¡Sí, Se Puede! Yes, You Can! Employing a Personal Testimonio to Show Young Latinx Students and Families That Their Dreams of College are Well Within Reach

by
Lorenzo Michael Curtis

A THESIS

submitted to
Oregon State University
Honors College

in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the
degree of

Honors Baccalaureate of Science in Ecological Engineering
(Honors Scholar)

Presented November 28, 2022
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Abstract approved:_____________________________________________________

Kathryn Esther McIntosh

From my personal experiences, I’ve noticed that Latinx students and families are most receptive to college-related information communicated as anecdotes. Latinx students are among the most poorly represented demographic at universities nationwide, which I believe can be mitigated through calculated efforts to increase collegiate literacy and understanding. This project is a series of five videos, directed towards Latinx students and families interested in learning about college, that capture key components of my experience as a Latino student in STEM. My video series and written thesis are both versions of my personal testimonio (testimony), which is non-traditional information that provides words of advice and shared experiences that my audience can connect with. My testimonio aids in shifting the power structure in academia by providing academic resources to a historically underrepresented demographic. This video series will be posted and housed on Precollege and SMILE Programs’ websites as a free educational tool.

Keywords: Latinx, Hispanic, minority, outreach, testimonio, epistemology, HSI

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I understand that my project will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University, Honors College. My signature below authorizes release of my project to any reader upon request.

Lorenzo Michael Curtis, Author
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Acknowledgements

This document still feels unfinished, and I don’t think authors are supposed to admit that. As an avid writer, I recognize that the document could always be more polished and more succinct. It is likely that I have unknowingly omitted details about my personal experiences throughout this document. Despite being unfinished, this document is a piece of my life. The following people are also pieces of my life.

Madre mia, te debo todo (mother of mine, I owe it all to you). I wrote this for all Latino/a/x students and families who doubt their own abilities, partially because I was one of those people. My mother gave me my language abilities and she proved to me that she would fight to the very end to ensure her son got the highest quality education. The Mexicans I know have a fighting spirit, and my mother is a prime example of this. Ma, this is for you.

Padre (father), thank you for the confidence you gave me throughout my educational, professional, and personal career. My father taught me the value of the voice and advocating with it to get what you want. Self-expression is a beautiful thing, and we shouldn’t be self-conscious or preoccupied with what others think of us. This is your story, your life, and your time. My father taught me to be proud, inquisitive, and charismatic.

Mis hermanos, los adoro (my siblings, I adore you). Being the oldest of four is and will forever be my proudest position. I continue to be fascinated by what Andrés, Emilio, and Daniela accomplish in their youth. I learn from you guys, and I’ve become the young man I am because of you all. I pray that you three continue to grow in wisdom, faith, experience, and admiration for the beautiful privilege it is to be bilingual.

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The work I have done in producing this Honors College thesis encompasses various dimensions of myself. I identify as a bilingual and bicultural Mexican-American Latino male. Spanish is my first language. The Spanish language is inherently designed as binary, giving words a masculine or feminine denomination (Beatty-Martínez & Dussias, 2019). As with any language, there are some exceptions to this binary assignment. In the instances where I am directly speaking of myself, I will use the word ‘Latino’ because I am a male. Throughout this document, I will italicize masculine and feminine Spanish words. At times I will also use ‘Latinx’, which is a term developed to include Hispanic people who don’t have a binary gender. While this word is not frequently used among native Spanish speakers, its use coincides with a national and global movement to be inclusive of different gender identities (Noe-Bustamante, Mora, & Lopez, 2021).
Introduction

Storytelling is one of the best ways to communicate personal experiences. According to Mokhtar et al. (2011), when anecdotes were used to share information in the classroom setting, students had improved abilities in associating meaning and emotion with words, recalling information, and using a broader vocabulary. From my personal experiences, the findings from this study also apply to Latinx students, parents, and families.

During my sophomore year of college, I was at a Latino Family Night at Hillsboro High School in November of 2019 where I was representing the Honors College as a Student Ambassador (Figure 23 in the Appendix). I was hosting a table at this event, accompanied by another ambassador who was not fluent in Spanish. Naturally, I saw this informational recruiting event as an opportunity to practice my vocabulary and interpersonal skills in my native language.

The first thing I noticed at this event was the broad diversity in age groups. At my table, I was answering questions from elementary-age students, middle-schoolers, teenagers, parents, and their parents. I usually worked in an office, answering organized and pointed questions for parents and their prospective child. This situation was different, however, because these Latinx students and families had no solid premonition of what university was like. Hence, I couldn’t answer their questions with the senseless jargon that I use in my tidy office in Corvallis. Plus, this jargon was difficult to translate into Spanish. I had to take a different approach.

On the fly, I began circumnavigating the collegiate vocabulary and instead told stories about my personal experiences. I recounted how nervous I felt about applying, and I described the loud exchange I had with both my parents when the decision date came around. As I continued to tell my personal experiences before and during university, this elicited deeper inquisitions from the Latinxs at my table; they were gaining a better understanding of college right there and then. Their questions began to sound like the organized and pointed questions I tended to field during a regular shift in the office. After answering the slurry of questions to the best of my ability, I realized how receptive these students and families had been to my stories. In Spanish, personal
stories are called testimonios (testimonies), and storytelling carries immense cultural value in the Latino culture. An article by Reese (2013) notes that “sharing of stories and narratives, dichos (sayings) and consejos (advice), is a prominent experience among families in Mexico as well as among immigrant Mexican families in the United States” (para. 2). With culturally valuable stories being shared frequently in Mexican and Latinx households, I began pondering how stories could be used advantageously.

My attendance at this event showed me the need for information literacy that Latinx students and families in the Portland suburban area had pertinent to college. Information literacy, which I use interchangeably with collegiate literacy, is the ability to “identify information needs, locate and access relevant information and critically evaluate a diverse array of sources” (Loyola Marymount University, 2022). As a Latino STEM student, I wanted to contribute to informing Latinx families about what higher education is and how to attain it. My intentions took time to materialize; the idea for this thesis project came years after this 2019 Spanish-speaking event. During my very first thesis brainstorming meeting in October 2021, I learned that Oregon State University announced its intention to become a Hispanic-Serving Institution, or HSI (Flores, López-Cevallos, & Davis-White Eyes, 2021). Being a HSI means that over 25% of the undergraduate student body is composed of Latinx students. Currently, OSU’s undergraduate body consists of about 10% Latinx students, putting it close to Emerging HSI (eHSI) status ranging from 15 – 24.9% (United States Department of Education, 2021). It’s important to note that my project’s objective is not to attain HSI status for OSU. Rather, my goal is to align with the efforts to move OSU towards HSI status.

Learning about OSU’s subpar Latinx representation inspired me to find ways to integrate my Honors College thesis project into the already existing efforts and frameworks promoting Latinx representation. The office of Precollege Programs (PCP) and its SMILE Program are one example of OSU efforts centering on post-secondary success for diverse youth audiences while working with underrepresented youth learners. PCP, SMILE and offices like Juntos and 4-H Youth Development host a multitude of educational and social events for young first-generation students looking to attend university, serving the same people that I was serving at the Hillsboro High School event in November of 2019. Once I had learned that these offices were well
equipped to support my intentions of increasing Latinx representation, I needed to pitch an idea about a possible project that I’d request their support with.

The Hillsboro High School event showed me that several generations of family members contribute to making education-related decisions. Even in medical situations, Hispanics have a cultural preference of making family-based choices (Beltran, 2022). Hence, for my project, my intended audience is Latinx students and families interested in learning more about university life. To serve my audience, I produced a video series about my experiences as a Latino male in STEM with the intention of offering a unique, accessible, and insightful perspective on what university is like for Latinx students. Knowing that student testimonies are invaluable to Latinx families, this video series would be a useful tool for filling gaps in collegiate literacy related to making connections, approaching opportunities, navigating university resources, and school-life balance.

This video series is a testimony about myself and my college experiences, ultimately increasing the information pool available to these students and families. This is not a research project because I am not collecting data beyond my personal accounts. Based on these guidelines, my project does not need IRB approval (University of Rhode Island, n.d.).

My primary goal in this testimonio video series is to motivate Latinx youth and make political change. I possess knowledge that needs to be shared with these traditionally underserved populations. In developing and broadcasting this information, I am shifting the power structure of academic institutions by allocating more attention and resources to Latinx people who are underrepresented at most public colleges (Porras, 2020). Beyond this overarching goal, I have a series of other specific goals that can be found in Figure 5 the Approach section.

These videos only have value if they’re viewed by the communities I intend to serve. For this reason, in February of 2022, I teamed up with Precollege Programs and used their institutional framework to support my video series endeavors. PCP and other partners will post my video series on their websites and YouTube channels to be viewed and distributed as a free educational tool. This project was initially inspired by my attendance at a Latinx recruitment event in
November of 2019, but this project and its goals have developed into much more than a recruitment ploy. Recruitment efforts are designed to persuade the audience to follow a path, whereas my testimonio shares my collegiate journey and orients it as one of many viable paths. These video testimonios detail my personal triumphs throughout university because the goal of the video series is to promote postsecondary success in young Latinx learners. There have been challenges and tribulations not captured in this video series but it goes without saying that college, in reality, is a compilation of highs, lows, and lessons throughout. I’m hoping my testimonio encourages young Latinx learners to pursue their dreams of changing their family trajectory through postsecondary education. ¡Sí, se puede! (Yes, you can!)
Overview

This thesis project has two modalities: written and visual. This written thesis is meant to explain how and why the information in testimonios is valid, culturally relevant, and academically sound. There is a need for anecdotal information especially when serving Latinx communities. I will also use this space to tell the story of how my personal Latino identity has been shaped over my 22 years, serving as my textual testimonio. The written thesis will illustrate how I put together the video series, as well as future trajectories and larger applications for this project. This thesis project will be housed digitally in OSU’s Honors College Scholar Archives and on OSU’s Precollege Program website.

The visual portion of this project is a five-clip video series that encompasses my experiences as a Latino student in STEM at OSU. On behalf of Precollege Program, these videos will be dispersed and employed as materials to give Latinx students and families information about student life that they would otherwise not have access to. These videos aim to serve my fellow Latinx communities by providing them an accessible and understandable way to learn more about the collegiate student experience. This video series will be housed on the PCP website and YouTube channel, as well as on my personal social media sites.

Ultimately, my thesis project will be deemed a success if Latinx youth learners and families watch my video series. The point of the video series is to be shared with students and families who are interested in seeing a different angle of university life. If my videos reach Latinx households and entice further inquiries, communications, or campus visits, I will be proud. My written project will be a success if it’s read by budding Latinx students and used to inspire further efforts towards increasing Latinx representation at universities. There is work to be done at our university and at many others, but our goals won’t materialize without motivated learners and dedicated educators. This project aims to improve Latinx representation in postsecondary education.
Literature Review

*Testimonios* carry tremendous cultural power and include the shared experiences of many. In my personal and professional life, sharing stories has been a reliable method of conveying memorable information. My project is, effectively, a vehicle to transmit my Latino epistemology. Epistemology, according to the University of Sheffield (2020), is “the theory of knowledge…concerned with the mind’s relation to reality” (para. 2). Epistemology takes various forms, and there has been recent research done on the epistemology of testimony (or *testimonio*), specifically focusing on the knowledge we acquire from stories.

This project isn’t simply telling stories, though. While I use *testimonios*, anecdotes, and stories interchangeably throughout this document, it’s important to note that testimonies differ from anecdotes and stories. My *testimonio* is non-traditional information that largely draws on my cultural intuition. The concept of “cultural intuition” was developed and shaped by *Chicana* (Mexican-American) feminist intellectuals, of which Dolores Bernal was a pioneer (Bernal, 2016, p. 2). Cultural intuition is used as a scholarly tool that “Chicanas bring to the research process, [drawing] from personal experience, collective experience, professional experience, communal memory, existing literature, and the research process itself” (Delgado-Bernal, 1998, pp. 567-568). *Testimonios*, which integrate the various dimensions of cultural intuition, help Latinxs assimilate and communicate shared experiences. As a heterosexual male, my thesis project employs cultural intuition as a link between collective experiences, communal memory, and experiences had in land and space (Calderón, 2014). My project follows the rationale that “being more attuned to…forms of ‘cultural intuition’, [allows] a researcher [to]... ‘ground’ [their] work in the life experiences of People of Color” (Malagón, Pérez Huber, and Velez, 2009, p. 255). Because I’m able to apply my Latino cultural intuition to this project, my work will be better geared towards my target audience.

One noteworthy example of cultural intuition is the concept of the body-mind-spirit split included in Elenes’ 2011 publication. This split is a conglomerate lens that Chicana feminists apply to understand their life experiences by involving emotions stemming from the body, mind,
and spirit. This unique lens stretches far beyond conventional academic findings; it contributes to the cultural value of personal testimonios developed by Latinx academics because it infuses spirituality into writing and gives permission to incorporate the politics of spirit into research, writing, and teaching (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 522). In her 1996 publication, Sofia Villenas cites how the body-mind-spirit “cannot be divorced” from the research produced by Chicana intellectuals (pp. 715-716). Latina feminists have multiplicity in their identities that can’t be omitted from the work they produce (Hernández-Ávila, 2002, p. 160). Similarly, my various identities and associated experiences can’t be separated from my life story, so use those to guide my testimonio.

Testimonios have been used for several purposes in academia. In Dolores Bernal’s (2018) publication, she shares a personal testimonio that illustrates how she and other educators use parenting tactics to ‘properly’ teach their children about race. Naturally, there are a myriad of factors contributing to how each educator-parent rears their kids. Bernal describes testimonios as “narratives of political urgency” that are “always somehow a part of a shared experience of a group of people” (Bernal, 2018, p.28). She connects her testimonio with those of others by starting this article with a short story about what inspired the publication, and then she weaves the ideas and experiences of others into her own mothering strategies.

Testimonies have also been used to ignite social change by bringing Latina scholars together. The publication produced by Espino et al. (2012) highlights how testimonios were used to develop a collective consciousness by weaving Chicana’s experiences together and turning their lived experiences into truth. At the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) conference, Latina scholars shared their testimonios with the goals to critique oppressive systemic structures, heal damages, and formulate strategies for social change within academe. From this conference, the women oriented their experiences within a larger social and institutional context through shared stories, which ultimately helped guide further publications and research. To shift the status quo, there is still work to be done beyond sharing testimonios to recruit and improve the education opportunities for Latinx students and families.
Latinxs and Education at OSU

According to Sibley and Brabeck (2017), “Latino immigrant children are a growing segment of the U.S. population, and understanding how to educate them effectively should be a top priority for the nation” (p.148). With large numbers of Latino families entering our country and our school systems, there needs to be infrastructure, programs, and offices in place to support the needs of these people. From my observations, collegiate literacy is one of the main needs of Latinx students and families. For example, at the 2019 Hillsboro High School event I cited in the Introduction section, I recall Latinx parents asking me if Honors College students can still take advantage of OSU scholarships. In my mind, and in the minds of most people with exposure to college, the answer is obvious: Of course they can! However, with Latinx students and families, this “common knowledge” is beyond their area of expertise because they haven’t attended university or had family experience in college-going. There needs to be better ways to serve these historically underrepresented minorities.

Oregon State University is home to several offices and programs dedicated to Latinx outreach and development of collegiate literacy. I have partnered with the Office of Precollege Programs, who are supporting the production of my video series. While these and other offices do amazing work, there is still a great need for Latinx representation at our university.

In 2021, Oregon State University had 3,100 Latinx students out of 32,000 total students, making Latinx students equal less than 10% of OSU’s total student body. This figure is far smaller than it should be considering that 24% of K-12 students identify as Hispanic/Latinx across the state of Oregon (Flores, López-Cevallos, & Davis-White Eyes, 2021). Proportionally, this means that about a quarter of Oregon’s prospective college students are Latinx, but less than a tenth of these students attend Oregon’s top STEM university. If the objective of K-12 education is to move students into higher education, then our education system is poorly serving its Latinx students based on these statistics.

In Oregon, 41 of our K-12 school districts consist of over 25% Latinx students. Ten of those 41 districts have over 50% Latinx students (Oregon DOE, 2020). In K-12 school districts that have a high proportion of Hispanic/Latinx students, it’s no surprise that nearby community colleges also have high proportions of Latinx students. For colleges and universities with a high
proportion of Latinx students, the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) created the title of Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs). HACU is the membership association for HSIs, and they persuade Congress to recognize HSIs and allocate appropriate resources to them (Garcia & Taylor, 2017). This denomination was officially created in 1995, then in 1998 legislation was changed to integrate HSIs into the Higher Education Act (New America, 2015). A HSI, by definition, is “an accredited, degree-granting, public or private nonprofit institution of higher education with 25%, or more, total undergraduate Hispanic full-time equivalent (FTE) student enrollment” (Chico State, 2020). HSIs are the fulcrum for pivoting the well-known narrative of Latinx students not making it to college.

Being an HSI means more than simply enrolling Latinx students. While there’s an increase in Latinx students enrolling in universities nationwide, this increase must be met with human and physical infrastructure to specifically support Latinx students in academic and non-academic manners (Garcia, 2021). In April of 2021, Oregon State University announced its intention to become a HSI (Flores, López-Cevallos, & Davis-White Eyes, 2021). OSU is far from HSI status because we have 10% Latinx undergraduate enrollment, putting us close to Emerging HSI (eHSI) status, ranging from 15 – 24.9% (United States Department of Education, 2021). According to HACU, Oregon has six HSIs and fifteen eHSIs, and four of the six HSIs are community colleges (2021). Therefore, the majority of HSIs in our state are community colleges.

These community colleges with HSI status are surrounded by K-12 school districts that have high proportions of Latinx students. For a community college or university to be a productive HSI, there must be infrastructure in place to support their student demographic. In 2019, legislators passed the Hispanic Educational Resources and Empowerment (HERE) Act. This legislation is designed to support partnerships between and provide funding to HSIs and school districts that primarily educate Latinx students. These partnerships and funds would ultimately facilitate the transition between secondary and postsecondary education to improve Latinx students’ overall achievement (Padilla, 2022). The HERE Act serves as a launchpad for schools to move towards HSI status and for these respective schools to better serve their Latinx students. Having infrastructure and legislation that supports people of color, namely Latinx students, at all
types of educational institutions is invaluable because of the positive effects that quality education has on the students, the institution, and society.

Institutional diversity is an important predictor of the academic performance and success of students, particularly of students with low socioeconomic backgrounds who don’t primarily speak English at home (Goff & Min, 2016). There are three forms of diversity as defined by Gurin et al. (2002): structural diversity, classroom diversity, and informal interactional diversity. Findings from this 2002 study show that informal interactions with peers of other racial groups significantly improved “intellectual engagement, self-motivation, citizenship and cultural engagement, and academic skills” (Tsuo, 2016, para. 4). In a Board of Directors statement from the American Council on Education, they state the various benefits that student body diversity has on the university itself, including enriching the educational experience, strengthening student communities, and bolstering the quality of education delivered (ACE, 2012). On a societal level, diversity in higher education creates a more resilient, versatile, capable, and competitive workforce. According to Lewis & Cantor (2016), diversity has an integral role in “sustaining a prosperous democracy” (p. 15). In this same book, the authors hold that “increasing diversity on college campuses is crucial in preparing people for work and maintaining the nation’s economic competitiveness” (p. 107). In all facets, there is an undeniable need for diversity on college campuses and at all levels of education. My Honors thesis works to share my testimonio as a Latino student, disrupt the university power structure by informing and motivating Latinx students, increase institutional diversity, and inch Oregon State University towards HSI status through producing momentum for outreach projects similar to mine.
Mi Testimonio

My testimonio is aimed at illustrating the landmark events in my life that have contributed to my identity as a Latino male. This section of my thesis will follow my scholastic path chronologically. Being Mexican is a fundamental part of who I am and throughout my life I’ve begun to conceptualize what it means to me and how much I love this part of myself.

The very start of my Spanish career began at A Child's Way Kindergarten-Preschool in Portland, Oregon. I was enrolled in the twos, threes, and fours program at this school and my mother was my Spanish teacher. I don’t recall very much from this era besides the playground and the pumpkin patch that was hosted by the school every October. My mom Karla developed our activities and curriculum in Spanish, and this is when I first knew that my mom was Mexican. Looking back at the activities I did under her instruction, I saw the breadth of skills and applications I had for my native language. I spoke, read, and wrote Spanish just like my mom, so I knew I was Mexican, just like her.

I attended a dual-immersion elementary school called Barnes Elementary in Beaverton, OR. Most of my classmates had dark skin, brown eyes, and black hair and I wondered why I looked different from them. They were all Mexicans who spoke Spanish, as was I. At the time, however, I didn’t see myself as Mexican because of my “white” physical appearance, but I knew I was fluent in Spanish. In a way, I was caught in limbo because I couldn’t tell if I was Mexican or American.

I was treated like a Mexican by my peers because I fit in with them on the playground. Playing hard at tetherball and four-square gave me bruised hands and bloody knuckles, which is how I merited the respect of my classmates. After recess, though, I noticed a shift in treatment. In the classroom, my peers treated me like an American because I was proficient in reading, writing, speaking, and spelling. For some reason, the Mexican kids at Barnes Elementary thought it was cool to not care about school. They mocked me for being an avid participant in class, calling me a “try-hard.” I couldn't understand why this was an insult. Wasn’t school worth trying hard for?
In elementary school, I realized that my household had a different relationship with academics compared to my peers’ households. For one, both of my parents always came to my parent-teacher conferences. I was excited for these meetings because the teachers said good things about me, which led to me getting ice cream afterwards. I always felt well supported at school and at home because my teachers and parents stayed atop my academic progress. I didn’t know it then, but the fact that both of my parents had received a college education was a driving factor in them staying atop my performance in school. My friends, on the other hand, had their tíos or abuelas come as their parental ambassadors. Even in elementary school, I assumed that my peers’ parents were working because I knew that Latino parents worked tirelessly to provide for their children. While they were at work, other family members filled in at events like parent-teacher conferences. It’s not that their child’s school performance was a secondary priority for these parents, but feeding kids and paying bills came first. On the other hand, my parents had the luxury to reschedule or rearrange their lives to attend these conferences. Academics took precedence over lots of other things in my household, which wasn’t always the case in my peers’ homes.

I remember walking to my friend Lazaro’s house from school one day. Lazaro lived in a duplex about a quarter mile from Barnes Elementary. From the outside, you couldn’t picture seven people living in this tiny home. In fifth grade, Lazaro’s mother died of an aggressive cancer. We were both ten years old. I didn’t know how to support him besides playing hard with him during recess. I had never hung out with him outside of school, so after his mom’s passing he invited me to his house after class. As soon as we arrived, I remembered wondering why all his curtains were drawn. It was dark. There was very little furniture, but plenty of dolls and toys on the ground. His grandmother was at the stove cooking several dishes in large quantities while wearing a hand-knit apron. Her kitchen smelled like salsa and fatty meat. Lazaro introduced me as his best friend, and she greeted me with a tight hug and a healthy kiss on the cheek. I felt very welcome. She and Lazaro exchanged words and I think she had asked us if we were hungry. Abuela spoke very quickly, hardly enunciating, probably because she was missing a few teeth. Lazaro replied since I was still deciphering what she had asked, and then abuela served us tamales at the table. I knew I was fluent in Spanish, but I was having difficulty understanding the kind plump woman speaking to us. At Lazaro’s house, I realized that my mother Karla speaks
slowly and meticulously compared to his grandmother. Lazaro had high conversational aptitude that he learned at home, while I was a strong reader and writer due to my mom’s method of teaching Spanish. As far as language, we were both the products of our caretaker’s teaching styles.

My mom, beyond language, also fed me differently compared to my peers. While I was in elementary school, my (at the time) stay-at-home mother packed me lunch for school every single morning. At the lunch table, I ate a nicely wrapped egg burrito while my classmates received hot lunches free of charge. I wondered why I was the only one at school with a lunchbox and a water bottle. My pre-packed meal stood out at the lunch table covered in black checkered lunch trays and Styrofoam. Sometimes, I would find little handwritten notes from my mom in my lunchbox. She knew that I missed her at school sometimes. Thinking back to it, I didn’t mind standing out at the lunch table since my mom made me lunch and wrote me notes to make up for it. But looking around at the hot lunches my friends were eating, I wondered what other moms did early in the morning.

Not only did my lunches stand out, but my outfits did too. I was always dressed differently compared to my peers. My mom liked me to go to school looking guapo (handsome), and she’d dress me in nice jackets, jeans, button-ups, and neat shoes. All my peers thought I was rich and braggadocio because I played four-square in expensive Air Jordan shoes that my dad got me at the Nike employee store. Both of my parents continuously assessed my closet and made sure the clothing fit my body. Sometimes, I felt like I stood out too much: My skin, my hair, my lunches, the way I spoke, the way I dressed… There were several elements that created a self-imposed canyon separating myself and my peers, ultimately contributing to me feeling less Mexican than them. It was a personal insecurity of mine, being so different. Despite these, I knew I was privileged in every regard but nothing made me feel more fortunate than traveling.

Every year while I was at Barnes Elementary, my family took a trip to Mexico in the summer. We would visit Puerto Vallarta, Cancun, Saltillo, Monterrey, and other places. On these trips, we would meet up with my mom’s side of the family, all of whom are fully fluent in Spanish and wholly Mexican. These Mexican family gatherings were loud, disorganized, and always involved
spicy food, dancing, and spending quality time with good company. During these vacations I was immersed in my native culture, and I came back to Oregon feeling “more Mexican” than before. In retrospect, I experienced ebbs and flows of connectivity to my Mexican side: sometimes I felt very Mexican, and other times I felt distant from that part of myself.

I recall feeling the most Mexican in fifth grade. When I was 11, I placed second in Oregon’s statewide Spanish Spelling Bee (Figure 2), which earned me a chance to compete nationally. I went on to place third in the 2011 National Spanish Spelling Bee in Albuquerque, New Mexico (Figure 3). I came back to Barnes as a celebrity since I was in the newspaper and news channels representing my small elementary school (House, 2011). Having championed spelling and earned the respect of peers and teachers, I felt like I could do anything in Spanish. These victories were the first of many.
Oregon’s First Statewide Spelling Bee

Lily James (at the microphone) placed first in Oregon’s first statewide spelling bee (House, 2011). I placed second, but at least I was wearing my Nike Zoom Kobe VI basketball shoes.
Elementary school was an important formative moment in my lifetime because it was the first time I realized that I am two people: 50% Mexican and 50% American. I was fluent in the Spanish language, but my skin was fair. I was well integrated in the Spanish speaking circles in elementary school, but I questioned if I was truly Mexican. My identity as a Latino began to form in elementary school, but middle school was a bit more tumultuous.

Middle school was a struggle in finding my identity as it is for most middle-schoolers. I wasn’t surrounded by Spanish speakers at Stoller Middle School, so I felt even less Mexican than in elementary school because I seldom practiced my language with others. At Stoller, the Spanish classes were far too easy for me. I got in trouble for correcting my teacher during class and this earned me a visit with the principal. This was my first time “being in trouble”, and I didn’t know
what this meant for me as a student. Correcting my teacher was the first of many scholastic challenges I faced in middle school.

My mother, being an educator, was unhappy with the shoddy quality of Spanish education I was getting at Stoller Middle School. She battled for years with the Beaverton School District (BSD) to get me a better language education. One day she told me that she was fighting for me to take Spanish classes at the nearby high school, Westview High. I was twelve years old when I heard this, and I was frightened at the thought of being twelve in a class full of students much older than me. Ultimately, this idea didn’t materialize because of conflicts between middle school and high school schedules. My mom did, however, negotiate with the school district to get more challenging Spanish materials: BSD provided me with a textbook and study materials for advanced Spanish, which I paired with Rosetta Stone for rigorous audio repetition. I studied my textbook and practiced Rosetta Stone instead of attending Spanish class. As a twelve-year-old student, I felt very privileged while I independently practiced my vocabulary in the library. When my mom accomplished this for me, I knew that Mexicans were fighters. Karla rejected educational complacency, probably because she had participated in a student exchange program that forced her to feverishly study English. She wasn’t going to let her son slip through the cracks and get lazy with his native language. I didn’t understand the value of her efforts back then, but now I see that my mother would move mountains before she let me down. She’s a hero in my eyes, and all her persistent efforts were to improve my abilities in the language she had given me. My mom raised bilingual children, and I had to meet that expectation after recognizing her efforts.

I graduated middle school and attended Westview High School, home of the Wildcats. Here is where I enrolled in Spanish 3 as a fourteen-year-old freshman, and I stood out like a sore thumb in a class of juniors and seniors. This was probably the most challenging Spanish course I ever took because it was focused on grammar and syntax, and I hadn’t really learned these specificities in my household. While I learned how to read and write in Spanish at home, I had never practiced subjunctive nor conjugations, both of which were challenging to learn. In this class, I connected with my professor because of my active participation and diligent efforts. I made friends in this class, but I could tell most of them were not practicing Spanish beyond the
classroom. To me, being Mexican means incorporating the Spanish language into my life regardless of what others around me are doing. Beyond gaining syntaxial proficiency, I also strengthened my cultural understanding of what it meant to be Mexican during high school.

Just as she did for me in elementary and middle school, my Mexican mother packed me lunches in high school. She woke up at five every single morning, started a pot of coffee, and began cooking. My mom didn’t want me eating school lunches because she believed that putting processed foods in your body had negative long-run health implications. While I ate a home-made *carnitas burrito con arroz y frijoles* (shredded pork with rice and beans), my friends teased me for sneaking out during lunch to pick up a meal at Chipotle. Joke’s on them: fast food was the last thing I wanted to eat! My mom was easily the best chef I knew. Nutrition was what sustained our bodies and minds, she said, and she took quality food seriously. I was proud and grateful to eat the way I did.

In my household, the efforts we make with our hands are how we express love. My mother showed her love for her family by cooking, and we enjoyed her cooking at the dinner table. Our round wooden table (*la mesa*) was a symbol of unity and it was the primary location for sharing stories and meals together. *La mesa* had mandatory attendance when a meal was served. Before dinner, we always prayed and blessed our food. In my house, we feel spiritually connected to the animal that gave its life for our consumption. Blessing our meal and thanking God for the animal is a very special practice to me, and this was exclusively done at the table.

While the dining table was an important symbol of family unity, we also invited friends to share a meal with us. Whenever I brought friends over, they sat at the table with my family so my parents could get to know them personally. More importantly, having guests over for dinner reflected our hospitality: we take very good care of those who come into our home. We take pride in having people come to our abode, and we treated it like a celebration and a chance to connect over conversation and food.

Sometimes, it was a struggle to put together dinner. When my dad was away on business trips and my mom was stretched thin, she would somehow whip up a delicious dinner out of
practically nothing. Once dinner was served, Karla would say, “Diosito guió mi mano”, meaning “God guided my hand”. My mom mentioned God a lot in my life, but I didn’t know that Jesus was the one who gave her this much love and energy for her children.

I didn’t really have a concept for what God was until high school. Catholicism is the primary religion in Mexico; about 80% of Mexicans identify as Catholic. In my family, my mother was the daily-practicing Catholic while my father was baptized but didn’t really exercise his religion. Despite my parents’ different religious practices, the whole family of six unified to attend mass every Sunday. Sometimes we went to Spanish mass because we were late to the English one. Either way, my family arrived wearing nice clothes, clean silver jewelry, and all holding hands. Church was a time for us to thank God for what we have as well as pray for the things we’re concerned or hopeful for.

Prior to high school, I don’t think I prayed unless my mom was praying with me. My mother was, and to this day still is, my religious mentor. At the dinner table and at church, my mother often prayed for people who were sick, family members who were struggling, and for the well-being of our entire family. I always felt safe when I prayed with my mom. I also knew that she prayed much more frequently and intensely than I did because I would hear her talking to Jesus while she was cooking. I wondered what her conversations with Him were like.

Until high school, God and myself had a relationship existing mainly inside of the walls of my home. In 2015, this changed when I became an altar server at St. Juan Diego Catholic Church in Portland, which is where my family attended mass every Sunday. As an altar server, I helped the priest during church while wearing a bleached white robe (Figure 4). Imaginably, I ended up spending more time in church and eventually joined youth group. At youth group I realized that religion is much more enjoyable, applicable, and understandable when it’s shared with others, especially students of my age. Youth group created dialogue and inquiries that I hadn’t experienced before. I brought home questions to my mom, and she helped me understand who Jesus was. I knew I loved Him, but I really gained a concept for who Jesus was when I learned that He fuels my mom. In my eyes, anything that gives my mom power and protects her is a
beautiful thing. Being Mexican and being Catholic were becoming increasingly intertwined throughout my time in high school.

Figure 4: Altar Server at Emilio's First Communion
On April 30, 2017, my little brother Emilio had his first communion at St. Juan Diego Church in Portland, OR. I was the altar server at that mass.

Faster than I realized, high school was over and I was attending Oregon State University studying Ecological Engineering and Spanish. Being at university put me in a completely different world despite only being 90 minutes away from Portland. This distance changed the
interconnected dynamic of my newly developed Mexican-Catholic identity. Being away from my Mexican household urged me to find ways to stay connected to my family, and being away from my church inclined me to becoming more introspective and diligent with my religion. Making both of these adjustments was difficult, especially since I’m family-based and a homebody. I realized that I’m both a practicing Catholic and a Spanish speaker because of my Mexican heritage, and adjusting both of those identities because of my new location was a substantial shift for me. Every day of college, I missed being back home in Portland. At the time, I felt like a stronger Lorenzo back home.

My Mexican mother raised her kids to respect, obey, serve, and love their parents. In college, students around me expressed how they felt like ‘adults’ now that they were out of the house. All of my peers were 18 or 19, which to me is far from being a true adult. But this new sense of adulthood invigorated my peers to try new, risky, and edgy things. I never adhered to their mentality because I knew I was far from a true adult. My mother is a true adult and, despite being 18 and legally considered an adult, still has a big say in the things I can and cannot do. I always listen to my mother. I always return her calls, respond to her questions truthfully, and keep her updated often. My mother never told me what to do, though; she showed me. My mother showed me that she would support me in any way, shape, and form, and she showed me that she deserves my utmost respect and reverence. I’m fiercely loyal to my mother and my family.

Since I missed them, I would drive to Portland often during the school year. Immediately, I was struck by the differences between my college life and my Mexican household. For one, my family is big and loud. In college, my room was quiet all the time and I was the only person in it. Having a big family means that the oldest inherits the most responsibilities, so coming home resulted in me doing a lot of chores. But I loved that! I took pride in the things I did to help my family because I knew that having me home was lightening the load on my mother. All hands were on deck when my mom was cooking a meal, which is a common occurrence in our Mexican household. As mentioned earlier, the kitchen and the dinner table are important symbols in Mexican culture because they represent unity, love, collaboration, and service. According to my mom, I’ve been using knives since I was four years old. In her youth she played a supportive
role in the kitchen, so she instilled the same thing in her kids. She would always give us little
tasks in the kitchen to keep us busy and involved.

When nobody helped her in the kitchen, my mom teased us that she was the gallinita roja (little
red hen). You know that you fell short of helping mamá (mom) when she mentioned the red hen.
There was a book that she used to read us as kids about this red hen living on a farm with other
farm animals. This red hen was hungry and asked all the farm animals if they wanted to go find
food with her. They rejected her request. The red hen planted wheat and asked for help
harvesting it, a request again denied by the other farm animals. The red hen asked for help
irrigating and harvesting the wheat and never got any. Once the wheat was mature she ground it
into flour, which she did without aid. At the end of the story the little red hen had a delicious loaf
of bread that she had made by herself. When it was done and she was ready to eat, all the farm
animals were eager to eat her food. The hen obviously rejected their request because none of
them had helped her. My mom read that book to myself and my siblings as kids, so it’s ingrained
in us to always help mom in the kitchen.

To this day, coming home to Portland and being in the kitchen is what makes me feel most secure
in myself and my Mexican-Catholic identity. I open the front door, smell delicious food
simmering, and am greeted with a long hug and a warm kiss from my mom Karla. Then the rest
of my family welcomes me with hugs and kisses and my arrival becomes a celebration. My
father and three younger siblings jump in to help my mom in preparing dinner and with all hands
on deck, dinner is served faster than expected. Being together as a family, in my eyes, is being in
the kitchen. Together is the dinner table. Together is church and deep prayer. My Mexican family
is a unified, beautiful, loud, usually-late, and an unusually busy group of people. But regardless
of anything, estamos juntos (we are together). I adore being Mexican, Catholic, a man, and the
oldest of four. I have been blessed to have grown and benefitted from all aspects of my identity.
As my life continues, I will share my accolades and accomplishments with my loved ones
because a celebration can’t be done alone. My current testimonio ends here, but my life is just
beginning.
**Approach**

This section will outline the steps I took to put together this project. This section will be divided into various sections, called “phases”, which are separated based on developmental milestones I achieved.

**Phase 1: Brainstorming**

Before anything, I needed to find a topic for my thesis. I knew that I wanted to employ my language fluency to serve Latinx students and families, but didn’t quite know how. Since I’ve taken many Spanish courses at OSU, I reached out to a couple professors in the World Languages and Cultures department in December of 2021 and scheduled meetings to chat about what projects would best suit the needs of my intended audience. These meetings got me closer to landing on a thesis topic because my professors provided relevant literature and resources. It was through these resources that I discovered that *testimonios* were a primary part of Latinx academic literature. I later met with Dr. Kathryn McIntosh, who gave me the idea of producing a video series highlighting my university experiences as a Latino student and framing it as a personal testimony. Soon after this meeting, Dr. Kathryn McIntosh agreed to be my thesis mentor in January of 2022. I then connected with a handful of trusted professors and Oregon State faculty members and invited them to be in my thesis committee. Within thirty days I had selected a thesis topic, a thesis mentor, and a committee of people who would review and help improve my project. The next step was to secure support from an OSU office so that I could put together my video.

**Phase 2: Finding support for my topic**

Since I was doing a project to serve Latinx students and families, I needed to find an office that shares my audience. Dr. McIntosh and myself met with a variety of program leaders at OSU before meeting with Dr. Susan Rowe, the Director of Precollege Programs. This unit at OSU hosts outreach programs to support underrepresented youth and their previous projects seemed to echo intentions similar to mine. Thankfully, their program had the resources, time, and institutional framework to support my thesis endeavors and I officially partnered with Precollege
Programs in February of 2022. At this point, I needed to film my video series and write my thesis.

**Phase 3: Filming**

Before filming with Precollege Programs, I needed to develop the central messages of my video series. To help organize my thoughts, I put together a goal hierarchy where all of the general goals feed into the consequent, more specific goals (Figure 5). This hierarchy is a way to visualize a network of organized goals rather than create a list of disjointed ones. I chose three central themes that I wanted my video series to encompass, which I called Las Metas (the goals). From these three overarching themes, I developed three pieces of advice pertinent to those goals, called Los Consejos (the advice). Each piece of advice has three actions that help realize said advice, called Las Acciones (the actions).
Once I created this roadmap, I needed to divide these goals into digestible portions of information that I would include in a series of videos. I chose to write five separate scripts for five videos. Each script had its own combination of elements from the goal hierarchy from Figure 5. Each script also had an explicit location associated with it, strategically selected to include the core parts of my college experience. Once I had a set of goals, a script, and video locations, I reached out to Precollege Programs’ student media assistants and we set a date and time to film. Once the film date was set for May 2022, I reached out to the people working at my five film locations to let them know that I was filming in their space. When the film date came, two student media assistants recorded my monologue while the other assistant took photos of the process. We spent three hours filming together and had substantial footage and photographs. Below are some photos of the filming process. For the Spanish and English subtitles for each shot, see Figures 13 through 22 in the Appendix.
Figure 7: Shot 2 at West Hall
Sitting outside of the Honors-exclusive residence hall that I had once lived at. Students who connect with their surrounding communities get the most out of university.

Figure 8: Shot 3 inside Sackett Hall
Filming inside of Sackett hall where I landed my first job by chatting with the Dean of the HC. Advocating for oneself yields fruitful opportunities.
Describing my anaerobic digester senior design project. During university, the challenges we overcome empower us to believe in our abilities.

Wearing all my Honors regalia reflecting on all the lessons I’ve learned at OSU. Every opportunity must be seen as a stepping stone to the next.
Phase 4: Putting it all together

Shortly after gathering raw footage, I sent a thank-you email to the student media assistants and to Dr. Rowe for supporting my endeavors. By this point, Alyssa Pratt, one of the student media assistants, had been officially assigned to my project and agreed to work on it throughout the summer. Alyssa and I met a couple of times to discuss progress on the video series.

By June 2022, I had begun to compile little memories and notes about my life and development as a Latino. Over the summer, I pieced together my life story (see Mi Testimonio section) and worked on other parts of my written thesis. Once September arrived, I had a rough draft of my thesis that I sent to Dr. McIntosh for review. After receiving feedback from her, I applied her feedback and sent her and Dr. Rowe a polished draft for further review.

In October, I had been finalizing the video series with Alyssa. Once each of the five videos was edited the way I liked, Alyssa posted these mp4 videos on YouTube as ‘unlisted’ videos, meaning that nobody else could see them besides the people with the precise URL. This was a way for us to see what the videos would look like once they were uploaded and viewable to the public. YouTube had auto-generated Spanish and English subtitles for five videos, all of which I had to comb through and correct for syntax and vocabulary. Once the videos and subtitles looked good, Alyssa built a webpage on the Precollege website where my five videos would be ‘housed’. I wrote the captions for this webpage, and also wrote the announcement that would be broadcasted on both Precollege and SMILE websites. This announcement would lead viewers to the webpage that Alyssa created. All online resources that we posted on Precollege and SMILE included a link to my written Honors thesis, which is housed on Scholar Archives at OSU.

Next was to set a thesis defense date. I looked through my schedule and compiled a variety of dates and times that I was available for a two-hour thesis defense. I sent out a poll to my thesis committee members to see which of these dates and times worked for them, and we set a date late in fall term. Three weeks in advance from the defense date, I sent my thesis committee my final written thesis and a link to the website so they could preview my work and develop questions ahead of time. I also sent out thesis defense invitations to my family, colleagues, professors, and supporters. The thesis defense was in-person but I also recorded it for those who
couldn’t attend. After defending, I implemented the edits that my committee suggested and submitted my final written thesis to the Honors College in December of 2022. I sent handwritten thank-you letters to those who have supported me through this journey.
Conclusion and Looking Forward

This video series was a personally fulfilling way to use my Spanish fluency to impact young Latinx learners and their families. Since the start of this project, its applicability and reach have broadened significantly in scope. This thesis project began as a way to team up with OSU-backed programs to increase Latinx enrollment at the institution. Now, with the project live and accessible to the public, it’s clear that this project can do much more. This testimonio video series shows young learners that their collegiate path can take many different directions and any path is a way towards vertical mobility. This project is a calling to other underrepresented minorities to share their experiences in creative ways to benefit the next generation of incoming college students. This project is beyond recruitment: it’s about underrepresented minorities dismantling oppressive social structures by sharing stories, experiences, emotions, struggles, and successes. I hope to see many more outreach and underrepresented recruitment efforts on behalf of Oregon State University, all of which would help inch the institution closer to HSI status.

As mentioned in the Literature Review section, being an HSI means much more than enrolling Latinx students. To adequately support Latinx students in university, the institution needs physical, social, and cultural infrastructure. A shortcoming of my testimonio is that it does not contribute to creating any of these infrastructures, but rather serves as a resource that my target demographic can use to learn more about student life.

Another shortcoming of my thesis project is that it only offers a masculine perspective on university life. This is my personal testimonio and since my gender is male, I could only accurately speak on my male perspective. However, my project opens up the possibility for other students with various gender identities to express themselves, therefore adding to the information pool available to Latinx and other underrepresented communities. Non-traditional anecdotal information contributes to shifting the power dynamic of universities into the hands of historically underrepresented students.
It was beyond the scope of this project to measure the impact of my video series. There are various metrics that I could record, like fluctuations in Latinx enrollment, average Latinx GPA over time, or Latinx on-campus involvement. Because of the timeframe of this project, collecting and analyzing this data was infeasible. Also, it would be counterproductive to measure these metrics. As mentioned in the Introduction section, OSU has the long-term goal of becoming an HSI. While my project aligns with those intentions, I cannot say that my video series resulted in higher Latinx enrollment at OSU. Fortunately, this project will have a long-term impact on Latinx students and their families because of its ability to be used continuously over time by the offices that supported the creation of it. My testimonio is one of the few that have come from Latinx OSU students in STEM, and my intention is that many more projects similar to this one follow it.

If OSU wanted to bolster its Latinx representation, there are a variety of things it could do. The HERE Act is a good resource to use when looking for certain actions that educational institutions should take if they want to receive government funding for Latinx-related projects. The state of Oregon is in an advantageous position to use the HERE Act because it’s demographically moving towards becoming more Latino, meaning that OSU has a great foundation for accomplishing its goal of becoming a HSI.

Dr. Antonio Flores, President and CEO of HACU, described how community colleges that enroll high amounts of Hispanic students are the funnels to increase HSI status at several emerging institutions (Flores, López-Cevallos, & Davis-White Eyes, 2021). Oregon State University is one of those upcoming institutions that is close to eHSI status. Therefore, OSU must team up with community colleges around the state to install outreach programs to support Latinx students.

According to Padilla (2022), institutions wanting to get funding from the HERE Act should start by “supporting students through the college application and transition process”. There are OSU programs that already do this, and my project aligns with this suggestion. Also, OSU should look to address non-academic needs that inhibit “college enrollment, persistence, and completion”. These barriers include child care and food insecurity, which OSU offices and programs would have a good pulse on addressing. Since OSU has ample infrastructure to complete these tasks
and others, it needs to partner with community colleges to support their Latinx student body so that these students can transfer from a two-year college to a four-year university. Oregon has all the ingredients to become an HSI powerhouse like California (HACU, 2021), and my honors thesis project is one step towards increasing Latinx representation and enrollment at Oregon’s top STEM university.
References


Hernández-Ávila, I. (2002). In the presence of spirit(s): A meditation on the politics of solidarity and transformation. In G. E. Anzaldúa & A. Keating (Eds.), This bridge we call home (pp. 160–539). New York: Routledge.


Appendix

Figure 11: URLs and Text for Custom Precollege Webpages
The URLs below are where my testimonio video series lives. These are followed by the text on the webpage. Everything digital was created and finalized by Alyssa Pratt, a Student Media Assistant at Precollege Programs.

Spanish Webpage: https://precollege.oregonstate.edu/si-se-puede

English Webpage: https://precollege.oregonstate.edu/yes-you-can

Spanish and English webpage text:

¡Sí, se puede!
Yes, you can!

¡Saludos a todos! Me llamo Lorenzo Curtis, y estoy en el Colegio de Honores en Oregon State estudiando ingeniería ecológica y español. Esta página incluye cinco videos que detallan mi testimonio personal como un Latino en la universidad. Cada video tiene su lección individual. Espero que la información en estos videos te inspiren a hacer preguntas, aprender más, buscar guianza, planear tu futuro, atender la universidad, y perseguir tus sueños. Todo está dentro de tu alcance… ¡Sí, se puede!

Hello, everyone! My name is Lorenzo Curtis, and I am in the Honors College at Oregon State studying Ecological Engineering and Spanish. This page includes five videos that detail my personal testimony as a Latino in university. Each video has its own individual takeaway. I hope the information in these videos inspires you to ask questions, learn more, seek guidance, plan your future, attend university, and chase your dreams. Everything is well within your reach… Yes, you can!

Video 1: ¡Sí, se puede! (Yes, you can!)
Video 2: Las Comunidades (The Communities)
Video 3: Las Conexiones (The Connections)
Video 4: Ten Confianza (Have Confidence)
Video 5: Los Próximos Pasos (The Next Steps)

Estoy sumamente agradecido por los que me han apoyado durante esta aventura. Claro, mis padres y mi bella familia me dan toda la energía del mundo. Doy gracias a mi mentor, Dra. Kathryn McIntosh, por guiarme en cada aspecto durante este proceso. Mil gracias a la Dra. Susan Rowe y a los Programas de Precollege y SMILE. Gracias a mi colega Alyssa Pratt por su sabiduría tecnológica, por sus esfuerzos diligentes, y por siempre ser humilde. Agradezco a todos mis mentores en el Honors College y a todos los profesores y educadores que he tenido la bendición de conocer. Sobre todo, este proyecto es para la próxima generación de estudiantes Latinxs - Ustedes me inspiraron a crear estos videos y a dedicar mi vida para mejorar la representación de nuestra raza. ¡Sí, se puede!

I am beyond grateful for everyone that has supported me throughout this adventure. Of course, my parents and my beautiful family give me all the energy in the world. I am deeply thankful for my mentor, Dr. Kathryn McIntosh, for guiding me in every aspect throughout this process. I am indebted to Dr. Susan Rowe, Director Precollege and SMILE Programs, for supporting my video endeavors. Thank you, Alyssa Pratt, for your technological know-how, diligent efforts, and constant humility. I thank all my mentors in the Honors College and all of the professors and educators who I have been so blessed to connect with. Over everything, this project is for the next generation of Latinx students - You all inspired me to create these videos and to dedicate my life to improving the representation of minorities. Yes, you can!

www.linkedin.com/in/lorenzomichaelcurtis
https://honors.oregonstate.edu/
https://dce.oregonstate.edu/cccc
https://precollege.oregonstate.edu/
https://smile.oregonstate.edu/
Below is the text used for the Precollege and SMILE Programs announcement. These online announcements aim to attract attention to my thesis project.

**Spanish and English Announcement Text:**

*La Epistemología de un Latino Comunicado por una Serie de Videos Testimoniales*

A Latino’s Epistemology Through a Testimonio Video Series

*Los testimonios poseen relevancia cultural para estudiantes, padres, y familias Latinxs. Compartir un testimonio significa más que contar una historia - En esta serie de videos detallando sus experiencias como un estudiante latino estudiando ingeniería, Lorenzo M. Curtis ilustra sus cinco lecciones fundamentales que aprendió durante sus cuatro años en Oregon State University.*

La meta de este testimonio grabado es sacudir la estructura de poder en instituciones académicas por distribuir recursos relevantes, accesibles, y útiles a latinxs. Esta serie de videos está acompañada por un tesis escrito para el colegio de Honores, ambos en este enlace: https://precollege.oregonstate.edu/si-se-puede

*Testimonios (personal testimonies) have immense cultural relevance for Latinx students, parents, and families. Conveying a testimonio involves more than story-telling… In this video series detailing his experiences as a Latino student in STEM, Honors College senior Lorenzo M. Curtis illustrates his five key takeaways from his four years at Oregon State University. The goal of this testimonio video series is to shift the power structure at academic institutions by providing relevant, accessible, and useful resources to historically-underrepresented minorities, namely Latinxs. This video series is accompanied by a written Honors thesis, both of which can be accessed here: [https://precollege.oregonstate.edu/yes-you-can](https://precollege.oregonstate.edu/yes-you-can)*

*La meta de Lorenzo para este proyecto es motivar estudiantes latinxs para aprender más sobre la universidad y eventualmente atenderla. Adicionalmente, él espera que más estudiantes se inspiren a producir proyectos semejantes que, sobre tiempo, mejorarán la representación de latinxs en universidades. Sabir la representación de esa demografía acercaría Oregon State a su meta de convertirse a una institución que sirve estudiantes hispanos. Aprende más sobre las metas de OSU aquí: [https://diversity.oregonstate.edu/webinar-event-osu-emerging-hispanic-serving-institution-conversation-dr-antonio-flores](https://diversity.oregonstate.edu/webinar-event-osu-emerging-hispanic-serving-institution-conversation-dr-antonio-flores)*

*His goal for this project is to influence young Latinx students to learn more about and attend university. Additionally, he hopes to see more Latinx students produce similar projects that, in the long-run, will boost Latinx representation at universities. Increasing Latinx representation will push Oregon State towards its goal of becoming a Hispanic-Serving Institution. Learn more about that here: [https://diversity.oregonstate.edu/webinar-event-osu-emerging-hispanic-serving-institution-conversation-dr-antonio-flores](https://diversity.oregonstate.edu/webinar-event-osu-emerging-hispanic-serving-institution-conversation-dr-antonio-flores)*

*Lorenzo es un ingeniero ecológico con una sub-especialidad en español. Él aprendió español como su primera lengua, la cual recibió de su madre quien nació en Monterrey, México.*

*Lorenzo is an Ecological Engineer minoring in Spanish. He is a native Spanish speaker, having been taught the language from his mother born in Monterrey, México.*
Hola a todos yo me llamo Lorenzo Miguel Curtis Barrett.

Yo estoy en mi cuarto año aquí en Oregon State University

Estoy estudiando la ingeniería ecológica y tengo una sub especialidad en español.

Entonces hace cuatro años yo empecé mi aventura aquí en Oregon State University.

En realidad yo tenía muchos nervios y mucho miedo sobre la situación iba a estar lejos.

de mi casa yo temía ser aislado de todo especialmente de mi familia quien yo amo.

y en realidad fue un desafío muy grande empezar mi tiempo aquí en Oregon State.

Pero mis padres me motivaron para venir aquí a la universidad para aprender, a crecer, y a educarme.

El tiempo pasó y yo tuve más confianza en yo mismo.

en mis habilidades y en lo que yo puedo realizar aquí en mi tiempo.

Entonces durante estos cuatro años yo he aprendido muchísimas cosas no solamente sobre yo mismo pero sobre el mundo alrededor de mí he hecho muchas conexiones fantásticas y valorosas y espero que ustedes tengan una experiencia semejante.

acuérdate con fe cuando te pones las pilas y cuando tienes confianza y haces conexiones.

¡Sí, se puede!
Hello everyone, my name is Lorenzo Miguel Curtis Barrett. I'm in my fourth year here at Oregon State University. I'm studying Ecological Engineering and I have a minor in Spanish. Four years ago I started my adventure here at Oregon State University. In reality, I had many nerves and many fears about the situation. I was going to be away from home; I was afraid of being isolated from everything, especially from my family, who I love. And in reality it was a very big challenge to start my time here at Oregon State. But my parents motivated me to come here to college to learn, to grow, and educate myself. Time passed and I had more self-confidence, in my abilities, and in what I can accomplish here in my time. During these four years I have learned many things, not only about myself but about the world around me. I have made many fantastic and valuable connections and I hope you will have a similar experience. Remember: with faith, when you gain momentum, and when you have confidence and make those connections, you can!
Hola a todos

Entonces ahora yo estoy afuera de West Hall yo vivía aquí en mi tercer año aquí en OSU y yo trabajé como un Resident Assistant que significa RA y esencialmente mi trabajo es planear eventos y hacer amistades y durante mi tiempo aquí he notado unas cuantas cosas que los estudiantes quienes disfrutaron su tiempo la mayoría del tiempo ellos no estaban en sus cuartos y los estudiantes quienes estaban teniendo dificultades conectándose y encontrando amigos siempre estaban en sus cuartos entonces una de las cosas que yo he notado es que cuando uno se conecta con las comunidades alrededor de ellos no solamente viviendo aquí pero en OSU y pasado de OSU uno se divierte muchísimo más durante su tiempo aquí en la universidad la meta en vivir en campus es que la universidad se sienta como tu casa entonces cuando vengas aquí espero que tú te involuques en diferentes comunidades actividades y que atiendas muchos eventos con tus amigos
You feel more involved in college when you're connected to the communities around you.

Hello everyone.

So now I'm outside of West Hall I lived here my third year here at OSU and I worked as a Resident Assistant which stands for RA and essentially my job is planning events and making friends and during my time here I've noticed a few things that the students who enjoyed their time most of the time they weren't in their rooms and the students who were having a hard time connecting and finding friends were always in their rooms so one of the things that I've noticed is that when one connects with the communities around them not only living here but at OSU and beyond OSU you have a lot more fun during your time here at college.

The goal of living on campus is for the university to feel like home.

so when you come here I hope you get involved in different communities activities and attend many events with your friends.
Hola, entonces yo estoy aquí en Sackett Hall

Yo viví aquí en mi primer y también en mi segundo año en OSU y he tenido unas muy buenas memorias aquí pero una de las memorias favoritas mías fue de hecho era un evento donde estábamos almorzando con la decana del Honors College. Se llama Dra. Toni Doolen y me acuerdo era el primer día que yo estaba aquí en campus y estaba aquí con mis padres y sabía que la decana estaba aquí y tenía muchos nervios porque no quería hablar con ella y no sabía qué decir pero mis padres me dijeron, “Oye, preséntate. Ella es humana, está bien” y me presenté con ella y le dije que soy un ingeniero, soy bilingüe y también estoy buscando trabajo. Un poco más tiempo después de eso ella me ayudó a encontrar un trabajo como un embajador para el Honors College y todavía tengo ese trabajo cuatro años después entonces durante tu tiempo aquí en la universidad vas a conocer a muchas nuevas personas, vas a explorar quién eres tú, y también vas a tener muchas nuevas experiencias que van a ayudarte a crecer como un humano, como un estudiante, como un hijo o hija y vas a tener muchas oportunidades para crecer entonces estoy emocionado para ver cómo vas a crecer tú
The connections you make will take you to new opportunities and new heights. Hi, so I'm here at Sackett Hall.

I lived here my first and also my second year at OSU and I've had some really good memories here but one of my favorite memories was actually an event where we were having lunch with the dean of the Honors College. Her name is Dr. Toni Doolen and I remember it was the first day I was here on campus and I was here with my parents and I knew that the dean was here and I was very nervous because I didn't want to talk to her and I didn't know what to say but my parents told me, "Hey, introduce yourself. She's a human, it's ok" and I introduced myself to her and told her I'm an engineer, I'm bilingual, and I'm also looking for a job. A little later after that event she helped me find a job as an ambassador for the Honors College and I still have that job four years later. During your time here at university you're going to meet a lot of new people, you're going to explore who you are, and you're also going to have a lot of new experiences that are going to help you grow as a human, as a student, as a son or daughter and you are going to have many opportunities to grow so I am excited to see how you are going to grow.
Figure 19: Spanish subtitles for Shot 4
0:00:00.000,0:00:12.600
Hola a todos estoy aquí en Gilmore Hall

0:00:12.600,0:00:18.480
Es el edificio y la casa de los ingenieros biológicos y ecológicos como yo

0:00:18.480,0:00:27.360
Detrás de mí es un proyecto que me ha tomado un año hacer lo he hecho con un grupo de colegas

0:00:27.360,0:00:32.880
muy capaces y muy inteligentes y aunque sí ha sido un desafío grandísimo también

0:00:32.880,0:00:37.800
ha sido un desafío un proyecto muy, muy divertido entonces se los voy a explicar

0:00:37.800,0:00:45.840
esto es una máquina de digestión anaeróbica entonces en nuestro proyecto tomamos agua sucia

0:00:45.840,0:01:00.240
que viene de una cervecería y la ponemos aquí en esta máquina que está llena de diferentes tipos de bacteria y esta bacteria se come la agua sucia de la cervecería, y esa bacteria crea metano

0:01:00.240,0:01:05.640
Y eso es un gas que usamos para cocinar y para calentar a nuestras casas

0:01:05.640,0:01:10.380
Entonces este proyecto tiene muchas metas pero una de las cosas que yo he aprendido

0:01:10.380,0:01:16.200
sobre este proyecto es que durante tu tiempo aquí en la universidad vas a realizar metas

0:01:16.200,0:01:22.320
y vas a llegar a hacer cosas que nunca hubieras pensado que eran posibles entonces hacen un año

0:01:22.320,0:01:29.640
Hace cuatro años yo nunca pensé que yo pudiera hacer investigación o un proyecto de este tamaño pero

0:01:29.640,0:01:35.760
después de haberlo hecho he aprendido tantísimas cosas y estoy emocionado para aprender aún más

0:01:35.760,0:01:37.920
Y acuérdate, sí se puede
Figure 20: English subtitles for Shot 4

00:00:01.602,00:00:08.008
Have confidence in yourself because you are going to achieve goals that you never imagined

00:00:08.008,00:00:12.600
Hello everyone, I am here in Gilmore Hall

00:00:12.600,00:00:18.480
It is the building and the home of Biological and Ecological Engineers, like me

00:00:18.480,00:00:27.360
Behind me is a project that has taken me a year to do, I have done it with a group of

00:00:27.360,00:00:32.880
very capable and very intelligent colleagues, and although it has been a big challenge it

00:00:32.880,00:00:37.800
has also been a very, very fun project so I am going to explain

00:00:37.800,00:00:45.840
this to you. This is an anaerobic digestion machine, so in our project we take dirty water

00:00:45.840,00:00:50.940
that comes from a brewery and we put it here in this machine that's full of different

00:00:50.940,00:01:00.240
types of bacteria and this bacteria eats the dirty water from the brewery, and

00:01:00.240,00:01:05.640
that bacteria creates methane

00:01:05.640,00:01:07.680
And that's a gas that we use to cook and to heat our houses

00:01:07.680,00:01:10.380
So this project has many goals but one of the things that I have learned

00:01:10.380,00:01:16.200
from this project is that during your time here at the university you are going to achieve goals

00:01:16.200,00:01:22.320
and you are going to do things that you would never have thought were possible

00:01:22.320,00:01:29.640
A year ago, four years ago I never thought that I could be doing research or a project of this size but

00:01:29.640,00:01:35.760
after having done it I have learned so many things and I am excited to learn even more

00:01:35.760,00:01:37.920
And remember, yes, you can!
Hola a todos. Hemos llegado al fin de mi serie de vídeos y yo he llegado al fin de mi experiencia aquí en Oregon State University. Han sido cuatro años fantásticos, educacionales pero también difíciles y he aprendido tantas cosas en mi tiempo aquí no solamente de mí mismo pero del mundo alrededor de mí. Yo espero que ustedes tomen ventaja de cada oportunidad que les venga en sus vidas y que ustedes hagan lo máximo de cada oportunidad que venga porque nuestro tiempo aquí es muy corto. Salud y acuérdate que sí se puede.

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Hello everyone. We have come to the end of my video series and I have come to the end of my experience here at college. It has been a fantastic, educational, but also difficult four years and I have learned so many things in my time here not only about myself but about the world around me. I hope that you take advantage of every opportunity that comes your way and that you make the most of every opportunity that comes because our time here is very short. Cheers and remember yes, you can!
Figure 23: The Curtis Bunch at the Latino Family Night
Taken in November of 2019 at Hillsboro Highschool. Andrés (blue), Emilio (beige), Daniela (orange), and myself (black). This was the event that inspired this video series thesis project.
Figure 24: Lorenzo y César Chávez
My favorite photo taken during the filming process. ¡Acuérdate, sí, se puede! (Remember, yes, you can!)