retention and critical engagement and address personal and social issues in a non-threatening space. Other authors have proposed that multiculturalism should be built into the curriculum itself. For example, Jehangir (2010) reported on the effectiveness of a longitudinal intervention with first-generation students through participation in a multicultural learning community, meant to increase retention and learning through belonging, peer networks, and cultural capital. First-generation students with different ethnic profiles were integrated into a community intended to help them overcome potential isolation and marginalization at a research PWI. Through reflective writing and a retrospective interview, students gained agency, and made sense of themselves and their identities as multilingual cultural brokers. In spite of the discomfort and dissonance caused by their internal conflicts, their experiences became normalized and validated, their learning humanized, and isolation minimized. Storytelling is presented as something that helps hold participants together and draw on their wealth. The author concludes that an important tool of education is to drive home the message that some of the learners' best resources are within them.

1.1.3 | The Wealth They Carry

Beyond what institutions may do to support them, first-generation students do bring many often-overlooked cultural assets to their college experience, as noted in Yosso's (2005), critical Community Cultural Wealth Model (CCWM). This model challenges traditional deficit interpretations of social capital (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977), which view some communities as wealthy because they can access valued forms of social, cultural, and economic capital, whereas others are poor because they are barred from them. Instead, Yosso shows that marginalized cultural capital, unrecognized by privileged groups, is valuable in its own right. She proposes six interrelated sources of cultural capital in these communities: (a) aspirational, that is, a culture of possibility which nurtures hopes and dreams in the face of obstacles; (b) linguistic, the ability to deploy different languages, styles, and communicative traditions; (c) familial, based on a collective understanding of social life and broad definitions of kinship; (d) social, that is, peer and mentor networks and resources that provide instrumental and emotional support ("lifting as we climb"); (e) navigational, that is, strategies to maneuver through racially hostile institutions (e.g., resilience, agency); and (f) resistant, that is, assertive oppositional behavior that challenges inequality.

Several studies have shown the applicability of Yosso's (2005) CCWM to Latinx students specifically by confirming, expanding, and refining its claims. For example, Clayton, Medina and Wiseman (2019) investigated how first-generation Latinx students navigate their college search, choice, and transition, and develop a sense of community in college (community wealth). Several themes were identified, including the desire to embrace and express Latinx identity through community building, awareness of role model status in their families, and feelings of personal responsibility for their own education, both financially and academically. Vega (2016) identified academic rigor in high school and support networks at school and among family as important factors behind first-generation students' persistence at an HSI. This study also revealed students' ambivalence about their status as role models, which was both a motivator and a stressor. Intrinsic motivation, which is often tied to aspirations for a better future (Vega 2016), can be increased directly, through fostering pleasure to learn, and indirectly, through higher engagement and self-assessments of mastery (Trevino and De Freitas 2014). This in turn may lead to more academic achievement, directly, through fostering pleasure to learn, and indirectly, through higher engagement and mastery-based self-assessments.

For her part, Beard (2021) investigated further the role of familial and social capital in first-generation low-income Latinx student persistence, with a group of seniors at a PWI. Three types of "significant others" encouraged persistence, including social support agents (family, fictive kin, resident advisors), apprentice agents (near peer models), and institutional agents (advisors, professors, and mentors). Family helped overcome struggles and self-doubt and institutional agents provided access to resources, while near peers helped access local social capital within the university context. Successful students understood the need for diversified support, and their responsibility to reciprocate or pay it forward. In a study on first-generation students' mental wellbeing, McCarron (2022) identified beneficial factors in connection with aspirational wealth (e.g., dreams and goals) and community and familial wealth (e.g., increased belonging through co-curricular activities, contact with advisors, and personal relationships and engagement with community and family). Like Vega (2016), the study recognized that first-generation students navigated multiple identities and that families could be a source of nourishment and encouragement, on the one hand, caregiving obligations and stress, on the other. For her part, Marrun (2020) investigated the connection between community cultural knowledge and Latinx student aspirations. She found that lessons in survival and perseverance that shaped students' lives were contained in their elders' inspiring sayings, advice, examples of resilience, and cautionary tales underscoring self-efficacy and social mobility through education. Women in particular viewed their college attendance as a triumph over the traditional gender roles that had truncated their mothers' aspirations.

Yosso's (2005) CCMW has also been applied beyond its original reach. For example, Allen-McCombs (2022) employed the CCMW to identify salient themes in focus groups with Black and Latinx alums from a PWI. Participants vividly remembered hostile and isolating institutional conditions including micro-aggressions and tokenization. To combat the resulting negative feelings, they reported having turned to community cultural wealth, including social capital from intragroup networking, familial capital for motivation, professional aspirations to maintain focus, navigational capital to effect change within the institution, and transformative resistance. A final theme was ambivalence about life outcomes, since participants' economic status had not improved after graduation.

The objective of this work is to contribute to the literature presented in the previous sections by expanding our knowledge of first-generation Latinx undergraduates' experiences in PWI universities as well as by examining those reported by first-generation Latinx graduate students, a population not widely investigated. In what follows, we describe the methodology used to collect the interviews on which this work is based. We also discussed the theoretical framework adopted and results of a qualitative analysis carried out with the interview transcripts. This is followed by the discussion of findings and their institutional implications.

1.2 | The Project

This study relies on data collected through semi-structured interviews with Latinx, first-generation university students that were part of a diversity, equity, and inclusion project developed by the authors of this article at an R1 institution in Texas. The initiative was not research-oriented; instead, it sought to highlight and celebrate the students' cultural and linguistic richness as well as their academic experiences and contributions at the university of focus. The team that collected the data analyzed here was made up of three faculty leaders (the two co-authors and a third faculty member from the Sociology Department), who designed the project and were approved for funding by their college in Fall 2019. Subsequently, a team of student collaborators (SCs) was hired through an open posting in the university jobsite, review of applications, and in-person interviews. The original team included five undergraduate students, but one had to drop out before the start of data collection. The team members were all insiders, since they were Latinx/Hispanic undergraduates of diverse backgrounds from the same institution as the target population. Two were Mexican American, one was Venezuelan American and one was an international student from Mexico. Although the project's leaders originally intended to hire first-generation students exclusively, it was ultimately decided on a mix to cover a range of skills (e.g., video editing, website construction, graphic design) as well as personal qualities (e.g., empathy, active listening, thoughtfulness).

The collaborators were trained in two group meetings, the first of which was meant to let group members become acquainted with each other and discuss objectives and expected outcomes. Given that the purpose of the project was to collect spontaneous narratives, the second meeting was devoted to the development of interview questions that would address the most important issues for first-generation Latinx students through brainstorming and collaboration of the entire team. The resulting questionnaire had ten items (Appendix A). This second meeting was also devoted to training the SCs in semi-structured interview techniques, through modeling by the faculty, practice, recording, and critiquing. The SCs were also instructed to identify among their peer group students who fit the target population. Once these interviewees agreed to participate, the SCs were provided with recording equipment (a camera, tripod, and digital recorder) and were free to select a suitable recording location without faculty intervention. Eventually, the SCs group collectively decided that the best combination of convenience and sound quality was offered by a recording studio at one of the university libraries. Between November 2019 and February 2020, the collaborators recruited and successfully interviewed 24 students—20 undergraduates and 4 graduates.

Throughout the initiative, the faculty leaders regarded the students as active collaborators and project co-authors, with equal participation in all strategic and creative decisions as well as the presentation of the results of the team's work in a university-wide event. Since the faculty leaders were not associated with the students' majors or current classes, and they were also of Latin American origin, interactions were relaxed and friendly, and were characterized by humor and the exchange of personal anecdotes/experiences. The leaders set deadlines, tasks, and expectations, often in shared documents to prevent misunderstandings and to have a running record for reference. Students worked independently and were empowered to make

their own decisions, although the leaders were also available to clarify or suggest courses of action, as needed.

The interview conversations were recorded in a variety of formats, but were then converted to mp4 files (video) or mp3 files (audio). The audio/video files were then uploaded onto *Trint* (https://trint.com), an automatic transcription platform, and the resulting transcripts were revised by each one of the interviewers, to ensure accurate transcription. The tool chosen proved to be a robust transcription software as long as the conversations were in a single language. Because most of the interviewees spoke in English or Spanish almost exclusively, the overall quality was good. Sporadic examples of code-switching were dealt with during the revision phase. Since all SCs revised their own recordings, it was relatively easy to recover the original message with the aid of the audio.

In the next step, the SCs were asked to go over the transcripts to identify the portions of each interview in which the interviewees had discussed the nine topics resulting from their answers to the questions posed. The topics reflected opinions on (1) family and community; (2) becoming part of the institution of focus; (3) being part of a particular major; (4) positive and challenging moments; (5) experiences as first-generation students; (6) what it meant to be a student at that university; (7) goals for the future; (8) advice for prospective students; and (9) helpful resources. These segments were cut from the interview, and all the snippets that corresponded to the same topic were grouped in a single folder, accompanied by their corresponding transcript. In addition, a first set of sub-topics wa identified for each of the themes of interest.

Because the primary intent of the project was dissemination of information to the university community and the general public, the interviews and their written transcripts became publicly available after the completion of the study on an open-access website developed by the four SCs in the initiative. While the original intent was to delegate the development of the website to the institution, due to a number of logistical problems such as lack of support staff, changes in leadership, institutional structure, and priorities, we opted for a commercial platform. The SCs were thus tasked with learning how to adapt the affordances of the site to the specific needs of the project. For this stage, they received general guidelines, but they had freedom to choose what the overall website would look like and how information would be organized. This provided SCs with the opportunity not only to learn website formatting and exercise their creativity, but also to make theirs a project that had relied so much on their work. Throughout the website development process, the team discussed progress and challenges in bimonthly meetings, with the faculty members offering guidance and support (e.g., in terms of technology) when needed. The final website structure contains a homepage that introduces the project, presents a carrousel with the nine identified topics, and a map with pins to locate the interviewees by provenance. In addition, the *Themes* tab guides viewers to a dropdown menu that presents each topic, with all the corresponding video/audio clips. Some complete interviews are available by clicking on the map, but capacity limits for the website made it impossible to add all 24 interviews in their entirety. Finally, a *Teams* page briefly describes the participants in the project. The website is publicly accessible to the university and community at https://mariairenemoyna.wixsite.com/mysite.

1.3 | Research Questions

The richness of the opinions resulting from the interviews prompted the initiative's developers to explore the participants' experiences as first-generation students in more depth to contribute to the existing literature on this student population. Specifically, the researchers sought to answer the following questions:

1. Are there differences between the way in which undergraduate and graduate students viewed their academic experience?
2. What institutional factors influenced positively or negatively the participants' experience at the university of focus?
3. How did both groups cope with and overcome academic and personal difficulties?

The investigation undertaken is presented in the next sections of this article.

2 | The Study

2.1 | Participants

Even though 24 Latinx, bilingual (Spanish-English) first-generation students were interviewed as part of the initiative, one of the interviews was not included in this study because the interviewee talked about their experiences at a different institution. The participants in this work were, therefore, 20 undergraduates and 3 graduates. Twelve identified as female and 11 as male. All students were pursuing degrees in the Humanities (7), Social Sciences (4), and STEMM (12), and were recruited through word of mouth. All of them, except for two, were residents of Texas. The three graduate students had some work experience outside of academia, having been employed in other parts of the country or world for at least a year before pursuing their graduate studies.

The project's SCs were provided with uniform invitation emails, but they were not required to approach potential interviewees only through this medium. For the most part, the authors were not involved in recruitment, and never approached potential interviewees directly, but they would occasionally suggest the name of a student known to them who met the criteria. It was felt that the peer-to-peer recruitment would be more effective and lead to more honest conversations and richer data. Interviewees could choose whether they preferred to be interviewed on video or audio, had the option of using their name or an alias, and gave their consent in writing for their likeness to be used as part of a website. Because this study was carried out with data publicly available on the web, the institution's IRB office exempted it from further human participant permission.

2.2 | Theoretical Framework

The examination of the participants' experiences was guided by an adapted version of Garriott's (2020) *Critical Cultural Wealth Model* (CCWM). This framework incorporates Yosso's (2005) notion of *cultural wealth* into a model of academic and career development for first generation and economically marginalized students (FGEM). One component of the model is *structural/institutional conditions*, that is, policies and practices that may limit students' opportunities by exploiting students' economic vulnerability, marginalization from campus activities and resources, or exclusion of their experiences from the curriculum. These policies can also foster powerlessness, if they deprive students of agency in the choice of where or what to study. Institutions may also oppress students by emphasizing individualism and capitalism, or by being remiss in the prevention of violence against marginalized groups. The second CCWM component is *social-emotional crossroads*, that is, experiences navigating noncongruent home and institutional worlds. These include the extent to which students feel welcome, integrated, and aligned with institutional values (*campus cultural fit*), their assessment of alignment between their resources and knowledge and those privileged by the institution (*normative capital*), and family support towards education and potential psychological burdens such as achievement guilt and pressure to succeed (*school-family integration*). The last component of Garriott's CCWM is *career authorship*, the ability to exert control, agency, and self-efficacy to make decisions, solve problems, and adapt to career circumstances. Garriott's recommendations include leveraging first-generation students' strengths and assets, empowering them to understand their positionality, and aiming interventions at the institution.

The usefulness of Garriott's (2020) model has been tested quantitatively. For example, Duffy et al. (2020) connected first-generation students' subjective experiences with belonging, wellbeing, and career and life satisfaction with structural and institutional factors such as discrimination, financial stress, and work volition, that is, a student's ability to choose a career path. They found that student life satisfaction is related to belonging and financial stress, while higher wellbeing correlates to the combined effects of higher levels of career choice and belonging and lower financial stress. Students of color reported more discrimination, suggesting that interventions need to consider socioemotional factors beyond financial stressors. The study thus recommends an examination of institutional racism, leveraging students' cultural capital, and a more careful consideration of contextual factors.

Sussman (2020) also applied Garriott's (2020) CCWM to quantitatively explore the relationship between first-generation college students' cultural wealth variables, work volition, and several outcomes—academic major satisfaction, persistence, and wellbeing. She found positive correlations between resilience and family encouragement and work volition, academic major satisfaction, and well-being. By contrast, she found negative correlations between those same outcomes and critical consciousness, a form of resistant capital defined as "the critical analysis of one's social conditions and individual or collective action" (Freire 1973). This suggests that students who are more aware of their barriers may be more uncertain about their ability to overcome them and less hopeful about their future.

In the present study, Garriott's (2020) CCWM was deemed appropriate for the in-depth exploration of the views expressed in the interviews for three reasons. First, the framework has been employed in existing studies (e.g., Duffy et al. 2020; Garriott et al. 2020, 2021; Sussman 2020) with similar student populations. Second, the model includes dimensions pertaining to students' social and academic worlds and allows for the establishment of intersectional connections among them, thus offering the researchers the opportunity to develop a comprehensive analysis of the factors affecting first-generation experiences. Third, CCWM incorporates some of the conceptualizations in Yosso's (2005) model of community cultural wealth, which highlights the "array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (p. 77). Combined with CCWM's dimensions, Yosso's categories can shed light on the ways in which first-generation students resort to their existing cultural wealth to cope with and overcome oppressive, discriminatory behaviors. By incorporating personal and institutional dimensions, CCWM constitutes "a novel [intersectional] framework from which researchers may conceptualize the experiences and challenges of [first-generation students]... as anchor[s] from which academic... development take[s] shape" (Garriott 2020, 89).

The CCWM's dimensions that informed the analysis of the participants' academic experiences in this study were *structural/institutional conditions*, the *social-emotional experiences* characterized as *campus cultural fit* and *school-family integration*, and *cultural wealth* (Garriott 2020). The first dimension makes reference to aspects of students' university environment (e.g., practices, policies, expectations) that might result in their exploitation, marginalization, feelings of powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and/or forms of violence (e.g., physical or emotional). The *campus cultural fit* category within *social-emotional experiences* refers "the extent to which [first-generation students] feel they are engaged, welcomed, and belong at their university" while the notion of *school-family integration* describes their "feelings of connectedness and support from their family in relation to their college attendance" (Garriott 2020, 86). Garriott believes that strong connections between students' family/community world and their university experiences can positively affect retention and can result in successful academic outcomes.

CCWM's (Garriott 2020) *cultural wealth* incorporates three categories—*resilience*, *critical consciousness*, and *family and community capital*, which are based on conceptualizations in Yosso's (2005) model. The first two are connected to her notion of *resistant capital*, characterized as critical awareness/knowledge of and action against discriminatory and/or oppressive behaviors. In this work, Yosso's notion was preferred to Garriottt's, because it synthesized his intended critical and resilience aspects. CCWM's *family and community capital* shares similarities with Yosso's *familial and social capital,* since it reflects the social home- and community-related networks students are part of and from which they derive support and strength to face difficult situations. In addition to these two dimensions, one more

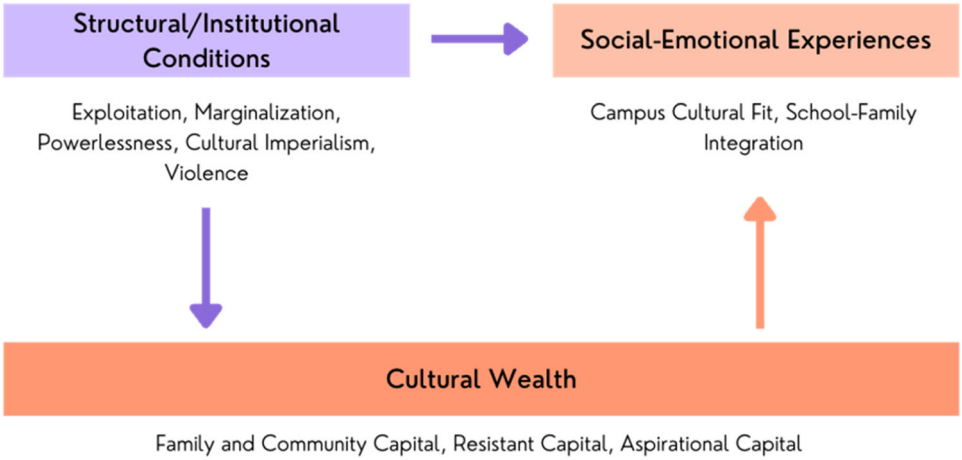

FIGURE 1 | Adaptation of Garriott's (2020) CCWM employed in this study. Figure adapted from Garriott (2020, 83).

component of Yosso's model was considered in this investigation: *aspirational capital*. This concept was chosen because it reflects how Communities of Color are able to have dreams and aspirations for their future in spite of the social obstacles they might have experienced, or feel they could face in the future. We therefore felt its incorporation into Garriott's model could offer one more way of understanding the participants' experiences. The adapted CCWM used in the study is shown in Figure 1.

2.3 | Data Analysis

The participants' interviews were analyzed qualitatively with the software *MAXQDA 2022* (VERBI Software 2021) using thematic analysis. This type of analysis was chosen because it has been used in a myriad of works that have focused on participants' perceptions and have employed similar instruments for data collection (see Braun and Clarke 2006). The first step involved the careful reading of participants' responses and the recording of overall, general impressions in connection with the components of the version of Garriott's (2020) CCWM developed for this study. That is, in this stage of the analysis, the researchers sought to discover which overall CCWM dimensions might be embedded in the first-generation students' opinions. This was followed by the specific identification and recording of correspondences between the opinions expressed by each participant and the dimensions present in the study's version of CCWM, as well as the existence of themes not included in Garriott's model but associated with its dimensions. In the next phase, all connections were refined, and exemplifying statements were identified. The final step involved the cross-examination of the relationship between the first-generation students' statements and CCWM's dimensions through the application of Glaser's (1965) constant comparative method to ensure that there were no discrepancies in the initial analysis.

2.4 | Results

The thematic analysis of the interviewees' views pointed to the important role that personal and institutional factors played in their university experience as first-generation students. The application of the study's version of Garriott's (2020) CCWM to the examination of these themes revealed that the model's structural and institutional conditions were reflected in some of the experiences described by the participants. A summary of the themes resulting from the analysis and their percentage with respect to the responses submitted (i.e., the coded documents, with one document corresponding to each participant) is presented in Figure 2.

Some of the themes uncovered in the thematic analysis did not correspond to the components of the adapted version of the CCWM. For example, the model could not account for the participants' feelings of isolation due to what they perceived as the university's lack of diversity, as well as their political differences with the mainstream student population, both of which appear to have played a role in their trajectories at the institution of focus. Additionally, two themes were connected to the positive institutional factors reported by the students. The first one was the support that both undergraduates and graduates had found in campus organizations that catered to their specific needs. The second one was related to undergraduates' positive views of the institution's traditions and their apparent role in their on-campus well-being—a result that seems to have been uniquely related to this work. The addition of these themes to Garriott's CCWM is summarized in Figure 3.

Additionally, the findings suggest that some of the experiences detailed in the interviews were similar to those reported in recent studies (e.g., Adams and McBrayer 2020; Allen-McCombs 2022; Beard 2021; McCarron 2022; Vega 2016). The analysis also highlights the significance of the participants' cultural wealth for their well-being, their efforts to establish an educational context to which they could feel they belonged, and to find ways to achieve their academic goals. The positive and negative factors reflected in the identified themes and associated with the institutional components and cultural wealth dimensions of the adapted CCWM are discussed below, in two separate sections.

2.4.1 | Positive Factors in the Participants' Experience

The thematic analysis revealed a high percentage of views reflective of students' aspirational and family and

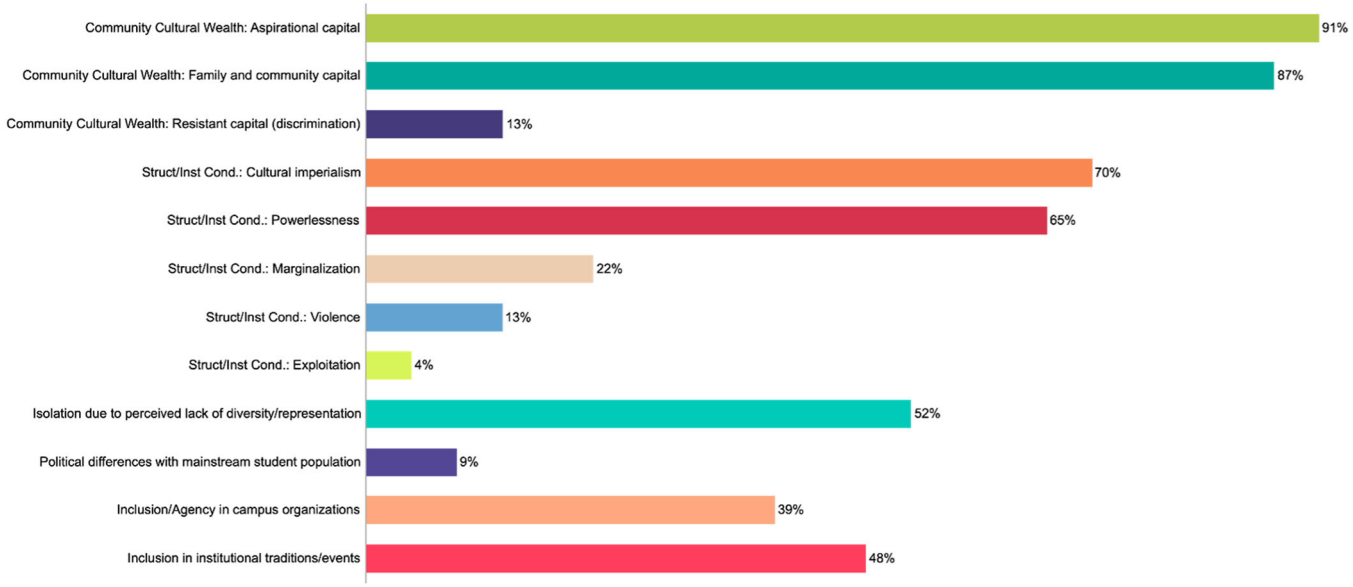

FIGURE 2 | Percentage of themes in coded documents.

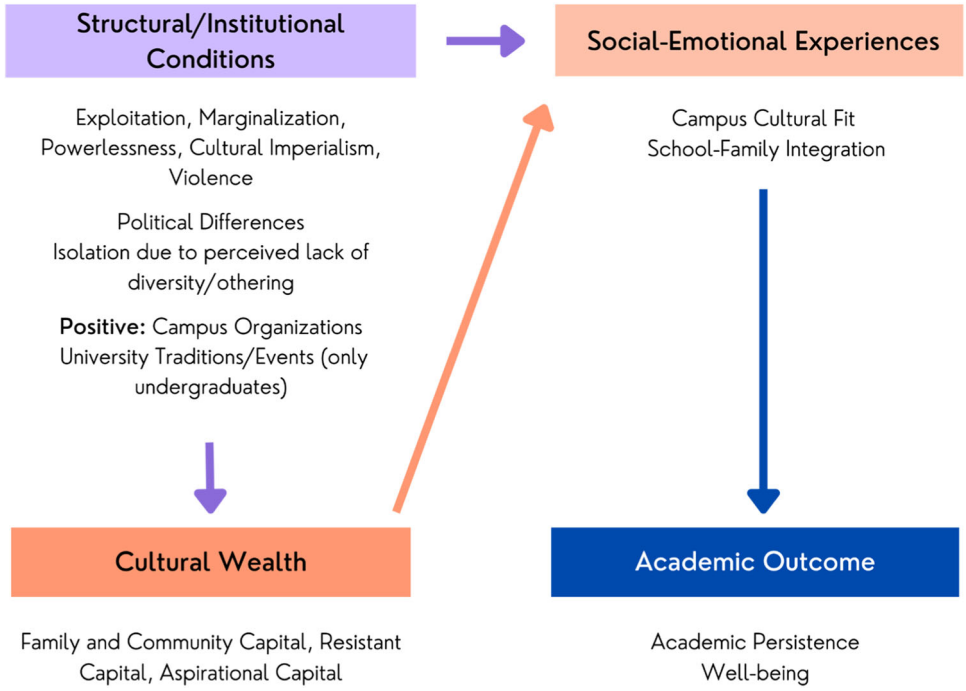

FIGURE 3 | Application of Garriott's (2020) CCWM to the analysis of participants' views.

community capitals. These results point to a clear connection between participants' desire to become university students and their academic persistence and wellbeing, as well as the emotional support and encouragement offered by their families and, above all, by university peers who shared similar sociocultural/ethnic background and lifeworlds. The interviewees' parents and peers seem to have played a pivotal role in the integration of family and school, offering a "support system" (Participant #4) which might have contributed to the students' academic self-efficacy and retention/graduation:

> *Definitely... meeting all my homies and Latino Males United... and sticking it out and graduating... Because to be honest, I didn't think I was gonna graduate, let alone... come back for my master's... I found a place like I belonged on campus. (Participant #12; graduate student)*

Like the participants in Marrun's (2020) work, the interviewees in this project specifically highlighted the support they had received from their mothers as evidence of the role of family in

academic success. For example, Participant #10 described an incident very similar to the experiences recounted in Marrun's work, where students had sought their mothers' reassurance and comfort when faced with difficult academic situations:

> *The toughest moment for me was in [the] studio... It was me [at] 2:00 in the morning... and I wasn't satisfied with what I was doing... It was [the] first time I had a mental breakdown... I was struggling. I was shaking. I couldn't do anything... I called my mom. She told me it's fine... We'll support you. (Participant #10)*

Like previous studies (e.g., Adams and McBrayer 2020; Beard 2021; Jehangir 2010; McCarron 2022), the undergraduates in this work also praised campus organizations that catered specifically to the needs of students like themselves for instilling a sense of belonging. The following quotes exemplify these feelings, but they also point to the importance of the participants' family and community capital. That is, the interviewees seem to have felt a close connection to the organizations of which they were part when they could perceive a parallel with their lifeworld:

> *I joined the Mexican Student Association my sophomore year and... I ended up making a lot of friends... Whenever we [had]...* carne asadas *[a Mexican-style barbecue] or socials, I felt I was at a cookout that my family would do back at home. And so it just really made me feel more welcome here... because then there was [sic] so many other people just like me. (Participant #7)*

> *I was in a program... that was for first generation students. So really a lot of the things that I went to were kind of... accommodating... to my background and my situation. First generation, Latino... And I guess that that made me feel welcome. (Participant #8)*

These institutional resources appear to have been important for the development of students' sense of campus cultural fit. However, some participants felt that there were not enough groups that represented them at the institution of focus, and thus, they actively worked to build spaces for themselves and peers with similar needs:

> *Although Latinos or the Latinx community is making up more of the percentage here at [institution of focus], I feel like we're still underrepresented. And so... a couple of my friends [and I] are trying to do the Latinx Community Center. ...I feel like that representation is lacking, but it's being built by the students... (Participant #1)*

Other examples were provided by Participant #3, who created a YouTube channel for first-generation students with information on the application process and mental health resources, and by Participant #8, who was part of a group that established a graduation ceremony for Latinx students and also became the president of an existing organization for minoritized students as well as a member of the student senate. These actions also reflect the interviewees' aspirational capital, particularly because they stated that they not only hoped to exert institutional change, but also to "advocate for the people of [their] community at home, especially after [they] graduate[d]" (Participant #8), and could have contributed to their campus cultural fit.

Within the positive institutional factors mentioned by the participants, the undergraduates characterized their involvement in university traditions and events as a key aspect of their academic well-being. Indeed, the majority (13 out of 20) chose their participation in campus events as examples of the most memorable moments in their academic trajectory. Some of these occasions had also entailed active family involvement, which might have further contributed to school-family integration, a relevant socio-emotional experience for student success (Garriott 2020):

> *El más feliz... fue el día que recibí mi anillo porque estaba toda mi familia... Ha sido ese el más feliz. Estaba toda mi familia [y] tuvimos una carne asada.*
>
> (The happiest [moment] was the day when I got my ring because my whole family was there... This has been the happiest [moment]. My whole family was [there and] we had carne asada.) *(Participant #14)*

> *The first real [university spirit] moment that I had was during the [football game against another university]. When we went to seven overtimes, right? I was at home, but I was watching it with my family and that was the first time we had watched a football game as a family. And it was exciting to see... my football team playing. (Participant #21)*

This finding was unique to this work, and it might be related to the history and culture of the university where the project took place. At this institution, traditions and university-wide sport events are considered pivotal aspects of students' campus experiences as a recruitment and retention strategy even after graduation.

2.4.2 | Negative Factors in the Participants' Experience

Even though participation in the institution's traditions and sport events seems to have played a positive role in the experiences of the undergraduate participants, this was not the case for the graduate students, who did not appear to have felt part of them. One participant regarded them quite critically:

> *The school definitely wasn't built for us and it definitely has a lot of growing to do. So I don't take my hat off in the [building at the institution of focus] [a school tradition], and last week I had this white lady who worked there... she's like, "Oh, sorry, can you take your hat off?" I said, "As soon as [this university] stops being racist, I'll take my hat off." I didn't go to [campus events associated with traditions]. And when I did go to events, I felt like I*

had to put on a face, like I had... changed the way I talked..., the way I acted and that really wasn't me. (Participant #12, graduate student)

The views expressed by this student also exemplify the participants' resistant capital, as they show their rejection of behaviors or institutional contexts that they perceived as racist, non-inclusive, or not reflective of their identity.

Other negative aspects associated with the undergraduate and graduate students' university experiences in this work were similar to those reported in existing studies (e.g., Allan et al. 2023; Clayton, Medina, and Wiseman 2019; Crisp, Taggart, and Nora 2015; Kouyoumdjian et al. 2017) and seem to have originated in academic expectations and behaviors to which the participants were exposed at the institution they attended. For instance, the students described difficulties faced before and after joining the university as well as academic dissonance, and feelings of isolation, marginalization, and violence. For example, both groups of participants made reference to feelings of uncertainty and frustration when recalling their application to the university. The lack of support reported by the interviewees, which appears to have triggered negative emotions, might have originated in the university's unrealistic assumptions and expectations with regard to applicants' (and their family's) knowledge of the paperwork involved in the application process, their ability to afford its associated costs (e.g., required entrance exams and application fees), and the logistics connected with loans, lodging, and living expenses. Additionally, some participants described confusion and anxiety with regard to their first week of study, specifically when navigating the university campus and finding where their classes would take place. These difficulties seem to have negatively affected some of the interviewees' wellbeing, tainting their first week as undergraduates.

The negative emotions felt before the start of their first semester were also part of some of the participants' academic trajectories, especially during the initial part of their studies. The experiences detailed by both undergraduates and graduates suggest a lack of institutional support, possibly deriving from dissonance between the university's expectations for *all* students and first-gens' specific needs. This dissonance appears to have affected the students' initial study plans (e.g., 7 changed majors), their academic success, and more importantly, their mental health. The following quotes from both undergraduate and graduate participants offer evidence for these feelings and experiences:

My toughest moment, I think, was my sophomore year when my mental health was just kind of deteriorating. And unfortunately... I became weak, suicidal and... I just was giving up on everything. I was deciding whether or not I was going to drop out at that point... I [didn't] want to fail my family... I just acknowledge that I needed help, first of all. And I actually [went] and asked for that help that I needed, because it just made me feel like I did not belong here. (Participant #3)

I think the toughest time was my freshman year, my second semester, I was taking [undergraduate class] and the first exam I didn't do too hot. And the second exam I knew I had to step it up so that I could maintain a good grade. ...And so I worked really hard. ...I studied, I read the book and everything. ...And I was in the middle of the rec [Student Recreation Center] waiting for a rack, and my professor emails us saying that the exam grades are out. And I checked it and I realized that I got the same exact grade on the second exam as I got on the first exam. And I just... I burst into tears in the middle of the rec. I had run out because... it was like too much, just too much... That class just really stressed me out and I just had to come up with new studying skills because apparently what I was doing wasn't working. I had never been so stressed in my life. (Participant #7)

I think sometimes it's still confusing because people around me know tips and secrets... like... going to office hours. And I don't feel comfortable doing that... I think it's been a really uphill battle being comfortable talking to professors and talking and asking for things... The channels that exist really do exist for people who are in the know. So it's pretty hard sometimes to get in on that and feel bold doing it. (Participant #23)

My first day I took a class where we worked on... Photoshop, things like that.... And I mean, I'd never even heard of these programs before. ...I felt completely out of place. Every kid under knew how to work these programs. And I was like, this is like a first step for me. And I really feel out of place. (Participant #5; graduate student)

These quotes can be considered examples of Garriott's (2020) *cultural imperialism* dimension, since they make reference to curricular elements and academic assumptions and practices that are imposed onto first-generation students and might not reflect their sociocultural background and/or socioeconomic reality. Additionally, the experiences described point to feelings of powerlessness in the face of academic failure akin to those reported in previous works (e.g., Clayton, Medina, and Wiseman 2019; Kouyoumdjian et al. 2017; Stephens et al. 2012). The high percentage of opinions rendered from the thematic analysis in connection with these two institutional dimensions suggest that they figured prominently in the students' negative experiences.

In the interviews analyzed, the undergraduates and graduates in this study also talked about experiencing marginalization or exploitation within the institution of focus because of discriminatory attitudes, and, in some instances, what could be characterized as *tokenism*—"the experience of being visible solely for the purpose of promoting a notion of diversity and inclusion" (Allen-McCombs 2022, 24). Also, half of the students in this work (52%) reported feeling isolated due to what they perceived as lack of diversity within the student population. Examples of these feelings are offered in the following quotes:

Well, college, for me, it was all tough moments. I really don't have any recent memor[ies], any happy moments. I guess just spending time with my friends, but it was mostly hard challenges... Really had no one to go to. (Participant #13)

I feel like I'm constantly on defensive mode. ...I constantly feel I need to sort of remind people who I am and where I'm from and sort of stuff like that. ...It's been a pretty mixed bag. People who are really hostile towards me and people who are very kind and much like the people I grew up with. (Participant #23)

Obviously, we don't fit in with any of the White groups because I mean it's weird... we just get treated differently or we're seen differently because of the way we dress, the way we look, or the way we talk....When I was a freshman [or] sophomore, we would go out to [a restaurant/bar area close to the university frequented by undergraduates]... in a big group, like there'd be 20 of us... Black and Brown. And White dudes would get drunk and they'd either be calling us "wetback" or "beaner" or "spic" or they would be calling the Black dudes the N-word. (Participant #12; graduate student)

I think first gen students are looked like a kind of [an] idea. ...We're very symbolized in the university. ...A lot of posters you saw [from] different departments were proud of their first gens...[of] their retention and graduation rates. And so I think right now we're looked at say like a key, like... one we recruited... (Participant #5; graduate student)

Some of these negative experiences appear to have been exacerbated by differences between the interviewees' own political stances and those of the mainstream student population, particularly after the 2016 presidential elections:

[After] the 2016 [presidential] election... I just felt very alone [at] that time... knowing what kind of a campus we are in. ...I felt like that [it] was going to give those people more of a drive to actually hurt people... There was this fear. ...I was just worried... the way that he [Trump] talked... (Participant #5; graduate student)

After [Trump] got elected, the day after he got elected, that's when some white girl called me "wetback" on [an area on campus] for speaking Spanish [to his mom on the phone]. ... A lot of my experiences here were definitely negative. I actually wanted to drop out. (Participant #12; graduate student)

These opinions mirror those presented by Allen-McCombs (2022, 29), whose participants "reported feeling agitated by [the] political posters and bigoted rhetoric that circulated on campus and social media [after the 2016 election]."

3 | Discussion

The first research question in this study sought to explore whether there were differences between the undergraduates' and graduate students' university experiences. The application of Garriott's (2020) CCWM to the analysis of the interviewees' responses revealed the existence of minor differences between the two groups. In our study, the graduate participants' opinions appear to have been more critical than those held by the undergraduates. Some interviewees in particular, such as Participants #12 and #5, offered detailed examples of the racist behaviors they had experienced on and off campus as well as the anxiety they had felt after the 2016 presidential election. Additionally, Participant #5 mentioned an instance of tokenism in connection to the way some academic units regarded first-generation students. The graduate students' views were similar to those in Allen-McCombs' (2022) study, which, like this work, was carried out in a PWI. The marginalization and violence described by this project's students might have been the result of the lack of diversity they perceived as prevailing in their university context. Moreover, since the three graduate participants were older than the undergraduates and had worked in other parts of the country and world before returning to their studies, they might have been more aware of subtle discriminatory instances than their younger, undergraduate counterparts.

The second question connected to the research aspect of this work focused on the institutional factors that might have positively or negatively influenced the interviewees' experience at the institution of focus. The students made reference to two main positive aspects of their academic experience. The first one was the social support they had received from on-campus organizations that specifically catered to their needs, particularly when the students could identify connections to their lifeworld (e.g., congruence between on-campus social gatherings and those organized at home). This finding has also been deemed important in the existing literature. For example, based on her participants' experiences, Allen-McCombs (2022, 31) suggests the need for the development and implementation of "targeted programming [for first-generation students] that includes holistic counseling, service-learning experiences, and a collegial family-like atmosphere" (see also Crisp, Taggart, and Nora 2015; Ishitani 2016).

The second positive factor highlighted by the majority of the undergraduates was their participation in campus traditions and/or sport-related events, which they described as their happiest moments as university students. These occasions seemed to have instilled a sense of belonging, as it is seen in these views:

One of my favorite traditions is the [university's] hymn. I think the whole... grabbing each other by the shoulders and then crossing legs is kind of crazy out there. Like it. I can understand why you [might] think we're a cult, but... ***once you're part of the [the university's] family****, you understand why* ***we*** *do it. (Participant #9, emphasis added)*

Mi recuerdo más feliz... es cuando fui al [evento] y ver todos los alumnos cantando himnos y apoyando al equipo de fútbol. Se siente como una atmósfera totalmente diferente. Claro, ***se siente apoyo, armonía... todos juntos****.*

(My happiest memory is [the day] when I went to [event] and I [saw] all the students singing hymns and supporting the football team. It felt like a completely different atmosphere. Of course, **you feel support, harmony... everybody together**.) *(Participant #20, emphasis added)*

The institution where this work was carried out strives to convey the idea that its students are part of a family where everyone is welcome and embraced, and this is mainly achieved through the organization of events such as the ones described in these quotes. Clearly, in these participants' case, as well as for others in the group, the institution succeeded, since the students felt they were part of the university "family." The graduate students, however, did not appear to share this view. For example, at the time of their interviews, none of the graduates reported actively participating in university-organized events, and Participant #12 felt that being part of them entailed conforming to institutionally expected patterns of behavior/attitudes that did not reflect their identity as a first-gen, Latinx student.

Even though both groups of participants praised on-campus organizations and the majority of undergraduates celebrated their opportunity to be part of campus traditions/events, they also made reference to institutional conditions that triggered feelings of isolation and exclusion, and resulted in mental health issues and academic difficulties. These experiences mirror those discussed in previous studies (e.g., Adams and McBrayer 2020; Allen-McCombs 2022; Clayton, Medina, and Wiseman 2019; Kouyoumdjian et al. 2017). Like the participants in these works, the students in the project often felt underrepresented and, in some cases, excluded and discriminated against due to being part of a university characterized by what they viewed as a lack of diversity. The interviewees also referred to problems such as being in classes with a high number of students and not having enough academic support; having difficulty finding adequate academic advice, with advisors and units that failed to understand their unique circumstances; and dealing with university assumptions with regard to their family's socioeconomic status and knowledge of institutional mechanisms. In particular, they mentioned the university's application process, the procurement of loans, and residence life as a whole.

The third aspect of the interviewees' university trajectories this work attempted to explore was connected to the ways in which both undergraduates and graduates coped with and overcame academic and personal difficulties. Like previous studies (e.g., Adams and McBrayer 2020; Beard 2021; Clayton, Medina, and Wiseman 2019; Marrun 2020; Vega 2016), the interviews analyzed showed the importance of the participants' family and community capital, which manifested through the reported emotional strength and resources offered by their families and the peers with whom they shared similar backgrounds and lifeworlds. This type of cultural capital also seems to have played a pivotal role within the campus organizations in which the students participated and in the strengthening of the relationship between home and university–a crucial aspect of academic success (Garriott 2020). Additionally, the interviewees' views revealed their aspirational capital embedded first and foremost in their efforts to build a more inclusive campus that would provide a better cultural fit for them and other first-generation students, through the development of resources, the lobbying for and establishment of safe spaces and representative support groups, and their participation in student governance (e.g., the senate). Furthermore, some students' aspirations extended to the communities they belonged to, who they hoped to continue to help after graduation. When confronted with what they interpreted as racist/discriminatory instances, some of the participants also displayed behaviors and actions that could be interpreted as evidence of their resistant capital.

The analysis of the project's interviews suggests that while the university of focus appears to have been to some extent successful in contributing to the participants' campus cultural fit and possibly their sense of belonging and well-being, more is needed. In the next section, we tap into the results of this work and those reported in previous studies to discuss steps that institutions like the one in this study could take to counter the negative circumstances that seem to mar first-generation students' university experiences, both at the undergraduate and graduate level.

4 | Institutional Implications

In line with Garriott's (2020) model, several institutional affordances were significant to students' success and well-being. For example, strong traditions based on universally attainable principles and activities that did not incur large costs, such as sports events and graduation, gave Latinx first-generation students a sense of community congruent with their own home values. Another important resource was the large number of student-led organizations in the institution, which offered students opportunities to shape the social context and learn leadership skills, providing an outlet to navigational capital and a means to develop self-efficacy and agency. The evidence points to the fact that the best tools for increasing first-generation Latinx students' sense of belonging is to incorporate socially congruent activities within the long-standing annual calendar, rather than attempting to develop new initiatives specifically for their families, which could feel inauthentic and marginalizing.

That said, there was a lot of room left for improvement. For example, many of our interviewees expressed feeling unsupported during the application and financial aid process. As the numbers of first generation and Latinx students rise, it is imperative that support staff in recruitment and financial offices be experienced in serving them, at the risk of losing good quality applicants. Moreover, universities need to recognize the importance of familial capital in the adaptation and wellbeing of Latinx first-generation students throughout their entire college careers. Institutions must support not just

the student but the family through linguistically congruent communication materials and culturally appropriate activities, as well as recognize the need to address familial expectations to gain parental support (e.g., gender roles, financial self-sufficiency). This may include providing high-quality language services online and in person (e.g., multilingual fliers, campus signage, campus tours) that do not depend on volunteers and do not have to be specifically requested.

Institutions also play a central role in increasing cultural sensitivity among all constituencies to recognize and uproot discrimination against underrepresented groups, including both invisible daily microaggressions and incidents that make the news and damage institutional reputations. Latinx students of immigrant background should not be burdened with the responsibility of overcoming their peers' or professors' prejudices and limiting expectations. Rather, the entire university must think of itself as a multicultural community where microaggressions, marginalization, and tokenization have no place. In that regard, building from, supporting, and partnering with grassroots first-generation Latinx students organizations seems like low hanging fruit. For graduate programs, success may require more coordination and effort, but it is even more important, since those participants were the most critical of their reception and treatment. Given that in graduate programs belonging includes both institutional and field-specific components, a two-pronged approach is needed. On the one hand, the institution must create cross-departmental support systems for Latinx first-generation students (e.g., at the college or graduate school levels) to reach a critical mass and establish a robust social community. On the other, each unit may need to create homegrown field-specific supports. In some institutions, legislative efforts to ban diversity initiatives will make this much more challenging; however, these efforts are needed beyond short-term political expediency, if institutions are to live up to their missions.

Finally, universities, even those with large residential campuses, are not immune from their surrounding contexts and national *Zeitgeist*. The community in particular plays a central role in shaping the student experience and providing safe environments free from prejudice and hostility. Since the university is often a central economic engine of local development, it would do well to leverage its power to create a welcoming environment for everyone. This may be achieved through participation in partnerships with local authorities, community organizations, schools, and business establishments.

5 | Conclusion

The analysis of the project's interviews revealed similarities with existing literature on Latinx first-gen university students' experiences. Our work supports the findings of earlier studies on institutional and personal factors that can affect the academic success of first-gen undergraduates and graduates positively and negatively, highlighting the need for institutions to recognize and embrace this population's cultural capital, both in academic and personal terms. Our findings also pointed to the crucial role families and peers can play in these students' university trajectories as well as the importance of congruence between academic and personal life. More importantly, the study offered novel data on the experiences of graduate students, a population not widely studied but that it is important to focus on if we are to succeed in making academia more socially and ethnically diverse. We identified ways in which institutions can foster a sense of belonging in the student body through university-wide traditions and events, signaling possible actions for the full integration of first-generation Latinx students at all levels.

When considering our results, however, we must also recognize that this work was carried out before the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, questions remain on how many of the concerns expressed by our interviewees might have been exacerbated since then by the socioeconomic difficulties experienced by their families and communities. Finally, more information is needed on the ways in which the changing national discourse has affected first-gen students' views and experiences. Clearly, more work remains.

Author Contributions

María Irene Moyna: conceptualization; funding acquisition; investigation; writing–review & editing; data curation; supervision; project administration; writing–original draft; methodology; resources; visualization; formal analysis. **Gabriela C. Zapata:** conceptualization; investigation; funding acquisition; writing–original draft; methodology; visualization; writing–review & editing; formal analysis; project administration; data curation; supervision; resources.

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Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Endnote

[1]The institution, located in the US Southwest, was at the time on the cusp of becoming a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), and has since achieved this designation.

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Appendix A
Interview questions

English	Español
1. What made you decide to go to college?	¿Por qué decidiste asistir a la universidad?
2. What was the application process like?	2. ¿Cómo fue el proceso de solicitud?
3. Tell me about the day you got your acceptance letter.	3. Cuéntame sobre el día en que recibiste tu carta de aceptación.
4. Tell me about your first day on campus.	4. Cuéntame sobre tu primer día en el campus.
5. What is your major? Why did you choose it?	5. ¿Cuál es tu especialización? ¿Por qué la elegiste?
6. What is it like to be a first-gen student?	6. Cuéntame cómo es ser un/a estudiante de primera generación.
7. Tell me about your happiest memory as [a student at the institution of focus] and your toughest moment.	7. Cuéntame sobre tu recuerdo más feliz y tu momento más difícil como [estudiante en la universidad de foco].
8. What is your goal after graduation?	8. ¿Cuáles son tus objetivos cuando te gradúes?
9. What does it mean to you to be [a student at the institution of focus]?	9. ¿Qué significa para ti ser un/a [estudiante en la universidad de foco]?
10. What advice would you give a student who would be first-gen and is interested in coming to [this university]?	10. ¿Qué consejos les darías a estudiantes de primera generación que están interesados en estudiar en [esta universidad]?