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Treading Borders: How College and Community Cultures Shape the Upwardly Mobile Experiences of Mexican-Origin Students

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Treading Borders: How College and Community Cultures Shape the Upwardly Mobile  
Experiences of Mexican-Origin Students

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Sociology

by

Alma Nidia Garza

Dissertation Committee:  
Professor Cynthia Feliciano, Co-Chair  
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2020



## DEDICATION

To

DA/SG, AI/DE, JD/KS and KI/AJ/SA

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Treading Borders: How College and Community Cultures Shape the Upwardly Mobile  
Experiences of Mexican-Origin Students

by

Alma Nidia Garza

Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

University of California, Irvine, 2020

Professor Cynthia Feliciano, Co-Chair

Professor Rubén Rumbaut, Co-Chair

For students from working-class backgrounds, a college degree is often viewed as the most reliable way to achieve upward mobility. Although existing studies assessing upward mobility in college tend to focus on the racially exclusionary experiences of Hispanics or the devaluation of working-class culture, this study bridges the gap between race and social class studies. This research adopts a racialized class lens to investigate how the upwardly mobile trajectories of working class, Mexican-origin students differ based on the selectivity of the school they attend as well as the community in which that school is located.

Using semi-structured interviews and participant observation, I compare the experiences of 60 working class, Mexican-origin students across two universities. Thirty respondents attended a moderately selective, flagship institution located in an urban, middle-class metropolis

and their co-ethnic counterparts attended a regional, Hispanic-serving institution. I conducted a total of 60 student interviews and recorded in-depth observations for a 16-week period.

Whereas key institutional processes, such as classroom content, leadership program opportunities and organizational cultural offerings challenged students to alter discourse techniques and lifestyle patterns in the moderately selective, flagship school, students attending the regionally accessible university experienced fewer challenges to do so. The flagship university thus valorized mainstream, middle-class cosmopolitan cultures but provided limited opportunities for student respondents to exercise valuable ethnic cultural skills. Students attending the Hispanic-serving, regional university, on the other hand, experienced their working-class, racial-ethnic culture as dominant cultural capital in the university but had fewer opportunities to develop mainstream, middle-class cultural skills.

This research illuminates how a horizontally stratified university system hinders access to valued forms of cultural knowledge. I argue that while a four-year college degree facilitates access to middle-class occupations, contextual characteristics associated with a school's selectivity shape the extent to which Hispanic students can access skills that enable them to navigate mainstream cultural arenas and remain engaged in non-dominant ones. Thus, inequality in the college-for-all era becomes increasingly characterized not solely based on overt forms of exclusion but by the cultural tradeoffs involved as upwardly-mobile minorities attempt to broaden their opportunity structures.



## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

Rushing towards the school gym, I spun my head to gather a glimpse of my surroundings.

Nightfall had begun to descend on the balmy, September evening. Green open fields stretched for miles beyond the school grounds with minimal signs of human activity save for the parked vehicles in the isolated parking lot. “Please let this be the right middle school,” I mumbled as I reached for the gym door. Mentally wading through the sounds of shrieking whistles, continuous volleyball thuds and enthralled parent cheers, I quickly scanned the gymnasium. “There!” I sighed in relief as I spotted the young undergrad whose poise and sophistication made it difficult to avoid confusing her for the team coach. Dressed in a white undershirt, a sharp black blazer, jeans and black shoes, Aracely sat with the volleyball athletes on the team bench. Not only were Aracely and her former volleyball coach extraordinarily good friends, but Aracely’s sister was also playing on the junior high volleyball team tonight. Since it was parents’ night, Aracely would stand with her sister, in representation of her mother, who had passed away when Aracely was 16.

A second-year undergraduate enrolled at Regional State University, the local four-year university, Aracely managed a hectic school and work schedule with the grace and composure sleep-deprived undergraduates envied. Aracely had graduated as the valedictorian of her approximately 500-student senior high school class. An all-star athlete, she had not only already been featured in *Sports Illustrated* but had also earned a prestigious regional award for her accomplishments as a student athlete. Aracely could have attended any university in the state, including more competitive ones across the country. Despite her teacher’s insistence that she pursue undergraduate study in someplace other than Liberty Stream, her socioeconomically

disadvantaged, predominantly Mexican-American hometown, Aracely's response was simple: Why do I need to leave for a teaching degree if I can get one here?

Aracely's question illuminates an issue that has stirred enormous debate since an expanding system of higher education enabled students from all walks of life to pursue a four-year degree: does school type really make a difference on one's future outcomes? In 2018, the college admissions scandal magnified the depths of inequality in higher education. As part of Operation Varsity Blues, federal investigators charged just under three dozen of the nation's wealthiest parents with conspiring to gain illicit admission into elite schools for their children (Reilly 2020; Wong 2019). That parents would risk federal prosecution so their children could graduate from an elite college highlighted both the power and appeal of school prestige. The college admissions scandal further intensified debates regarding the accessibility of the type of institutions perceived as delivering the highest quality of education for racial-ethnic minorities and socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

Scholars Anthony P. Carnevale and Jeff Strohl (2013) have traced the inequality that cuts across a horizontally stratified system of higher education. They report that the top 468 colleges in the United States (U.S.) not only enroll a disproportionate share of affluent White students, but also spend approximately two to five times more per student than less selective schools. Open access two and four-year, low-tuition colleges, on the other hand, enroll significantly greater numbers of low-income Hispanics and African-Americans (Carnevale and Strohl 2013). The researchers add that between 1995 and 2009, of the population of White students that enrolled in college, 82% of new White college student entrants matriculated in the top 468 most selective institutions in the country. In contrast, 72% of new Hispanic enrollees attended two-year and four-year open access schools (Carnevale and Strohl 2013).

Recent demographic shifts across degree granting postsecondary institutions highlight the importance of addressing how four-year universities across the selectivity spectrum meet the needs of their growing Hispanic student bodies. As the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES) researchers report, the number of Hispanic undergraduates enrolled in college observed the greatest percentage increase (134%) of all major racial-ethnic groups between 2000 and 2016 (de Brey et al. 2019). They add that in 2016, Hispanics comprised 19 percent of the total share of undergraduates enrolled in degree-granting institutions. Hispanic enrollment in four-year schools not only doubled between 1996 to 2016, but Hispanics surpassed Blacks as the largest minority enrolled in minimally selective four-year schools (Fry and Cilluffo 2019). By fall 2026, the number of Hispanics in degree-granting colleges and universities is expected to undergo a 26% increase, rising from 3.3 million in 2015 to 4.1 million (Hussar and Bailey 2018). This change is the largest percent increase of all major racial-ethnic groups (see Hussar and Bailey 2018).

A large number of scholars have investigated whether attending a more selective<sup>1</sup> university results in any meaningful advantages for students. As it relates to issues regarding learning and cognitive growth, findings have been slightly inconsistent. A few that have compared student growth, for instance, identify trivial or non-significant differences in the learning gains or good practices of more and less selective universities (Braxton 1993; Kuh and Hu 2001; Pascarella et al. 2006). One recent study using quantitative observational data, however, concluded that courses offered in more prestigious public institutions were characterized by a greater degree of cognitive complexity than courses offered in less prestigious institutions (Campbell, Jiménez and Arrozal 2019). Less prestigious institutions in Campbell et al.'s (2019) study, however, had more supportive teaching practices. Although education and

psycholinguistics scholar, Jean Anyon (1980; 1981), finds that classroom teaching and learning practices are stratified according to the social class composition of schools, class-based dimensions of curriculum competencies in college have received limited research scrutiny.<sup>2</sup>

The potential advantages regarding the employment and occupational payoffs of attending a more selective or prestigious institution has also generated a great deal of research scrutiny. Although some studies have found significant associations between school selectivity and earnings (Mueller 1988; Loury and Garman 1995; Bowen and Bok [1998]2016), others find that attending a more selective school results in positive returns only for Black, Hispanic and students whose parents possess low levels of education (Dale and Krueger 2011). Yet, while a degree from an elite institution raises the likelihood that an employer will respond to an applicant, Black applicants from elite institutions are more likely to receive responses for lower-paying jobs and for non-managerial positions (Gaddis 2015). Prior research illustrates that while the question of whether university selectivity results in meaningful academic or occupational advantages isn't a novel one, the one underlying Aracely's rhetorical challenge and the one we have yet to ask is. Beyond potential outcome differences, *how* do characteristics associated with the selectivity of a university impact student development? More specifically, how do these institutional features shape the upwardly mobile trajectories of students like Aracely, low income and working-class Hispanics of Mexican descent?

### *Objective*

In this study I compare the academic experiences of low-income and working-class Hispanic students across two, four-year public universities. One university is a regionally-accessible Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) and the other school is a moderately selective, flagship university. My goal is to understand how school offerings and curriculum processes prepare

students to navigate an upwardly mobile class culture. I argue that although college may facilitate economic mobility, structural demographic characteristics associated with a school's selectivity play a critical role in the extent to which a four-year degree enables cultural proficiency—students' ability to develop and nurture habits that help them successfully navigate multiple cultural arenas. While a moderately selective institution sought to equip students with the habits and preferences that thrive in mainstream, middle-class cultures, it also limited students' opportunities to exercise practices tied to their social class and racial-ethnic origins. A less selective, regionally-accessible university, on the other hand, while providing students significantly greater opportunities to exercise behaviors and preferences rooted in their working-class, Mexican origins, was less effective at equipping students with mainstream middle-class practices.

Resources matter. This study will reinforce that differences in university funding play an important role in the relative opportunities that the two schools make available for their students. However, beyond the impact that differential resources have on student development, I find that universities shape upwardly mobile lifestyles in starkly contrasting ways due to the ways in which cultural characteristics associated with dominant groups on-campus permeate institutional affairs. These widespread tendencies exert a strong influence on the thought and action patterns of all students on campus and in particular, vulnerable minorities whom universities perceive as having the greatest need for a college roadmap. Thus, the relative degree to which school administrators, course professors, university staff and other students reinforce dominant group cultural practices in everyday affairs, help shape the set of skills that end up comprising a student's upwardly mobile class culture.

### *Class Culture and the University*

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984) proposed that social classes are both ranked and distributed according to their relative stocks of economic, cultural and social capital. Whereas economic and social capital emphasize the value that inheres in money and relationships respectively, cultural capital includes any form of cultural competence that generates material and/or symbolic profits (Bourdieu [1986]2002). While cultural or aesthetic interests are resources that help students achieve distinction, it is the tastes, attitudes and skills of the most privileged students that receive greater rewards in school (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979; Bourdieu 1973). As an example, studies have demonstrated that gatekeepers both value and reward the discursive practices (Shoshana 2017; Lubienski 2000), help-seeking strategies (Calarco 2011) and impression management techniques (Foley 1990) of students from middle-class backgrounds over those of their low-income and low-status peers. Scholars who have assessed how childrearing (Bernstein [1973]2003; Chin and Phillips 2004; Lareau 2011), consumption (Bryson 1996; Peterson and Simkus 1992; Holt 1998), mobility (DiMaggio 1982; Streib 2017), moral worth (Lamont 2000) and self-oriented (Stephens et al. 2014) behaviors vary across social class lines, have further contributed to a growing body of knowledge regarding the belief systems and lifestyle practices that differentiate working class from middle-class culture. As a result, beyond its economic capital or purchasing power, cultural aptitudes in the form of interests, tastes and expressions are also defining characteristics of a class culture.

Modelled after European cultural ideals, schools and universities during colonial America were designed to impart intellectual training emphasizing a religious orientation and a classical linguistics curriculum (Lee 1963). As higher education historian John R. Thelin (2011) documents, colleges educated men from the wealthiest families and prepared them to assume the

responsibilities they would inherit from powerful and influential family enterprises. By the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, adolescents began to view a college education as means by which they could grow earnings and also improve their social status (Thelin 2011). Recent studies also support the enduring elite and middle-class cultural persona of the university. Colleges and universities are sites where low-income students adopt the linguistic, dress and presentation styles of the middle-class (Aries and Seider 2005; London 1992) and those who are already endowed with middle-class skills experience easier college transitions, often claiming greater academic and social payoffs (Jack 2019; Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Stuber 2011). These processes help explain why the university is widely regarded as transmitting the cultural skills of the upper classes and why numerous students of low-income backgrounds pursue a college degree as a means of improving their socioeconomic standing.

Studies of higher education adopting a comparative cultural lens, however, reveal that institutional characteristics and community contexts play a salient role in shaping school cultures. Educational sociologists in the inhabited institution tradition, for instance, demonstrate that factors like community socioeconomic characteristics, student demographics, curriculum structures and surrounding employers, condition how individuals enact organizational meaning systems at a local level (Binder, Davis and Bloom 2016; Reyes 2018; Nunn 2014). Not only do socialization processes vary based on the class status of the communities in which schools are located (Stephens et al. 2014) but social class also permeates an organization's culture (McDonough 1997). Revealing a correlation between a high school's organizational habitus and the relative prestige of students' college choices, McDonough (1997) highlights that school settings do not always reflect middle class cultural outlooks. Because students attending differentially resourced high schools felt entitled to colleges or universities that aligned with

their opportunity structures, McDonough (1997) argues that familial inputs and school resources shape class-based collegiate aspirations.

Through this study, I demonstrate that although driven to nurture a similar set of universal ideals, including individualism, intellectual fulfillment and competition, governing traits of the middle-classes, universities reproduce the class cultural practices of their student bodies. Due to the premium that high status occupations confer on mainstream middle-class cultural skills, working-class students, who were exposed to these skills in schools with large numbers of middle-class students, gained important advantages. In this sense, the university could be seen as a powerful engine of social mobility. Working-class students who attended a university with large numbers of working-class students, on the other hand, had more limited access to mainstream middle-class cultural skills. Although these processes may suggest that attending a more affluent university yields greater advantages than attending a lower-status school, I also find that working-class Hispanics attending a predominantly middle-class school paid a hefty emotional and physical toll for their middle-class culture passports. While their counterparts had greater access to working-class, Mexican-American cultural repertoires that do not carry the same exchange value as mainstream, middle class cultural skills, they nonetheless experienced college life as a less harrowing affair.

The college-going experiences of low-income and working-class Hispanics is thus largely one about tradeoffs. The decision to attend a more selective institution for these students involves a consideration of how their position within the overall student body impacts both occupational and personal well-being measures. Students attending a more selective institution struggled to exercise a healthy academic self-concept as well as a class and ethnic identity, unlike their counterparts attending a broad access institution. Respondents in the less selective



school, however, encountered more limited professional development resources and academic growth challenges. I thus suggest that minority groups in the college for all era are excluded not solely on the basis of their racial-ethnic and socioeconomic group belonging. Rather, working class, minority student exclusion results from a failure to equip students with a set of holistic cultural skills, which reap rewards across mainstream and non-mainstream arenas.

### *Racialized Class Cultures: The Importance of Studying Mexican-Americans*

Statistics alone illuminate the importance of understanding how the collegiate experiences of working-class Hispanics shape their academic and professional development. Of the population of first-time students who initiated pursuit of a bachelor's degree in fall 2010, only 54% of Hispanic students graduated from college within six years compared to 74% of Asian and 64% of White students (de Brey et al. 2019). Hispanics also earn substantially less money than Asians and Whites when comparing the median earnings of full-time, year-round employees possessing at least a bachelor's degree (de Brey et al. 2019). According to de Brey et al. (2019), the median earnings for Hispanics was \$49,300 compared with \$69,100 for Asians and \$54,700 for Whites.

A social class analysis of Hispanic students is also significant because it helps underscore that social class, as a cultural concept, cannot be divorced from its racial underpinnings (see Marger 1978). Sociologists, for instance, have long maintained that class and race, alongside other important subjectivities, operate as an interlocked system (hooks 2000; Cole and Omari 2003; Zweig 2004; Hurst 2010; DiAngelo 2006). Because class categories are racially coded, race and social class become fused identities, which operate as a distinct social structure and become hidden within each other (Ortner 1998). Prevalent in mainstream cultural discourse is a presumption that White signals middle-class distinction while racial-ethnic minority status is

synonymous with lower class (Ortner 1998; DiAngelo 2006; Lorick-Wilmot 2018; see also Rampersad 2012). Studying the upwardly-mobile experiences of working-class Hispanics thus problematizes the notion that social class can operate as a discrete unit when studying racial-ethnic minorities.

The historic stigmatization of Mexicans in the United States, coupled with their lower average levels of education relative to other major racial-ethnic groups (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Telles and Ortiz 2008), makes Mexican-origin individuals particularly vulnerable to subordinate social class perceptions. Nativists' perceptions of Mexican culture as inferior and threatening to the American way of life not only characterized the context of reception for Mexicans throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Sánchez 1993) but persist into the modern day (Lacayo 2017). Moreover, because low-status, often poor, Mexican immigrants provide the ethnic raw materials that nourish a more salient ethnicity (Jiménez 2010), strongly ethnic cultural practices in mainstream American contexts become associated with the low status of the individuals who help maintain them. Native language proficiency (Portes and Rumbaut 2014; Telles and Ortiz 2008), traditional food consumption behaviors (McArthur, Anguiano and Nocetti 2001) and familial support (Almeida et al. 2009), for instance, are practices and orientations that are more prevalent among early immigrant generations and in communities of lower socioeconomic status (SES) (Almeida et al. 2009; Lutz 2006; Dewey, Strode and Fitch 1984).

Beyond their socioeconomic contexts, repertoires, like speaking in Spanish, eating traditional Mexican foods, listening to Mexican music and/or maintaining a sense of family unity, are all activities that enable the manifestation of an ethnic identity for Mexican-origin individuals (Anzaldúa [1987]2004; González 2002; Gonzales 2015; Jiménez 2010). These identity-making processes imbue relationships with meaning and yield valuable academic,

emotional, and material benefits. Thus, ethno-racial cultural objects and practices serve as valuable forms of cultural capital (Valenzuela 1999; Carter 2005; Yosso 2005) even though dominant groups may undermine their importance.

This research highlights that the class oppression of working-class Hispanics derives not solely from their lack of familiarity with the cultural habits of the middle-class mainstream but also due to their allegiance to ethnic practices that have been branded as lower class. For this reason, university contexts, regardless of how selective they might be, make it enormously challenging for Hispanic students to nurture both: a strong ethnic identity and mainstream middle-class cultural assimilation. Taken together, these schooling processes reinforce cultural hierarchies, which maintain that Mexican-American ethnic practices cannot coexist with mainstream middle-class cultural habits.

#### *Respondents' Community: Liberty Stream*

A balmy, isolated region along the southwestern U.S. border, Liberty Stream (also known as simply, Liberty) is known as one of the most socioeconomically depressed areas in the state. Although a number of underprivileged counties comprise the entire Liberty region, I recruit all students from one central county. According to the U.S. Census (2018), the median household income in this county is approximately \$38,000, about a third of residents over 25 lack a high school degree and over 40% of children under 18 live in poverty.<sup>3</sup> In comparison, approximately 20% of children across the United States (U.S.) live in poverty and U.S. families claim an approximately \$60,000 median household income (U.S. Census 2018). Despite its economic struggles, Liberty is not without its share of unrivaled contributions. The U.S. Census (2018) documents that about a quarter of Liberty residents are foreign born and only an estimated 10% of the foreign-born population claims a non-Mexican identity. Considering over 90% of the

inhabitants in the county identify as Hispanic or Latino and roughly 80% of the population speaks Spanish (U.S. Census 2018), this county, along with the entire Liberty Stream region, nurtures a vibrant Mexican-American culture. Moreover, because of the spatial concentration among ethnic groups that typically accompanies chain migration (Rumbaut 1997), residents in Liberty sustain extensive kinship ties. Community relationships are thus woven with the cultural characteristics of a shared ancestral upbringing.

Because the study aimed to understand how differentially selective schools shape the habits that first-generation college students develop in their upwardly mobile pursuits, the ability to recruit study respondents who shared highly similar class cultural characteristics at college entry enabled a richer opportunity to assess school influence. Thus, I recruited all study respondents from Liberty Stream, the geographic area where they had all spent their formative adolescent years.

### *The Schools*

Setting aside their shared affiliation to the same university system in the state, Regional State University (Regional State) and Flagship University (Flagship)<sup>4</sup> have little else in common. Regional State is the largest and most comprehensive, four-year public university in Liberty Stream. Although the university has a variety of business units and academic centers located throughout Liberty, its core administrative bodies and academic functions are carried out in one of two main campuses. While both campuses are represented in this study, the vast majority of research activities took place on the Regional State main campus, which generates greater student activity and houses the central administrative body. Accepting approximately 70% of its freshman applicants with an average SAT score of 950, Regional State is generally classified as a broad-access school.<sup>5</sup> The university is also solidly established as a HSI considering 90% of its

student body identifies as Hispanic. Moreover, because 70% of Regional State undergraduates are also Federal Pell Grant recipients, the university represents an institutional context that is *consonant* not only with study respondents' racial-ethnic background but also their social class backgrounds.<sup>6</sup>

Situated in Mauve City, a bustling urban metropolis with a predominantly White, middle-class resident population (U.S. Census 2018), Flagship is widely-known as one of the most prestigious four-year, public universities in the state. It is located several hundred miles away from Liberty and represents the university system's flagship school. Home to a legendary football team, Flagship's student body is almost double the size of Regional State's. Accepting 40% of its applicants with a 1260 average SAT score, Flagship enrolls some of the most academically accomplished students from throughout the state. Because only 20% of students in the entire university identify as Hispanic and roughly a third are also Pell Grant recipients, unlike the structural demographic characteristics at Regional State, Flagship represents an institutional context that is *dissonant* with study respondents' racial-ethnic and social class backgrounds. In Table 1.1, I outline these and other important institutional characteristics.

### *The Study*

On a cold January afternoon, I met Christian at a bustling Starbucks in Liberty Stream. A mild-mannered undergraduate, Christian, would be the first of 60 Hispanic undergraduates of working-class backgrounds whom I interviewed for this study. Even though the coffee shop served as the study's inaugural launch point, I met most students and conducted the vast majority of the study interviews in a patio, dining lounge or other common area on the campus grounds of either Regional State or Flagship. Of the 60 Liberty Stream students who participated in the

study, 30 attended Flagship and 30 attended Regional State. Interviews ranged between 56 minutes to 2.5 hours.

At the time of the study, all 60 student participants were enrolled as either first or second-year students at either Regional State or Flagship. All students graduated from a public high school in Liberty Stream and the majority identified as second generation-since-immigration. Eight students were foreign-born and six reported third generation status. With two exceptions<sup>7</sup>, all students graduated in the top 15% of their senior high school class and approximately 75% of the students enrolled at Regional State had also qualified for admission at Flagship University.

All study participants identified as Hispanic, Latino or Mexican and indicated having a working-class background. Part of their working-class identification meant that all students were first-generation college students—neither parent had obtained a four-year college degree in the U.S. With a few exceptions, most students reported that their parents' highest level of education was a high school degree, general education diploma or less. Thus, a sizeable number of students shared low-income backgrounds. There were no more than a handful of respondents in each university who reported a combined parent income of between \$50,000 to \$70,000. Although these students would be categorized as middle class under conventional social class interpretations, they are included in the study sample of working-class respondents for two important reasons. First, students' household income was the only indicator of middle class belonging. Neither parent had obtained a college degree in the U.S. and parents also held blue-collar jobs or low status managerial positions. Second, because some parents' jobs were seasonal, the reported income during the time of the interview for these students was not only subject to abrupt declines but also did not generally reflect students' material resources during upbringing. Table 1.2 summarizes key study respondent characteristics.

I also invited eight students to participate in the participant observation component of the study. During this observation phase, I shadowed each student for two weeks. Shadowing involved attending all the classes and most academic campus commitments that each student had. Once a respondent agreed to participate in the observation component, and I had secured professors' permission to attend class, I usually met students right before their first class for a given week. To minimize feelings of self-consciousness and to preserve student anonymity, I usually sat in the back of a classroom. In large lecture halls, I occasionally sat next to a study participant. Although I informed professors that I was in their class observing a student and other classroom exchanges, I did not reveal the student's identity. I often shadowed a student participant for most of the day but allowed substantial private time where necessary. As an example, when students needed to study on their own, wanted to attend church or have a private lunch, I refrained from observing them. Although most of my observations were limited to students' on-campus affairs, I occasionally had lunch or dinner with students off campus, met their family members and accompanied them to volunteer events. I collected data as a participant observer for approximately 16 weeks, which translated into about 275 hours. I also provided a \$30 honorarium to all students who were interviewed and a \$100 honorarium to each of the eight students who participated in the two-week observation component. Table 1.3 lists key information for each of the eight students who participated in the observation portion of the study. I also provide an extensive discussion regarding recruitment and sampling procedures in Appendix A, along with an analysis concerning issues of subjectivity and positionality.

#### *Analytical Approach*

All interviews, with one exception, were audio-recorded. I also took an additional set of handwritten notes during all interviews. During the participant observation phase, detailed

handwritten notes were taken at two primary moments. In some instances, I took written notes of the subject or person of interest as I actively engaged in the observation. When active note taking was not feasible, I typed detailed notes of the event, conversation or person shortly after an exchange or action took place.

I use the Dedoose (2016) software as well as triangulation techniques (LeCompte and Schensul 2013) to analyze data stemming from three primary sources: interview transcripts, handwritten and typed field notes. During the first analytical phase, I drew on the interview questionnaire and analytical field memos to help establish a set of general codes. I subsequently assigned portions of field note data into their relevant categories or conceptual bins (LeCompte and Schensul 2013).

Dedoose facilitated systematic coding of the interview data. Characterized by extensive iterations of reading and labeling, this coding process yielded a significantly larger set of more specialized codes. Software analytical features also enabled me to not only compare how respondents' accounts differed based on the university they attended but also to readily identify disconfirming cases.

In the final stage of analysis, I recoded the field notes data based on the specialized codes that Dedoose had helped identify. During this stage I was able to establish clearer links between the field notes and interview data. This approach helped illuminate not only how campus cultures impacted students' on-campus experiences but also how students interpreted class-based socialization processes that presented themselves as norms.

### *Overview of Chapters*

The following chapters assess the experiences of working class, Hispanic students in what were considered to be the most essential components of their undergraduate academic student lives. In



other words, although students typically elect to participate in student organizations, Greek life, recreational sports, study abroad and other extracurricular opportunities, the analyses that follow concentrate on three aspects of campus life for which students do not generally “sign up.” The university’s organizational culture, its course instruction and available leadership initiatives, comprised campus offerings that with few exceptions, were automatically tied to the students’ enrollment at an institution.

In Chapter 2, I compare how the everyday, seemingly mundane cultural objects that comprise a university’s culture influence students’ involvement and consumption behaviors. I demonstrate that the organizational cultures at each university not only represent the social class practices of the dominant groups on campus but that in doing so, they sideline cultural practices of the social classes that are not well represented. Because cultural sidelining hinders working-class Hispanics from nurturing valuable ethnic capital in one institution yet also limits their opportunities to develop mainstream cultural capital in another, I argue that while minority student marginalization in the contemporary, college-for-era persists, it is not solely characterized by student and institutional cultural mismatches. Rather, working-class Hispanics experience divergent forms of exclusion that derive from how they are positioned within the broader university context.

Chapter 3 provides a comprehensive snapshot of the instructional and interpersonal practices taking place inside the classrooms at both Flagship and Regional State. I analyze how pedagogical processes designed to elicit greater and more meaningful student participation reflect the socializing practices that are commonly associated with distinct class cultures. Whereas I observed a greater reliance on mechanistic instruction and more authoritative disciplinary approaches at Regional State, Flagship University instructors encouraged

exploratory, inquiry-based learning with greater consistency and addressed student behavioral issues with more empowering approaches. Although the practices at Regional State had the unintended effect of suppressing engagement, instructional processes that validated students' ethnic, working-class cultural repertoires recognized students as authentic intellectual participants and mitigated students' perceived insecurities. Hispanic study respondents attending Flagship, on the other hand, shared opposite experiences. Students' underrepresentation at the university meant that detached instructional styles, which privileged exceptionalism and individualism, heightened students' academic insecurities.

In Chapter 4, I concentrate on each university's respective emphasis on what is typically referred to as the extra-curriculum—school-wide social and academic activities, like clubs, internships and other organizational opportunities (Stuber 2009). This chapter achieves several objectives. First, I demonstrate that by embracing a rigidly defined middle-class frame, Flagship University equips students with precise forms of human, cultural and social capital, which prize self-actualizing and ambitiously competitive tendencies. While valuing highly similar leadership orientations, Regional State's loosely structured middle-class frame prioritized the more essential goals of graduation and successful employment. Second, I illustrate that when students' extracurricular responsibilities were combined with their academic and familial responsibilities, they developed lifestyles, that much like the priorities embedded within each university's class frame, also followed pronounced social class patterns. Finally, this chapter assesses how these perceived advantages and disadvantages were accompanied by tradeoffs.

I close with a discussion regarding how a horizontally stratified system of higher education has problematized understandings of upward mobility when considered in the context of class cultures. Assessing how working-class Hispanic students who all grew up in the same

community but who pursued four-year degrees in differentially selective universities demonstrates that while students may be poised to improve their socioeconomic standing, their degree may not serve as reliable of a pathway to help them navigate multiple cultural contexts. Moreover, although a more selective institution equipped students with a wider repertoire of mainstream middle-class cultural skills, the broad-access school with greater shares of working-class co-ethnics was better positioned to nurture students' ethnic-class cultural capital and academic self-concept.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Selectivity is used to denote an institution's admissions competitiveness (Barron's 2017). Although entrance exam scores are often viewed as the most reliable measures of an institution's selectivity (Kuh and Pascarella 2004), college ranking outlets, such as Barron's, draw on a wider range of factors to assess an institution's level of competitiveness. Some of these include: median exam scores for the incoming freshman class, percentage of freshman students scoring above a given exam score, percentage of freshman accepted, percentage of freshman class ranking above a certain threshold, student test scores, class rank, as well as grade point average (Barron's 2017).

<sup>2</sup> For an exception, see Curry (2001).

<sup>3</sup> All statistics have been rounded for purposes of confidentiality.

<sup>4</sup> For purposes of study participant and institutional confidentiality, I use a pseudonym in place of actual respondent and university names. I also adopt a pseudonym for the students' hometown and use fictitious names when referencing school mascots, colors and any other potentially identifying school and geographical characteristics or landmarks.

<sup>5</sup> Colleges designated as broad access are understood as accepting most of their applicants (Stevens 2015).

<sup>6</sup> All university statistics referenced through the entire manuscript are derived from each University's Office of Institutional Reporting and Public Information. In several instances, they are derived from other official university data reporting websites or press releases.

<sup>7</sup> Two respondents reported graduating in the top 20% of their senior high school class. Both were enrolled at Flagship University.

TABLE 1.1: Campus Characteristics for Academic Year 2016-2017 <sup>a</sup>

	<i>Regional State University</i>	<i>Flagship University</i>
<i>Student Population</i>	28,000	51,000
<i>Acceptance Rate</i>	70%	40%
<i>Average SAT</i>	950	1260
<i>Housing Type</i>	Commuter	Residential
<i>Undergraduates living on-campus</i>	Less than 5%	20%
<i>Community Setting</i>	Suburban	Urban
<i>Pell-Grant Recipients<sup>b</sup></i>	70%	30%
<i>Students Percent-Hispanic</i>	90%	20%
<i>Faculty Percent-Hispanic</i>	40%	10%
<i>Revenue (Per Full-Time Student)</i>	\$10,000	\$17,000

*Sources: Office of Institutional Reporting and Public Information (at each University); College Board (2016)*

<sup>a</sup> All figures are rounded.

<sup>b</sup> Based on the total number of students receiving aid out of the total number of undergraduates who were enrolled full time at Flagship University. Regional State provided this figure.

TABLE 1.2: Student Characteristics

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Regional State</i>	<i>Flagship</i>
<i>Average Household Income</i> <sup>a</sup>		\$27,000	\$25,000
<i>Average Class Rank</i>		19	18
<i>Average GPA</i>		3.86	3.87
<i>Housing</i>			
On-Campus	19	3	16
Off-Campus	15	2	13
Off-Campus w/Parents	26	25	1
<i>Gender</i>			
Women	30	15	15
Men	30	15	15
<i>Generational Status</i> (since immigration)			
First	8	5	3
Second	46	21	25
Third	6	4	2
<i>Major</i>			
Arts/Social Science	28	11	17
STEM	24	15	9
Business	6	3	3
Undeclared	2	1	1
<i>Year in College</i> <sup>b</sup>			
1st	37	14	23
2nd	23	16	7

<sup>a</sup> Average income is calculated based on student responses. The average for Regional State reflects 27 rather than 30 cases due to one non-response and two students who indicated that the “minimum” amount option on financial aid application forms best represented their household income.

<sup>b</sup> Students who transferred are classified under their year of enrollment at the university field site regardless of the total number of years enrolled in higher education. Three students indicated transfer status at Regional State.

TABLE 1.3: Participant Observation Student Characteristics

	<i>Age</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Living</i>	<i>Work</i>	<i>Major</i>	<i>Parent Income (estimated)</i>	<i>Parent Education</i>	<i>Parent Occupation</i>	<i>Primary Home Language</i>
<i>Regional State University</i>									
Victor	20	M	Off Campus	Part-time	Bilingual Edu.	\$3,000	M <sup>a</sup> - College (MX)	M- Teacher	Spanish
Bela	19	F	w/ Parents	Part-time	Biology	\$70,000	M- Some H.S. F- College (MX)	M- Homemaker F- Pipefitter	Spanish
Aracely	19	F	On campus	Part-time	Mathematics	\$25,000	M- Grade School F - H.S.	M- Deceased F- Food Process. (Retired)	Spanish
Alan	19	M	w/ Parents	No	Kinesiology	\$15,000	M- H.S. F- Some H.S.	M- Homemaker F- Cook	English
<i>Flagship University</i>									
Kasia	19	F	Off Campus	No	Biology	\$16,000	M- Middle School (MX) F- GED	M- Home Health Care Provider F- Truck Driver	Both
Mia	18	F	On Campus	Part-time	Undeclared (Liberal Arts)	\$20,000	M- H.S. F- H.S.	M- Cert. Nurse Assistant F- w/ Disability	Both
Eli	19	M	Off Campus	No	Mechanical Engineering	\$14,000	M- Associate's SF- GED	M- Reg. Nurse SF- Unemployed	English
Rick	19	M	On Campus	No	Undeclared (Business)	\$28,000	M- Technical College	M- Sr. Loan Officer	Both

<sup>a</sup> M=Mother; F=Father; SF=Stepfather; MX= in Mexico

## CHAPTER 2

### Campus Cultures that Sideline

I draw on a sports metaphor to illustrate how the differential arrangement of organizational processes on campus equip students with important cultural skills but hinder them from developing others. In the game of basketball, as in most team sports, starting players are distinguished by their strategic advantage. Starting athletes usually possess greater field goal accuracy, defend more effectively, assist more consistently or possess any number of attributes that reserve players do not. Alternates are available as needed and substitute in for an injured or foul-troubled starter when required. Although bench players also claim an invaluable set of skills—abilities that helped them make the team—sideline players receive limited playing time. This chapter demonstrates how class cultures, like athletes on the bench, also assume sidelined roles in university settings.

I proceed by assessing how routine campus elements or repertoires (Small, Harding and Lamont 2010) impact the growth and inclusivity of upwardly mobile, Mexican-origin college students. Implicit, procedural activities not only circumscribe the socialized experience (Tierney 1997), but they are often unnoticed because they operate in the backdrop of campus life. Demonstrating how three cultural repertoires—language use, food practices and academic ethos—create a dominant group culture that trivializes underrepresented class cultures, cultural sidelining enables an understanding of how seemingly inconsequential processes disguise ongoing cultural exclusion.

#### *Problematizing Exclusion Through Cultural Sidelining*

Conceptualizing sidelining in the context of sports, as in relegation to second-string status, facilitates an understanding of how exclusion reinforces existing racial-ethnic and social class



hierarchies through divergent processes. Because understanding how a class culture is sidelined warrants consideration of the culture that is held in dominant esteem, sidelining centralizes not just structural institutional characteristics but students' interactional experiences within these settings. Latino students attending institutions with large Hispanic enrollments, for instance, are less likely to report experiences of discrimination than Latino students attending universities with lower shares of co-ethnics (Reyes 2018; Hurtado 1994). Moreover, when Hispanic students comprised over 80% of the student population, students reported a satisfactory campus experience with frequent Spanish communication (Abraham et al. 2002). These studies suggest that campuses with sizeable Hispanic student bodies may not sideline working class or racial ethnic, minority culture in the way students report in selective colleges (Jack 2019; Wildhagen 2015; Aries and Seider 2005; Morton 2019) large research institutions (Hurst 2010) or prestigious graduate programs (Granfield 1991). Cultural sidelining thus shifts the analytic focus from identifying exclusion to understanding how students experience exclusion relative to the prevailing class culture.

*Dominant Mainstream Middle Class: Sidelining Working-Class Culture at Flagship University*

*Academic ethos.* Situated in an eclectic, middle class, liberal community, Flagship University engaged in deliberate efforts to foster a socially conscious, inquisitive culture. A lifestyle centered on exploration (Settersten 2015; Mullen 2010) and civic or community engagement (Sander and Putnam 2010; Flanagan and Levine 2010), repertoires more commonly enacted among individuals from middle-class backgrounds, was not only institutionalized within students' degree plans but permeated everyday affairs on-campus. As part of their core curriculum degree requirements, students were required to take an exploratory course on any number of topics including, language, race, brain function or a wide range of other social issues.

These courses were designed to help students develop important critical thinking skills and to encourage interdisciplinary knowledge.

Study participants reinforced that Flagship normalized an academic ethos centered on personal growth and creativity when asked to describe their university's values. Abigail, a human development and family sciences major (m), captured Flagship's campus spirit succinctly:

What I think they value a lot is the intellectual exploration. That's the one thing I feel that is actually true to the university's core values. People want to see what *you* can bring to the table intellectually. [emphasis added]

Abigail's last statement was instructive. By shifting the focus from the university to herself, she underscored that Flagship's exploratory culture wasn't one to merely benefit from but one that required her active participation. This involvement would enable students to maintain a competitive advantage as Hugo (m: business) admitted when he described academic values at Flagship as, "trying to be ahead of everyone, trying to be better." A pursuit of knowledge, contribution and self-recognition, though, were not only defining features of campus culture but also cornerstone leadership traits, as Fred (m: government), elaborated:

I feel like knowledge and how to stand out [are] really important for this university...Everybody does their thing, and everybody has a group, and everybody is involved in something different, but they're all involved. And there's strong leadership based on that... There's leadership everywhere. There [are] opportunities literally everywhere.

Fred was not exaggerating. Students were engulfed with news headlines and learning opportunities on campus even if they had no intention to seek them out. Student organization representatives regularly lined the main campus plaza and distributed flyers promoting opportunities to protest divisive congressional bills, volunteer locally or join a student community. Civic-minded and socially conscious attitudes also spilled into the main student

dining areas, which were equipped with large televisions that were usually tuned into CNN or a sports center. As Kasia (m: biology) demonstrated, Flagship respondents understood the importance of integrating matters related to contentious social problems into everyday dialogues even if these issues did not have immediate solutions:

You have that Israel Palestine thing going on over there. But the point is the conversations are being brought up. So [I] think more than anything, that's really important. We're talking about it...When there w[ere] random posters being posted around on White supremacy...right away people had really bad reactions to it. The president had a general meeting for people to come in and... tell him what we were feeling as a campus, what we needed to work on and things like that. So even though it's not being fixed right away or even though they're still problems, the point is they're being talked about.

The leading role of an exploratory, socially conscious culture at Flagship meant Liberty's working-class students experienced repeated challenges to develop class-based repertoires characteristic of mainstream middle-class cultures.

*Food practices.* Although Flagship's food offerings emphasized a locally sourced, exotic food culture, generally accessible to individuals with high cultural and economic capital (Johnston and Baumann 2010), this practice came at the expense of sidelining working class, Mexican culture. Mirroring the extensive food truck community in Mauve City, Flagship had a designated high-traffic area on campus where students could enjoy eclectic cuisines from a local food truck, like Korean BBQ or white-meat turkey burgers. Campus shops further stocked a wide assortment of vegan, gluten-free and other allergy sensitive options.

Despite the range of food options, Liberty students failed to see their working-class culture represented in the university's cosmopolitan food practices. While students could access a Taco Cabana on campus or breaded chicken tacos served in cone wrappers, these were offerings that catered to non-Mexicans and a predominantly middle-class mainstream. Juxtaposed against the flavors of quaint, family-owned taquerías in Liberty, students

unanimously challenged the authenticity of these options as “just not the same.” Matthew for instance, recalled the flavors of charro beans, fajita or tripe blended in his father’s special dish. Sasha lamented not being able to access menudo and Hugo reminisced over his mother’s mole. Despite the democratization of food (Johnston and Baumann 2010), students referenced complex and time-intensive dishes that prevail in low-socioeconomic households (see Sukovic et al. 2011; Dewey, Strode and Fitch 1984). Functioning as a source of empowerment for marginalized Mexican women, elaborate food practices, such as homemade tortillas, menudo and gorditas, help preserve important ethnic traditions and build community (Sukovic et al. 2011:240). While these ethnic expressions could have been mistaken as common freshmen year homesickness, Tomás (m: computer science and mathematics) clarified that by undermining the authenticity of their food, community structures sidelined the groups behind those creations:

You have places like Jimmy’s that will sell you tacos and stuff but none of the people...making the food are from the background that food's supposed to come from. And they charge a whole lot for it...that's fine. But making money, trying to make a profit over a piece of culture that's not yours and while other people...southeast of Mauve City... I've seen taco trucks with Mexican-American people or Mexican people there and they're selling and trying to make money but those type of places don't get as much traction.

For Tomás, failing to include Mexican American business owners in mainstream settings not only excluded ethnic, working-class culture but also constituted a form of cultural appropriation. The taco truck business owners serving segregated Hispanic communities were after all, “trying to make money,” unlike Jimmy’s who held prime real estate near Flagship and “charge[d] a whole lot for [tacos].” Not being able to access foods representative of their ethnic, working-class culture meant respondents at Flagship created their own opportunities to nurture their ethnic cultural capital by taking lengthy trips to areas of town with high Hispanic populations.

*Language.* Embracing an English dominant, middle-class culture, Flagship sidelined Spanish—a language that in U.S. contexts is perceived as low-status due to the lower socioeconomic origins of the Mexican immigrant communities in which it is practiced (see Jiménez 2010). Despite widespread institutional efforts aimed at embracing cultural difference, Liberty students had few opportunities to express this diversity. Opportunities to speak Spanish were largely confined to informal settings such as with friends, service workers or ethnic student organizations. Unless the content area of a class dealt with issues related to Spanish, speaking Spanish in class, with an advisor or in other academic venues, as Rick (m: business) shared, was “rare.” While sidelining Spanish may not have carried meaningful repercussions for English-dominant speakers, for students like Mauricio (m: economics), these limited opportunities posed a long-term detriment. Asked if he ever used Spanish outside of a Spanish language class, he responded:

No, and I wish I could because I want to practice it and I want to be able to pass it on to my children. But no, I never have to. And even at work, there was a couple speaking Spanish, and I wanted to go talk to them, but somebody beat me to it.

Relegated to the sidelines, Spanish shared institutional relevance during designated cultural events, such as when promoting, “Fiesta del Grito [Grito Party]: A Visual History of the Diez y Seis [sixteenth] in Mauve City.” While Flagship encouraged multiculturalism, non-dominant cultural traits were generally expressed in spaces tangential to the university’s core culture. At times, sidelining morphed into hostile racism as Mariana (m: international relations) described:

There was a person on the mic speaking Spanish. So, there was this group of fraternity brothers who came wearing the caps, “Make America Great Again” and the US flag. And they came in and disrupted the protest and they started yelling, you know, ‘Go back to where you came from. This is America. Speak English. why are you speaking Spanish’?

Although students from Liberty took pride in their bilingualism and the school occasionally addressed divisive issues, racist actions reinforced students' marginality. Moreover, because many respondents viewed bilingualism as a vital aspect of their identity, like Mauricio, they attempted to practice Spanish whenever a situation permitted its use. While the detrimental consequences of not speaking Spanish primarily impacted the bilingual respondents, only four students attending Flagship did not speak Spanish regularly at home. Even these students shared strong ties to the language because it was usually their grandparents' primary language. Flagship respondents thus traded the opportunity to exercise Mexican-American cultural capital for the development of mainstream, middle-class cultural repertoires.

*Dominant Working Class: Sidelining Mainstream Middle-Class Culture at Regional State*

*Academic ethos.* Intellectual exploration and community engagement were also paramount tenets at Regional State University. Unlike their counterparts at Flagship, however, students at Regional State experienced growth challenges and civic awareness opportunities as sidelined affairs. Not only were student organizations at Regional State less vocal than those at Flagship, but because of high off-campus commitments, many students, including all four of the respondents I shadowed, frequently left campus during their breaks. Thus, students often missed opportunities to engage in civic-related matters when they did arise. Although Regional State did have its share of student activists, virtually none of the Regional State respondents shared an activist background and the university did little to encourage it. As an example, inconspicuous and outdated recycling bins that were occasionally stationed next to trashcans did not generally encourage a habit of recycling like the ubiquitous recycling program at Flagship, which consistently challenged students to discard, recycle or compost their waste. Like the small

televisions in the Regional State student union that were sporadically tuned into a news channel, students engaged with social issues beyond their community in an episodic manner.

Students' interview responses reinforced the sidelined nature of an exploratory and growth-driven academic ethos at Regional State. While some students referenced an emphasis on mutual respect for each other's differences and others admitted uncertainty when asked about their university's core values, a more substantial number described their university as fulfilling essential educational functions, as Erasmo (m: nursing) shared:

Values of this university? Hmm. I would just assume get everyone... to where they need to be, get everyone their diploma.

Lisa (m: rehabilitation services) also struggled to name Regional State's core values, "I don't know. Honestly, I don't know." When the question was posed differently, Lisa managed to recall foundational educational features:

I don't know. Maybe because I'm not that involved with stuff, I can't say they do this thing, you know. I'm thinking about nothing—like the classes are nice. The professors, the ones I've had so far, are really good and all that. They help you learn...Nothing really stands out. They have good financial aid.

Because essential university functions like teaching or providing financial assistance surfaced as the most prominent campus norms, these responses underscored that even if Regional State did provide opportunities to cultivate important civic-minded or other leadership traits, students did not view these efforts as playing a significant role in their regular on-campus experience.

A handful of Regional State students referenced knowledge or growth opportunities as their university's core values. However, as Bianca (m: business management) revealed, some opportunities interpreted as encouraging student involvement were also designed to meet essential learning needs:

It's what they do. Their actions...to have you get involved [and] have a better experience here. Not just come and go to class... And I feel like I love the fact that they let us print out for free. Like, wow... I love the fact that they provide all these opportunities for us.

The value of complementary printing for students who would not otherwise be able to engage with course material cannot be underestimated. Because these services stand out as the university's most noticeable features, though, Bianca's response underlines the university's struggle to accomplish both: provide exploratory, leadership-oriented opportunities while fulfilling basic educational goals. Whereas Flagship students raved about opportunities to grow, students at Regional State expressed gratitude for having opportunities to learn. Flagship encouraged higher education as self-discovery and experience, typical of the middle-class student experience, while Regional State served a more instrumental purpose of enabling mobility (Mullen 2010).

Students who spoke positively about enriching academic experiences at Regional State either lived on-campus or were involved in student organizations. Only three study respondents, however, lived on campus during the time of the study and roughly a third reported involvement in a student organization. Thus, while students could access a mainstream middle-class culture if they employed deliberate efforts, this class cultural experience was largely sidelined.

*Food practices.* In stark contrast to the cosmopolitan food options at Flagship, product offerings at Regional State catered to a Mexican-American, working-class student body. Instead of dining in quirky food trucks or pizza carts, students at Regional State filled disposable ramekins with any number of salsas, cilantro or chopped onion to dress enchiladas or tacos from Toñitos, a popular restaurant in the region that shared a presence in the student union. While students could snack on traditional American snacks, they could also opt for familiar Mexican



brands, including Gansitos, Churritos or Takis. These items were prominently stocked in the campus bookstore and other campus shops.

Large barbecue pits that held fixed locations in high-traffic campus settings reinforced Regional State's recognition of working class, Hispanic culture. While they resembled traditional barbecues, a carne asada in Liberty Stream characterized not just the process of grilling leg quarters, spicy cheese sausages or skirt steaks, but an entire family event with lively music and aimless conversations. As recorded in my field notes, carrying out a carne asada as a form of fundraising encouraged the same playful banter with the university's working class that students accustomed at home:

On a table located in a high-traffic student area sit about five to ten loaves of sliced bread. Neat rows of chicken quarters line a giant grill. Across the student overseeing the grill sits a man on a bench who appears substantially older than the students. He wears a light blue long-sleeve with jeans, work boots and a baseball hat—his groundskeeper uniform. Speaking in a loud voice, he jokingly promotes the chicken plates for the student organization in Spanish as the student working on the grill smiles.

Regional State students may have missed out on sampling a cosmopolitan food culture. Unlike at Flagship, however, where Hispanic student organizations relied on barbecue pits that had to be physically rolled into a desired place on campus, Liberty students' working-class food practices held permanent rather than visitor status at Regional State.

*Language.* Communication in Spanish assumed a significantly more prominent role at Regional State than in Flagship. Becoming a bilingual HSI, for instance, was one of a series of bicultural campus initiatives at Regional State. A bilingual identity, however, was not confined to formal or high-level institutional settings. University flyers such as “¡Alto a la Gripe! [Stop the Flu] or “Que Hacer Cuando Estas Siendo Ciberacosado [What to do when you are being Cyberbullied]”), alerting students to routine student affairs rather than isolated cultural events, also lined the main campus hallways. Although Regional State's primary language of

communication was English, concerted institutional efforts reinforced the legitimacy of a Spanish language associated with the working classes in campus settings symbolic of middle-class establishments.

It was also not uncommon to hear students speak Spanish in class even when the subject matter had little relation to the language. Exchanges in Spanish among students not only encouraged the development of social ties, but they also facilitated collaborative efforts on academic material. Aracely (m: mathematics) and her peer for instance, relied on their bilingualism to prove a statement during mathematical proofs:

Aracely: ¿Cuál estas usando? [Which one are you using?]

Peer: Estoy usando la [I'm using the] conditional statement.

Aracely: ¿Y te esta saliendo? [And is it working out?]

Peer: Si, pues más o menos. [Yes, well somewhat.]

Professors not only encouraged bilingualism but also helped normalize a Spanish-speaking culture when they incorporated it in their classrooms. Victor's U.S. history instructor, for instance, lightheartedly chastised her students as she reminded them about the tardy policy, "Pobre de ustedes si entran tarde [pity on you if you come in late]." Moreover, while it was not uncommon for Victor's Mexican-American studies professor to accept assignments completed in Spanish, Aracely's math professor admitted that her Spanish enabled her to better understand students' source of confusion over classroom material. While all of these professors shared Hispanic ethnicities, several respondents admitted that some non-Hispanic professors occasionally used Spanish in their classrooms. Instructors' use of Spanish not only enabled deeper classroom engagement but at times, also sidelined English-dominant speakers. In these instances, and as Bela (m: biology) shared, exchanges helped elevate the status of Mexican culture in a reconfiguration of ethnoracial hierarchies (Jiménez and Horowitz 2013):

She [biology professor] knows that most of us from Liberty are Hispanics so she does make jokes. Like another thing she said was, think of this [biology process] being like you guys not having tamales on Christmas. And you're like, 'what? No tamales for Christmas?' ... I noticed all of... us started laughing. But I noticed my classmate, she's from Russia and she plays tennis here. So, she looked at me and she was confused. And I was like, wait a minute, you don't get it because you're not from here. So, then my professor was like, 'Bela, please explain to her what it means.'

### *Shortchanging the College Experience Through Sidelining*

Students across both schools appreciated the opportunities their academic environments offered as they also devised strategies to cope with ongoing forms of marginalization. Considering that prevalent campus repertoires exerted normative functions, the inability to access menudo per se did not necessarily result in an alienating experience for Flagship respondents, particularly when juxtaposed against egregious forms of racism. However, because the food and language practices that students sought to cultivate at Flagship were symbolic remnants of the families and communities that had facilitated their entry into that institution, sidelining these working-class repertoires as insufficiently mainstream reinforced students' marginality.

Mesmerized by the social justice aims of on-campus protests and the university's unceasing diversity discourse, most study respondents attending Flagship readily admitted a generalized feeling of belonging. Yet, even though Flagship students felt "comfortable" on campus or had experienced "welcoming" organizations, this often required that they overlook explicitly racist and classist encounters. For example, although Rudy (m: biology) listened to both Spanish and English music, aware of the stereotypes that regional Mexican music like banda carries, he simply did not listen to music in his apartment when "anyone else [was] around." Attempting to manage a sense of confidence among his middle-class peers, Eli (m: mechanical engineering) admitted that he selectively withheld information about his social class background to avoid embarrassment. Most Flagship University respondents either expressed

disappointment over racial and class-based forms of exclusion on campus or admitted suppressing behavioral traits at least until they could better read their audience. Ninny's (m: English) self-monitoring helps capture the cost of achieving belonging for students at Flagship:

I don't do it consciously most of the time, but I know I'm more alert and aware of me as a human being here. So, I'm not as relaxed as I am back home.

Explaining why she didn't feel relaxed, she added:

Back home, if I slip into Spanish or if I go on a little rant about how much I love a certain Mexican food or something, it's normal and nobody kind of blinks. And here, because I'm surrounded by so many different people and so many different cultures, something that seems so normal to me can be completely weird and out of the ordinary for someone else.

Although cultural sidelining did not result in immediate dropout, for students like Matthew (m: advertising), it certainly came close:

Because there were points that I can tell you, I was crying. I did want to go back really bad. And I would call my mom and tell her, I can't do this.

Even though the university preached that demeaning behavior on the basis of cultural difference was unacceptable, students learned to live with unsettling forms of exclusion.

Although not immune to status-based forms of discrimination, students at Regional State did not report the type of racial and class marginalization that their peers at Flagship experienced. Regional State students also did not complain about insufficient opportunities for civic-oriented engagement or intellectual exploration. However, Regional State students understood they had been shortchanged in an important way and this exclusion was tied to their limited student-centered opportunities for growth and exploration.

Seeing little difference between their high school and collegiate schedules, several interview respondents, including other students on campus, described Regional State as a "big high school" that did not provide a distinct social or academic experience. Reluctant to agree with them, Zaida (m: accounting) summarized these widespread perceptions:

They say that it's—What have I heard? That you don't get the whole experience here. You don't get the whole college experience. There's not that many activities, college spirit, anything like that.

Bela learned of these widespread views through her friends who enrolled in more distinguished universities in the state. Although Bela also intended on enrolling at a more selective institution, she had acquiesced to her parents' wishes, withdrawn from the more selective university and enrolled at Regional State just in time for classes. She recounted mixed feelings about her campus experience at Regional State:

And so, my first semester here was... it just felt like I was still in high school a little bit. I would come to school, do my work and then go back home. And it just felt like I wasn't getting that college experience that everybody talked about. So that made me kind of sad. But something that...I did like that I saw [with] some of my friends that went away to college...was that the people I attended school with didn't make me feel uncomfortable. ... I didn't have to feel embarrassed about being first generation or things like that.

Bela powerfully highlights the tradeoff involved in her sidelined class cultural experience. Even though she describes a monotonous first semester with no meaningful campus involvement, she leverages the strengths of Regional State to underscore that at least she can embrace her identity in ways that co-ethnics in other schools could not.

Nearly two-thirds of Regional State respondents had their dreams originally set on attending a school outside of Liberty but had defaulted to Regional State largely due to parental demands or financial constraints. Like Livy (m: English), who regretted not attending a university in a different city as a means to “see the world” and “explore my options,” respondents did not view the campus cultural experience as a setting through which they could access non-local cultural capital. Determined to capitalize on their ambitious pursuits, students like Gustavo (m: mechanical engineering) deployed their own strategies to cope with their shortchanged academic experience, “You just have to work with what you have.”

## *Conclusion*

Universities establish a set of dominant campus norms based on the cultural repertoires that prevail in their organizations. Despite existing understandings, which associate four-year universities with middle-class cultural distinction (Bourdieu and Passeron [1977] 1990, 1979; Hurst 2010; Stephens, Markus and Phillips 2014), this study finds that universities embrace different dominant class cultures. Moreover, a school's selectivity and demographic characteristics heavily influence which class cultures hold dominant status on campus and which ones are sidelined. Students from Liberty, who left home to attend a moderately selective institution with greater racial-ethnic and class diversity, experienced a dominant campus culture characteristic of White, middle-class mainstream groups. Flagship University valorized English dominance, intellectual exploration, and cosmopolitan food preferences. In this hierarchical pyramid, Flagship sidelined the ethnic, working-class cultural repertoires so emblematic of Liberty Stream. Although Regional State embraced Mexican, working-class culture more explicitly in dominant school affairs, news-driven, socially conscious outlooks and cosmopolitan interests took on sidelined importance. Students in both settings shouldered the burden of creating opportunities to remain proficient in class cultures vital to their ethnic identities or academic and civic engagement. Understanding the tradeoffs involved in students' college choices illuminates how universities across the selectivity spectrum undermine the experiences of working-class, Hispanic students. While some aspects of campus cultures may help enrich students' developmental journeys, sidelined processes hinder students from nurturing and/or acquiring vital forms of cultural capital.

## CHAPTER 3

### Social Class Inside the College Class

Monday afternoons brought mixed feelings for Victor, a bilingual education major (m: bilingual education). Three afternoon courses contributed to a long Monday evening, so they were usually marked with an air of disappointed sluggishness that the weekend had eluded him. On the other hand, it would soon be mid-week. Although Victor had beat me to History, a classroom of about 40 students, I managed to find a desk in front of his. Victor stared intently at Rosie, a Hispanic, advanced PhD student who was also his course instructor, as she listed all of the pending assignments. Realizing that four assignments were all due at once, she joked, “Que hicieron [What did you do] to upset me?” After reminding students about the upcoming midterm and extra credit opportunity, Rosie began the day’s lecture on the shift from capital to consumer goods in the early 1900s:

“The country is getting back on progressive footing. People are driven to buy things because they need them.” Offering an illustration, she raises her wrist to demonstrate that the phone could do the same thing as the new iPhone watch when a student abruptly interrupts her, “is your phone the new iPhone?” “Yes!” she responds enthusiastically, seemingly amused that someone had noticed. The class bursts out in laughter as the lecture gets derailed into a conversation about modern day credit and spending. After a brief exchange, Rosie continues, “Spending habits in 1920s leads to depression. Many poor are excluded from the consumer revolution; no increase in wages to meet new market prices.”

Victor’s History course depicted a common curricular pattern at Regional State. With some important exceptions, lectures often consisted of fact-based bulleted items with frequent exam references and fragmented discussions. In addition to its mechanistic composition, classroom pedagogy did not generally stimulate student engagement beyond the expected minimum requirements. This approach to classroom instruction not only mirrors the type of instruction delivered to students of low-income and working-class backgrounds (Anyon 1980;

1981), but it also contrasted starkly with the approach taken in Flagship. As is common in advanced or high-track classes (Oakes 2005) and among schools serving large numbers of middle- and upper-class students (Anyon 1980;1981), Flagship University implemented process-oriented curricula that encouraged exploration and conceptual analysis with greater consistency. These disparate competencies represent root sources of inequality because they reinforce notions of power and subordination (see Bowles and Gintis 1976). The greater independence and internalization of norms in elite schools resemble the social exchanges that characterize white-collar work while rule-based socializing practices in high school mirror the greater scrutiny of low-level workers (Bowles and Gintis 1976). In Table 3.1, I present the courses I observed during the course of the study.

The perceived advantage of experiencing continuous cognitive challenge at Flagship nonetheless came with a heavy tax. Liberty students' positioning as first-generation, working-class minorities in an intensely competitive middle-class university often contributed to feelings of inadequacy and reticence. Concerned about fulfilling professors' expectations and conveying the same command of course materials as their more privileged counterparts, students regularly self-monitored their behavior. Liberty students attending Regional State, on the other hand, experienced inverted tradeoffs. While course materials may not have stimulated the same creative and intellectual exploration as Flagship, bicultural instructional practices that embedded Mexican-American cultural repertoires in the curriculum, facilitated curriculum accessibility and enhanced students' academic confidence. As outlined in Figure 3.1, curriculum processes in both schools exacted simultaneous empowering and disempowering functions.



### *The Anatomy of the Lecture Hall*

As depicted in Table 1.1, Regional State University taught approximately 28,000 students—slightly over half of the number of students enrolled in Flagship. While differences in student enrollment meant Regional State respondents often attended smaller-sized classes than Flagship respondents, faculty and student demographic characteristic differences, rather than class size, played a more instrumental role in shaping instructional climates. Because 70% of the undergraduate population at Regional State received a Federal Pell Grant and the vast majority of students also identified as Hispanic, Regional State respondents attended classes with larger numbers of co-ethnics from low-income or working-class backgrounds than their Flagship counterparts. Not only did 30% of Flagship’s student body qualify for a Federal Pell Grant but three-fourths of the student body also shared a non-Hispanic background. Flagship students were also substantially less likely than Regional State respondents to attend classrooms led by a Hispanic faculty member. Whereas ten percent of faculty at Flagship identified as Hispanic, 40% did so at Regional State.

In addition to navigating classrooms, which differed across important socioeconomic and racial-ethnic dimensions, academic background characteristics also contributed to starkly different academic environments. A 1260 average SAT score for incoming freshman at Flagship compared to Regional State’s 950 suggested larger numbers of Flagship than Regional State students possessed more rigorous standardized test-taking skills. Additionally, whereas 70% of students at Flagship graduated in the top 10% of their high school class, 20% of undergraduates at Regional State had achieved this distinction. The academic profiles of each school help illustrate that as high achievers in high school (with two exceptions, all study respondents were ranked in the top 15%), Regional State respondents were among the most academically

competitive in their school while Flagship respondents were as competitive as approximately 70% of the student body. However, attending public or early college high schools in one of the poorest counties in the state, coupled with their first-generation student status, positioned Flagship respondents as a clear minority within their institution.

### *Mechanistic and Authoritative Instruction at Regional State*

*Course content.* Embracing a cornerstone mission of higher education, Regional State, like Flagship, sought to prepare students as independent thinkers who could adjudicate between competing ideas, assess how contextual circumstances impacted problem solutions and defend their position in controversial debates. However, even though course syllabi emphasized development of higher-order course objectives, including design, analysis, evaluation and implementation, unstructured lectures, coupled with an emphasis on mechanical and rote forms of thinking, undermined a vision of rigorous academic preparation. When material was presented in fact-based rather than procedural terms, it resulted in short fragmented student responses rather than substantive course discussions as I observed when shadowing Alan (m: kinesiology). Early one Wednesday morning, Alan's kinesiology professor took attendance, commented on the high number of absences and proceeded with lecture.

“What are the benefits of building muscular strength and endurance?” “Health,” she repeats a student's response. “Keeps us balanced—agility and balance can be affected. Strong muscles can prevent falls. What is the definition of muscular strength?” One student blurts out a response in a low voice. The professor continues, “Whereas muscular endurance? Number of repetitions involved, right,” repeating once more a student's soft response.

Lectures that adhered to the textbook in mechanical ways not only limited opportunities for students to exercise forms of creative thinking but also contributed to dull learning climates. Alan referred to these professors as “more monotone” and did not enjoy these classes as much as he did others in which professors sought greater student input. Yet, for this particular class and

on this particular Wednesday, dull levels of engagement readily turned into no engagement. Because Alan's 8:00 am kinesiology course met in a Regional State campus located at approximately 60 miles from the main campus, Alan would wake up at 4:40 am on Mondays and Wednesdays to catch the 6:00 am university shuttle. This was the latest shuttle he could take to arrive to class on time. Thirty-five minutes into the class, however, the professor dismissed students. The class was meant to run for an hour and fifteen minutes and only met twice a week. Alan had woken up at 4:40 am for 35 minutes of classroom instruction.

While students acknowledged feeling challenged when they stumbled upon committed and engaging professors, all students I observed were enrolled in at least one course, which took a mechanical approach to instruction and deprioritized the exploratory function of learning. Out of the 17 unique courses observed at Regional State, in roughly 50% of the courses, professors commonly read material listed on PowerPoint slides and built-in limited opportunities for topical classroom discussions. Students' interview responses reinforced that lower-order thinking and unenthusiastic learning extended beyond the courses I observed. Respondents described course assignments that involved repetition and lacked a significant creative dimension across a wide range of disciplines. Although some students interpreted courses that were "so easy" as a stroke of good fortune, Ester (m: civil engineering), readily acknowledged the disservice of instructors who deprioritized learning:

It was a history teacher. He was just—I didn't learn anything in his class...And he was very—He would just go, talk, talk, talk. There wasn't much interaction. He would just talk and his tests were just doing papers. Maybe five-page, six-page essays.

Alma: His tests?

Ester: Uh-huh. Where you had to kind of copy all that you wrote. And that was basically it.

Unsure if I had heard correctly, I repeated a key phrase in Ester's response with a tone of voice that sought clarity, "Copying all that you wrote?" "Yeah," Ester responded and proceeded to explain:

Because my first essay, it was a five-page essay. I didn't know what to write so I used a lot of the book. But then I noticed on the second essay we had to write—He expected us to simply—because he put notes, to kind of write what he had explained— And I guess kind of copy-paste what he was saying. So, I kind of did it on my second essay and I got a better grade.

Students faced a catch-22 at Regional State. Understandably concerned about attaining a desirable grade, Ester had acquiesced to her professor's expectations of "kind of copy-paste what he was saying." Ester was being trained not to venture too far out of the box in order to secure favorable marks. For Ester, this history professor was by far the worst professor she'd taken as most others were "pretty good."

Livy, a petite and ebullient English major with a strong writing interest, however, revealed that good professors did not always prioritize higher-order thinking. Evincing mixed feelings as she hesitated to speak poorly of her professors, Livy acknowledged her professors' generosity and their expert knowledge while lamenting that in most of her classes:

The only thing is that I kind of feel like it's just more of the work is more remember, like memory terms. I want to get better at my writing skills, and I don't feel like it's as challenging as if I were to go to a different university...

When asked about the particular classes that led to her assessment, she added:

Every class. Like right now I'm taking astronomy and it's the same thing. It's all just memorization.

Livy had her heart set on attending a slightly more selective university in the state but had enrolled at Regional State to remain close to her boyfriend. An academic curriculum that did not meet her expectations, however, made her feel like she had made the wrong decision. Because rote and mechanical forms of thinking characterized the type of learning in "every class" she was

taking, her experiences reinforced a broader pattern of mechanistic instruction that did not generally encourage students to push intellectual boundaries.

As Alan had alluded to when he described some classes as monotonous and as I had also observed, Regional State possessed a fair share of course instructors who exerted tireless efforts to help students develop inquiry-based mindsets, which facilitated systematic and complex reasoning rather than routinized thinking. Dillan (m: computer science), however, nonetheless helped clarify that courses teaching students application-based skills emerged as exceptions rather than as standard practice at Regional State. When asked about a class that he liked, Dillan shared:

I guess my assembly professor. A lot of the classes have what's it called, a lot of memorizing stuff. That's really not necessary. And I guess he [assembly professor] takes that stuff out and focuses more on the practical stuff because that's learning about a low-level programming language for computers and instead of just learning a bunch of information and stuff. He tries to make it how it's used. And more like practical uses. Other professors don't really do that.

By identifying a class that he really enjoyed as the one adopting application-based learning and by wanting to improve her writing skills, both Dillan and Livy helped underscore students' preference for dynamic courses that engaged them in situational rather than repetitive practices. Pedagogical approaches, which deprioritized intellectual exploration and critical thinking, contributed to dull learning environments. Students devoted the bulk of their time in these classes to mindless notetaking, cell phone checking or engaging in some other quiet activity.

*Social exchanges.* I also found notable differences across both universities related to professors' interactions with students. At Regional State, exchanges characterized by a reliance on directives and perpetual correction contributed to a strict instructional climate that encouraged conformity to a narrow set of expectations. In addition to constraining student behaviors, these interactional approaches suppressed class participation in overt ways. Disciplinary tactics at

Regional State were most visible when professors chastised students for not meeting precise expectations. One Tuesday afternoon, Bela (m: biology), approximately 25 other students and I listened intently to a Hispanic professor in statistics. As the professor demonstrated the steps involved to solve a word problem on life insurance policy and probability, he grew impatient when students didn't immediately provide an answer: "You guys have calculators so get out your calculators. Tell me." In a separate class meeting, his attempt to encourage student engagement carried the tone of an irritated boss when he snapped at the class, that if you're here, "raise your heads." He could tell students were just staring downward and wasn't sure if they were asleep. Since Bela was one of the more vocal students in the class, I found it hard to believe that the professor's reprimands were directed at her. However, the professor's remarks established a tense atmosphere in class that felt cold and restrictive. Bela confirmed this sentiment when she shared that earlier that semester the professor had gone on a condescending rant, complaining about cell phone use and criticizing students for not reading a book instead. She admitted that she didn't feel her statistics class was difficult, but the professor's strictness made the class uncomfortable, "I feel like he's annoyed by me, like I'm dumb."

Harsh correctives across other classrooms also reflected a rule-oriented environment that penalized students for common college-student mishaps. Although strict directives were meant to elicit greater participation in Bela's statistics class, chastising students when they deviated from classroom expectations discouraged student engagement. Sara (m: Spanish) described how her English professor scolded a student in front of the entire class when the student walked in ten minutes late. Attempting to avoid the same embarrassment that her peer had suffered, Sara skipped an entire lecture when she was the one running late:

That's why I didn't go to class that one time because I was like 'oh, she's going to point me out'. But I should've gone. I don't know. Like [she intends] to give a point maybe? 'If

you come late, this is what's going to happen to you. I'm going to humiliate you in front of the whole class.' That's why I didn't go to class one day. I couldn't find parking...I'm like, I'm just not going to risk it. I'm not gonna go.

While the English professor's rigidity may have minimized classroom disruptions by deterring students from arriving late to class, it also deterred students from showing up altogether.

Classroom cultures, which resembled restrictive secondary schooling experiences, contradicted the values of autonomy and personal responsibility that are typically ascribed to the college student experience.

Stringent instructional approaches were not limited to situations when professors sought to minimize classroom disruptions or stimulate student engagement. Professors' efforts to generate substantive classroom discussions also reinforced values of conformity rather than instructive debate. Lareli (m: sociology), for instance, described feeling relieved that she did not contribute in class after witnessing her professor's reaction to another student's contribution:

It's just that sometimes she's really into the art and one time, she put up a picture of a statue and she said, what do you guys think about it? And in my mind, I thought oh, 'it's nice.' And someone said, 'it's nice'. And she was like, 'don't say that! She was like, it's art.' She was saying, 'this is one of the biggest pieces in the world and you just say it's nice.' And I was like, imagine if I would have said it. But she's nice. She wasn't being mean. She was just saying I want more words for you guys to say, to describe it.

Although Lareli's art professor intended to help students develop a more contextualized interpretation of art, instinctive reactions conveying intolerance to simplistic commentary deterred Lareli from participating in class. In addition to expressing dissatisfaction with students' curt responses, by rejecting the student's answer, Lareli's art professor also dismissed the contribution as incorrect. Zaida (m: accounting) described the same rigid expectations in philosophy when her instructor attempted to stimulate discussion:

She would encourage it but just when somebody was about to start, she would cut them off and go to what she thought about it. My understanding with philosophy is there is no

right or wrong answer but then there was a wrong answer, which was what we would all say, and the right answer is what she said.

Asked if she contributed in class, Zaida articulated an internalized constraint that could be traced to her professor's strictness, "Not really. I tried to listen most of the time because I had no idea what direction to take."

Rigo, a second-year mathematics major, also described interactional styles among instructors, which penalized students for venturing too far out of the professor's academic parameters. Instead of forming their own opinions, students were trained to acquiesce to the professor's expectations. When I asked if he ever felt confident to raise his hand in the classroom and share that he simply disagreed with his professor's interpretation, Rigo described enacting a working-class logic of appeasement (Calarco 2014) to avoid contention:

I think maybe I just didn't want to say anything that would make her think I wasn't interesting. I respect the professors, so I don't say anything like, 'I don't see that'. I would just try to do what they told me to do. On the work... if she was trying to make me see something, I would try to see it. I would get it. Just enough so she could be like, 'oh, he's getting it.'

Not only do militaristic classroom interaction styles socialize students to self-monitor, suppress their thoughts and yield to authorities (Golann 2015) but they also reinforce norms of hard interdependence, which stress resilience and accommodating the needs of others (Stephens, Markus and Phillips 2014). Unlike exchanges at Flagship, which encouraged provocative discussions and empowered students to take personal responsibility, disciplinary tactics and narrowly stringent expectations suppressed risk-taking behaviors at Regional State. Rather than encouraging experimentation with new ideas and helping students build or extend existing perspectives, these exchanges discouraged students from actively contributing in class. In addition to reinforcing working-class behaviors tied to disadvantages in classroom contexts



(Lareau 2011; Calarco 2011), professor's communication styles also reinforced a mechanistic curriculum.

*Exploratory and Empowering Pedagogy at Flagship University*

*Course content.* Sitting in an approximately 65-student lecture hall several hundred miles away, Rick, a business major, was engulfed with dense academic material rather than repeated exam reminders. Rick's government class bore the hallmarks of the academic environment at Flagship University, a penchant for lively and informative debate and an emphasis on the process orientation of learning. Teaching students how to develop generalized forms of thinking through the application of concepts and encouraging intellectual exploration readily surfaced as a consistent theme across most courses observed. During one Monday morning in government, Sergio, the course instructor and also an advanced PhD student, covered a slide aimed at helping students understand how international relation theories such as realism, liberalism and constructivism explained the adoption of market reforms in Latin America:

Sergio (Lecturer): What would a liberal say in terms of market reform?  
Student: Economic independence is a great way to maintain international order.  
Sergio (Lecturer): If realists favor an international explanation, a liberal would favor what?  
Student: Domestic.  
Sergio (Lecturer): Meaning...?

As the student attempted to elaborate on the response offered and Sergio clarified the liberal position, he moved on to explain a constructivist perspective. During the next class meeting, students exhibited their application-based thinking instinct when Sergio covered a tangentially related issue:

Any questions from the last two classes? Does everybody know what a tariff is? A tariff is almost like a tax—an extra charge on imports. This is how countries protect economies and local producers. A student interrupts— So tariffs are more of a realist and free trade is more of a liberal thing? Sergio delivers a brief discussion on the association

between tariffs and trade liberalization but underscores that the overarching objective is to demonstrate changes in the reforms states took to promote economic development.

Although a reticent Rick never participated in class during my two-week observation, the eagerness with which his peers inserted themselves in the class lectures normalized academic conversations as a casual and effortless exchange of ideas. Students often felt compelled to freely state their opinions, even when unsolicited, and were seldom at a loss for responses when the course instructor sought their input. Thus, even though Rick did not actively contribute to discussions, he enjoyed a more dynamic classroom environment.

When probed about their classroom experiences, interview respondents resoundingly agreed that their courses required diligent efforts and heightened concentration because they demanded more than just a surface-level understanding of issues. As students described, these instructional strategies challenged them to alter pre-existing and potentially ineffective study habits in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of subject material. Realizing the inadequacy of his high school study approaches, Matthew (m: advertising) alluded to the importance of engaging with subject material in a deeper way:

It's not like high school where you can just lie and be like, it's fine. I understand. If you lie about it and you say you understand what you don't, then you really pay the price here. I learned that from my first semester because I would do that all [the] time. And it's like, you really need to understand what's going on—not just remember it but actually understand why this chemical is this and stuff like that.

Other students made explicit references to nontraditional teachers who tested them on their ability to defend opinions and emphasized the importance of understanding concepts in relation to other issues rather than taking definition-based approaches. When questioned about how her professor specifically helped her learn more than memorize, Amber (m: government and sociology) explained:

For instance, I had a test for him this morning and he told us to know the characteristics of certain genres but...when I got there, it was one main characteristic that we had to know. And I was like okay, that works, but that's not what I studied. I catch myself wanting to memorize rather than learn what I'm studying. And so ... with the way he does his exams and the way he presents his class, it's more of you might want to learn this in relation to other things. How can you relate this concept to another in order to remember it rather than how can you remember that all this information falls under this one name but not know how to relate it to anything else?

Amber's self-assessment reveals that beyond needing to develop higher-order competencies, like contextual reasoning, students also understood the need to retool existing, yet misaligned cognitive scripts (Garza and Van Delinder 2020). This pattern of intellectual growth and discovery also transcended course subjects. For instance, unlike Livy's writing experiences at Regional State, Josie, a first-year theatre and dance major at Flagship, described how exploratory opportunities in her writing classes challenged her to maximize her creative potential:

When I would write in Liberty, it was very structured because that's what they give you at school. They give you a structure for everything. And so, whenever I would write in Liberty, my creative bubble just wasn't big. And when I came here, all of my assignments that professors would give me were just kind of like free will. Do what you want to do with it.

Considering Flagship study respondents could attend classrooms with as many as 500 students, not all courses facilitated a continuous exchange of ideas with students. However, even if class discussions were not as fluid as the one's taking place in Rick's government class, in various ways, lectures frequently reinforced the importance of analytical thinking and conceptual application. As an example, Kasia (m: biology) sat at the far back of an old lecture hall in chemistry. Both the professor and guest lecturer used wireless microphones to reach their several-hundred student audience. To encourage deeper levels of engagement, professors frequently allotted time so that students could compute and discuss problem solutions with their neighbors. Because numerous course assistants walked around to help students during this time, students not only benefitted from one-on-one assistance, but they were periodically challenged to

demonstrate their mastery of concepts. Once, the professor asked students to discuss why a given molecular formula appeared a certain color with their neighbors. A course assistant happened to walk by and asked Kasia if she had any questions. Kasia was not able to get away with a close-ended question that revealed little about her mastery of the course concepts:

Kasia: I don't think so. Did I get it right?

Assistant: Yes, but can you explain how you got that answer?

Knowing that she was being prompted for an immediate response, Kasia explained how she had arrived at the precise answer. Conditioning students to engage concepts at a deeper level meant that attentive students periodically challenged professors when they had worked out problem solutions. On one occasion, a student asked a question in class that made the guest lecturer realize he had made a mistake. With a light chuckle, and as he corrected his mistake, the guest lecturer explained, "See, I know this concept because I read it in a book but someone out there actually calculated the distance."

Despite acknowledging that rigorous curricula, coupled with large workloads, provided for long and exhausting study nights, students understood and appreciated instructors' efforts to help them exercise higher-order forms of thinking. Even if Liberty students did not always actively participate in class, being immersed in a competitive learning environment reinforced a shared commitment to creative exploration and critical thinking.

*Social exchanges.* Unlike the directive-driven, stringent exchanges at Regional State, interactional styles and disciplinary approaches at Flagship empowered students to arrive at their own conclusions. Rather than aiming to instill guilt or fear, professors reprimanded students in ways that reinforced that while their performance was suboptimal, instructors were not going to sacrifice valuable instructional time for a few disengaged students. As an example, in Friday morning psychology—a lecture hall with more than 400 students—Mia's professor told the

class that the material she was about to cover would not be on the upcoming exam. “I’m telling you up front, so you don’t worry about it” she mentioned. Minutes later, when several students began to make noisy exits, she abruptly paused her lecture and announced:

I’m going to do something—all of you who are leaving because this won’t be on the exam, could you please do it now so the rest of us can concentrate? I’m not going to judge you for it.

Once all students who wanted to leave class made their way down the stairs to exit the lecture hall, the professor resumed her lecture. By encouraging autonomous decision-making as a way of minimizing disruptions and maximizing student engagement, Mia’s professor reinforced norms of independence and personal responsibility. Taking an empowering approach when criticizing student behavior also conveyed that students could act freely without fear of reprimand. Even though students’ choices did not always meet the professor’s expectations, by permitting a choice, professors were suggesting that students remained largely in control of their educational outcomes.

An interactional style, which emphasized empowerment and engagement, rather than constraint and reticence, could also be seen in classrooms with small numbers of students. When students did not exhibit desirable behaviors, professors communicated their displeasure in spontaneous, yet effective ways. These exchanges helped foster intriguing rather than intimidating classroom environments. As an example, when Kasia’s calculus professor at Flagship caught a student falling asleep in class, he introduced a spontaneous pivot in the lecture to re-engage students.

“Uh oh, he’s falling asleep.” Tom, a White professor who insisted students call him by his first name, teased lightheartedly. “Not good. Even though I would fall asleep in class all the time—Did I tell you all my most embarrassing moment?” “No, tell us!” the students chanted eagerly. Tom described an instance when he fell asleep in class. His head hit a cinder block and the noise was so loud it caused everyone including his own professor at the time to laugh.

The sleeping student's infraction could be blamed for derailing the lecture in calculus. Yet, the momentary pause not only helped re-engage the entire class, but it also contributed to a more relaxed learning environment where students did not have to fear the repercussions of common college student blunders. Although an introverted Kasia did not actively participate in most of her other large classes, she was an active participant in Tom's and regarded him as one of her best professors.

Students attending Flagship also described interactions with professors that challenged them to arrive at their own conclusions and not merely mirror a professor's thought-process. Students described classroom environments where professors carried themselves as facilitators, merely assisting students through their intellectual self-discoveries. When I had first interviewed Kasia, she pointed out the exploratory, yet autonomous climate at Flagship that her genetics professor in her honors class helped establish. Asked why her genetics professors intimidated her, Kasia responded:

Because every time I asked a question in class, Dr. Wright would respond with a question. [Laughs] No, I understand why she does it though because their teaching style is very, they want you to come to your own conclusions. They'll guide you to them. But they won't directly give you the answer. Which I both like and dislike—like when I get it, don't like when I don't.

An inquisitive classroom culture did not mean that all answers were necessarily correct. As Kasia mentions, she did not mind the Socratic questioning approach that her professors used when she “got it” but she wasn't particularly fond of it when she wasn't on the right path. What Kasia's example illustrates is that even if students furnished potentially incorrect responses, professors' inquiry-based instructional approaches were designed to encourage higher levels of thinking.

Several students confirmed that professors at Flagship also issued correctives whenever they believed that students were not on the right path. However, with few exceptions, even these students believed that their professors were not generally condescending when they revised or helped improve their responses. Professors emphasized a culture of disagreement to help convey to students that rather than serving as a form of correction, dissenting opinions were ways to challenge a particular thought process. As Bruno (m: undeclared business) describes, disagreeing with students and exposing the potential inadequacies of their perspectives was a strategy professors adopted to help students expand their cognitive skills:

Professors are straight up with you. They don't care. They're going to give input and try to debate you and you can never win but that's the point of going to college—[to] build your own opinions, build your own mindset and learn from what they tell you. You're probably never going to [beat] your professor in a debate but learn from what he tells you.

Fred (m: government) added that even when professors issued directives with authoritarian undertones, these communication styles represented purposeful attempts to help shake what they believed were unfounded or mechanistic student tendencies. Describing his experience with his weather and climate professor, Fred shared:

The first day we were in his class, he was like, 'if you're afraid to use your mind instead of your heart, get out of my class. If you're not ready to work hard and you're ready to beg, get out of my class.' The way he started, he started with those two lines. And he puts those [values] over everything he does.

Subscribing to a belief that informed and rational thinking should not be replaced with impassioned responses, Fred appreciated his professor's caustic remarks. Earlier in our interview Fred mentioned that his professor's fairness and dynamic instruction, including his emphasis on critical thinking, is why "I value his class so much."

Flagship professors consistently encouraged a diversity of informed and reasoned perspectives in their classrooms. Beyond equipping students with technical skills related to their

disciplines, professors also socialized students to assume responsibility for developing and acquiring new knowledge structures. Because exchanges between professors and students seldom strayed from the topic at hand, even when they were lighthearted asides, they not only reinforced the importance of remaining consistently engaged but also helped frame the academic climate as densely intricate and enjoyable.

#### *Alleviating Trepidation or Augmenting Insecurity*

Students across both universities understood there was a degree of formality with which they needed to carry themselves in the classroom, particularly as it related to their interactions with professors. Most agreed that while they may have had professors who were friendly, funny and occasionally informal, they often felt pressured to make stylistic adjustments when interacting with them to avoid sounding silly or incompetent. As Figure 3.1 demonstrates, though, while a challenging curriculum favoring conceptual understanding yielded important advantages for students at Flagship, the school's structural demographic characteristics that made this curricular focus possible came with a downside. Whereas the cultural distance between students and professors intensified academic insecurities for Flagship respondents, the cultural proximity experienced between these same actors alleviated students' trepidation at Regional State. Despite the less abstract curricular processes occurring at Regional State, culturally congruent practices between students and faculty validated students' sense of authentic belonging in college.

*Regional State.* Course instructors at Regional State frequently drew on ethnic-class cultural similarities with students to help relax rigid status hierarchies. When professors and teaching assistants incorporated Spanish in casual exchanges, they helped create academic spaces where students could participate freely. Responding to students who'd run into complications with their projectiles, Mark, the physics lab teaching assistant (TA), could be heard responding,



"Hay voy! [I'm going]" as loud bangs of metal projectiles and bubbly student exchanges drowned out his voice. When he sat down to explain concepts, Mark used the words "mas o menos [somewhat]" to gauge whether the student understood what he had just explained. It came as little surprise that Victor and his lab mates executed their lab assignment in both Spanish and English in Mark's class.

Victor counts in Spanish and deploys a projectile. Realizing that it makes a perfect landing, he makes a snide remark about his great precision abilities and announces, "*Una vez más. No vaya ser chiripa*" [One more time lest it was just coincidence]. He re-deploys and the projectile makes another perfect landing. "*Tén* [Here]" his lab mate responds handing him the projectile, "*¿Quieres apantallar?* [You want to show off?]," taunting him to fire it again.

During physics lab, Victor and his lab mate exercised the type of speech they accustomed in non-academic settings.

Incorporating Spanish in the classroom — spaces presumed to execute the highest order of business for students in college—also helped ease student intimidation. Because communication in Spanish typically accompanies casual and informal exchanges in Mexican American communities (Valdés 2000), speaking in this language helped signal more accommodating classroom environments. Ester, for instance, juxtaposed her engineering materials professor's welcoming personality with that of other professors:

Ester: He mentions some stuff in Spanish.

Alma: Is it class related concepts or is it more informal?

Ester: More informal kinds of things. He's very casual.

Alma: What do you mean by that?

Ester: He's very outgoing. And he's more, I feel like he doesn't seem to be a teacher-teacher. He's more like a student teaching other students.

Alma: What is a teacher-teacher?

Ester: Where there's like a division. Where you cannot joke around with them because they might get offended or something.

Drawing on Spanish for colloquial exchanges not only helped reduce the social distance between professors and students, but it also conveyed to students that they could be themselves without

feeling like they were infringing on professional boundaries. Unlike the other professors that Ester referenced, who imposed more rigid status hierarchies and made her feel like she needed to self-monitor, her engineering materials professor helped establish a casual environment. These actions enabled Ester to view him as a co-equal or as she describes, “a student teaching other students.”

Due to its bicultural initiatives, Regional State offered a robust number of courses in Spanish as part of its Spanish major, including some like mass media. A year after the conclusion of my study, the university expanded its Spanish course offerings to include statistics and college algebra. Beyond institutionalizing opportunities to help students exercise their ethnic-class cultural repertoires, professors across a variety of majors further validated the relevance of Mexican-American culture in the core academic curriculum. As Alan described, professors occasionally embedded shared forms of speech in the curriculum to facilitate students’ understanding of the course concepts:

He was like oh, ‘what does this mean in Spanish? Squished. So, whenever you hear this word, then just think of that word in Spanish and it will mean squished.’

Alan understood but did not speak Spanish fluently. Thus, when asked whether he found these associations helpful, he underscored that not only did Spanish associations enable students to more effectively understand and relate to the material, but they also facilitated access to esoteric academic concepts:

Because sometimes in anatomy they have sophisticated names— And they [professors], I guess, make it simpler for you like in that case. They make it simpler for you. It's more easy to understand what that word means or how to pronounce that word.

Zaida (m: accounting) discussed a similar experience in accounting when her professor’s use of Spanish helped her remember the topic covered in class that day:

I remember one time in accounting, she was explaining...depreciation about a car. So, she was saying something about her son towing one of her cars, una *carcacha*. That was the word she used so then I remembered that because of that.

By facilitating curriculum accessibility, professors who used Spanish terms to clarify concepts also helped students view the academic process as uniquely theirs. Professors demonstrated not only that students' cultural resources could be leveraged to master course content but that these ethnic-class repertoires were equally suitable for mainstream academic contexts. As Alissa (m: biomedicine) described, professors who drew on students' ethnic-class repertoires to maximize learning delivered smoother classroom experiences:

And I also have some [professors] that are from here, from the area...I guess I like those professors more because we have more in common and sometimes they'll explain things in ways that we can understand better because of the area that we were raised in. So those professors I tend to—not that I prefer them but sometimes it's easier to be taught by them because sometimes, a certain phrase that you know in Spanish that doesn't sound the same in English, they'll say it to us [in Spanish] and we're like oh, okay.

Beyond making the traditional academic curriculum less daunting, a bicultural curriculum also enhanced student learning.

Sustaining conversations in Spanish, however, weren't the only ways professors helped legitimize authentic belonging among students at Regional State. Even though command of the Spanish language may have been more prevalent among Hispanic faculty, instructors who made explicit attempts to situate students' backgrounds within the dominant academic culture helped dignify students' cultural upbringings. For instance, acknowledging shared socioeconomic origins were also ways in which professors at Regional State helped normalize academic settings as suited for all students regardless of social class background. One Monday afternoon, instructor Loera led a discussion regarding the difference between conveying knowledge and equipping students with lifelong skills, which stirred student enthusiasm:

Instructor Loera: Is it lack of education or proliferation of fast-food that contributes to

bad eating habits?  
Student 1: Education.  
Instructor Loera pauses.  
Student 2: But it's still their choice!

Instructor Loera sides with the second student and mentions that he was going to say something similar. After a few more exchanges regarding the reasons people eat out, Instructor Loera adds:

It's okay. My parents aren't educated either. My father went to 10<sup>th</sup> grade and my mother went to 5<sup>th</sup> grade. A lot of them—no offense to anyone—are on the food stamp program and this limits food options.

By sharing personal details regarding his low-income upbringing, instructor Loera helped ensure the inclusivity of students who shared similar characteristics. His use of, 'it's okay,' intended to reassure students that they could critique structural circumstances without feeling like they were self-ostracizing. Alan wasn't the only student who shared a strong liking for Instructor Loera's class and who believed that the instructor's dynamic approach helped make him more approachable. A classmate of Alan, who was an active contributor in Prof. Loera's class, described being so engrossed in the lecture that he lost sight of the fact that he was in a classroom setting.

While co-ethnic faculty may have been able to implement a bicultural curriculum on a more instinctual basis, a Hispanic identity was not a prerequisite to help mediate students' apprehension. Moreover, as I described during Bela's statistics class and as several respondents admitted, not all Hispanic faculty at Regional State leveraged shared cultural repertoires to relax intimidating academic boundaries. Instead, it was professors who demonstrated a consideration of students' backgrounds who helped reduce the distance between students' home and school cultures. Lisa (m: rehabilitation services), for instance, appreciated the family environment her professor in sociology established with humorous references to overprotective parents. Bela also vividly recalled how her biology professor asked them if they ever had to tag along as sibling

chaperones to illustrate the function of chaperonins in biology. After a casual exchange with a group of students in the Regional State student union, one student shared that by occasionally using Spanish in class, her professor from Illinois made the class feel more at ease, like they could be themselves.

Even if the content of academic discussions at Regional State may not have been as theoretically rigorous or as challenging as that observed in Flagship, when professors drew on students' ethnic-class cultural repertoires to facilitate curriculum accessibility, they not only helped students move beyond academic insecurities but also improved their comprehension. When professors incorporated bicultural repertoires as an instructional strategy, Regional State students were able to experience academic upward mobility, not as cultural outsiders, but as long-time occupants, merely expanding their skill sets. Although the sizeable share of Hispanic faculty members at Regional State, coupled with the majority Hispanic student body, facilitated the use of bicultural classroom practices, some non-Hispanic professors also attempted to institute similar instructional strategies.

If bicultural classroom practices legitimated authentic student belonging by empowering students to act freely, then how did mechanistic and authoritative curriculum practices simultaneously limit student learning and constrain participation? Drawing on shared ethnic-class repertoires to facilitate student comprehension did not necessarily occur in tandem with a process-oriented curriculum. Although bicultural classroom practices ensured students seldom questioned their perceived fit or preparation, students were drawn into a learning environment that emphasized memorization-based learning to virtually the same degree that it promoted critical thinking. A similar distinction applies to Regional State's authoritative environment. It's important to clarify that bicultural classroom practices helped mediate and not altogether erase

feelings of student reticence and/or intimidation. Although some professors enacted hierarchical practices that as Sara described “ma[de] [them] seem like the boss,” students were prone to contain their reservations to those classrooms and did not generally internalize narrow professor expectations as signs of personal incompetence. Professors who embraced students’ cultural repertoires played a crucial role in helping students develop this sense of academic worthiness.

*Flagship.* While Flagship students were challenged with curriculum standards that aimed to prepare them for management and leadership positions in future occupations, students also underwent constant uncertainty as they sought to assimilate into a competitive, middle-class academic environment. When compared to their peers at Regional State, students attending Flagship questioned and self-monitored their contributions in class with greater frequency. Flagship students did not generally question their belongingness. Like Regional State study participants, Flagship students’ strong high school performance, coupled with their achievement-orientations, conditioned them to strive for competitive and prestigious educational opportunities. However, because Flagship students experienced regular reminders of their academic under preparation and cultural mismatch at Flagship, students questioned their academic worthiness. Thus, classroom experiences at Flagship had a tendency of augmenting rather than mitigating Liberty students’ self-doubt.

Most respondents appreciated the opportunity to receive course instruction by renowned faculty scholars. With few exceptions though, a middle-class, individualistic environment did not generally allow for faculty scholars to connect with racial-ethnic minority and/or first-generation students. For example, on several occasions, Kasia had made clear how much Prof. Wright intimidated her, “I’m afraid she’s going to ask me something that I won’t know, and I’ll feel dumb” Kasia had shared. Kasia, however, could not understand why this particular professor

intimidated her so much. After a few days of closer observation, I was able to understand Kasia's apprehension.

Dr. Wright exemplified scholarly teaching at its best. A member of the distinguished teacher association at the university, Dr. Wright delivered detailed lectures on genetics with the precision of a meticulously rehearsed movie script. Her ability to expose component processes in biology through a continuous question and answer with students was quite artful. Kasia's intimidation had nothing to do with what Prof. Wright was doing. It had everything to do with what she was not doing. Prof. Wright would arrive to class with little time to spare and would immediately start the lecture. Because all of her interactions with students were related to the course topic, her demeanor conveyed a strict work-related environment. Kasia did not lack confidence. However, because Kasia's knowledge on the one issue that connected her to her professor (the course topic) was minor relative to her professor's decades of expertise, Kasia feared sounding dumb anytime she spoke with her. Because Kasia was taking this class with intensely competitive honors students, these structural dynamics compounded her apprehension.

Even though professors attempted to foster collaborative, growth-oriented classroom cultures, these efforts were undermined in classrooms with minimal student-professor interactions and when students had no way of relating to their professors. A young and recent PhD, Eli's linear algebra professor spent the majority of the 90 minutes of class explaining problems on the board with his back facing the students. Admitting that it was "impossible" to cover everything he should be covering in just a few weeks, he regularly sped through the explanation of matrices, performed quick scratch work to determine what examples he wanted to use and abruptly erased the board to make space for other examples. Times reserved for facing the students were usually when he was transitioning from one concept to the next. Like other

students in class, Eli at times opted not to take notes, worked on assignments for other classes and once left in the middle of class. He also admitted not going to office hours due to a peer's unpleasant experience. Prof. Anderson had told that student he couldn't get a concept because he wasn't smart enough.

Prof. Anderson did not strike me as a rude person. He had been extraordinarily supportive of my participation in his class even though he was a recent hire. During our one-on-one interview, he had also enthusiastically shared numerous algebra examples to explain his responses to some of my interview questions. Prof. Anderson's style of teaching, however, simply did not include a student-centered component and this deterred students like Eli from engaging in class.

A detached teaching style valuing exceptionalism tended to reward a narrow segment of students who could deliver on precise gatekeeper expectations. In Rick's economics class, for instance, the professor periodically asked students who had asked impressive and challenging questions to sit at a table of distinction in front of the class. Although such unusual forms of recognition would have deterred many students from participating in class, there were never a shortage of student contributions in classes at Flagship. Thus, although professors encouraged diverse perspectives and healthy debate, they also perpetuated student insecurities when students did not deliver sufficiently impressive answers. Cami, for instance, shared the impact of her sociology professor's approach in course discussions:

She encourages you to talk, or [have] discussions. But ... if she likes your response, she'll ask you for your name. If she didn't, she wouldn't acknowledge you...she just skips on if your answer was invalid. It makes me feel really small, so I really don't talk in that class.

Professors made students hypersensitive about their perceived academic preparation when they undermined what they felt were unimpressive student responses.



Flagship's racial-ethnic demographic composition imposed added pressures. Students also self-monitored their contributions in class because they feared that inaccurate responses could reinforce negative stereotypes of their ethnic community as Rudy, a first-year biology major shared:

I don't want to sound like what's wrong with this kid. But I feel maybe the fact that they're White really has to do with the fact that I don't want to give them a reason to think oh my god, another kid that's dumb and he comes from this place and he's Mexican. That kind of image.

Rather than feeling like free agents who could simply brush off inaccurate responses, as other Flagship students did, Liberty students questioned their intelligence when they felt they had not delivered noteworthy contributions. Like Kasia, Mariana (m: international relations) admitted that certain professors intimidated her. When I probed to understand the source of this intimidation, Mariana's response revealed that she had reflected on this issue on more than one occasion:

I've thought about this. And I feel it's more of like, I don't want them to think I'm dumb. Being a Hispanic woman. That's kind of what—Obviously if I have questions, I'm going to ask them. But if I have to really, when it comes to going to their particular office hours, my question in my head is like, is this a dumb question? Can you figure it out on your own? It's always that fear of not wanting them to think you're incapable of answering this question or figuring it out on your own or do you need more help than the others.

Mariana's response encapsulates Liberty students' academic tradeoff. Her emphasis on "figuring it out on your own" underscores her understanding that self-discovery and exploration undergird the curriculum at Flagship. However, immersion in this kind of instruction is complicated by her concern that her performance may not be on par with that of her peers. Such preoccupations could well serve as healthy competitive challenges. However, even though being among intelligent, high-potential peers impacts student behavior in beneficial ways (Kuh and Pascarella 2004), Mexican-descent students miss out on the advantages of resource-rich environments when

feelings of nonbelonging limit their school involvement (Hurd 2008). The fear that Mariana articulates and her awareness of her positioning as a Hispanic woman distanced her from her professors. Mauricio (m: economics) expressed the same detachment when he talked about the only time he had gone to office hours, “The only reason I went to her [Spanish professor], I can honestly say, it was because she's from Liberty Stream. And I felt comfortable with her.”

### *Conclusion*

First-generation and working-class students contend with sizeable academic challenges regardless of the selectivity of the institutions they attend (see Hurst 2010; Collier and Morgan 2008; Ishitani 2006). Although most professors and course instructors aim to develop independent thinkers who engage the learning process in meaningful ways, Hispanic students in this study either lacked classroom opportunities to develop these skill sets or the confidence to seize on them. When course structures that could facilitate the growth of complex reasoning skills were in place, as they were at Flagship, perceptions of a daunting academic process that is beyond reach, led to an apprehension and self-consciousness that prevented students from taking the participatory risks that their high-ability peers took. Professors’ teaching styles also limited opportunities for informal classroom connections that could reduce the cultural distance between professors and students. Structural characteristics at Regional State, on the other hand, including a significant number of Hispanic faculty, bicultural classroom practices and a larger working-class student body, not only made the academic process more accessible but also empowered students to feel like legitimate academic participants. However, unlike Flagship study respondents, Regional State students did not share the luxury of experiencing the academic process as a boundless intellectual playground.

These findings illustrate how classroom processes across heterogeneous school environments complicate students' ability to embrace an ethnic self that is able to bridge social class cultures. Even though Flagship students had greater access to highly rewarded mainstream middle-class cultural skills, these practices largely contradicted those associated with their collective, working-class upbringings. Moreover, self-doubts about their intellectual capabilities, which some students could not help but associate with their ethnic minority status, reminded students of their partial middle-class membership. Regional State respondents experienced significantly fewer discrepancies between their working class, ethnic selves and the classroom curriculum. Yet, for Regional State students, accessing the technical competencies in high demand among middle-class settings presented a greater challenge. As a result, beyond stratifying knowledge processes (see Anyon 1981), university classroom sites also help preserve existing ethno-racial hierarchies.

Table 3.1 Courses Observed

<i>Regional State University</i>				<i>Flagship University</i>			
Course Topic	Approximate # Students <sup>a</sup>	Weekly Meeting Times	Classroom Visits	Course Topic	Approximate # Students	Weekly Meeting Times	Classroom Visits
Physics Lab	20	1	2	Genetics (Honors)	60	3	5
History	40	2	3	Genetics - Discussion	10	1	1
Mexican-American Studies	20	2	4	Calculus	20	3	5
Philosophy	30	2	3	Calculus - Discussion	10	2	2
Statistics	20	2	4	Chemistry	330	3	4
Biology	80	2	3	Honors Seminar	--	1	1
Biology Lab	20	1	1	Research Seminar	40	1	1
Math Proofs	30	2	4	Psychology	530	3	4
Kines. - Physical Activity	--	2	3	Biology	260	3	5
Differential Equations	30	2	4	Biology-Discussion	10	1	1
Discrete Math	30	2	1	Art History	200	2	2
Teaching Certification	10	1	3	Thermodynamics	200	3	4
Kines. - Fitness	30	2	3	Thermo. - Discussion	--	1	1
Kine. - Curriculum Design	30	2	4	Statics	200	3	5
Social Ecology	160	2	4	Statics - Discussion	40	1	1
Social Ecology Lab	--	1	1	Differential Equations	50	2	4
Kines. - Arts	30	1	2	Accounting	360	2	2
				Career Seminar	20	1	2
				Pedagogy	20	2	3
				Government	60	3	5
				Economics	320	2	2
				Race Seminar	330	2	3

<sup>a</sup> Estimates are rounded and based on physical counts. They are based on room capacities when counts were not feasible.

Figure 3.1: Curriculum Tradeoffs

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	Regional State	Flagship University
Self-Concept	Enhanced Confidence	Augmented Insecurity
Cognitive Competency	Mechanistic	Exploratory

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## CHAPTER 4

### Regimenting Classed Outlooks

“Ok, I’m just going back to my apartment!” mechanical engineering major (m), Eli, quipped in a frenzied tone as soon as we’d left his Thermodynamics class. “I have to study.” Eli’s panic was evident. He had gotten a 40 on the last Thermodynamics exam so he really needed to prepare for the upcoming one. Eli wished the exam might have been his only concern. He had two quizzes for two other classes, needed to submit a leasing application for housing, and also write a letter of recommendation for a student he had mentored over the summer. We exchanged a few quick words before Eli retreated to his apartment to study. Enrolled in five classes, Eli’s rigorous course schedule meant that he spent just under 20 hours per week in class. Three of his courses met for problem sessions in addition to lecture. Eli was also an active participant in his bible study group, partially involved with a student engineering association on campus and contemplated joining a spirit group. Because he’d served as a student mentor, he also had lingering responsibilities associated with that role, all while he tried to sort out a financially affordable place to live. Financial assistance from his parents was out of the question. Thus, for Eli, as for most Flagship respondents, school and responsibilities associated with paid work dominated their tightly-packed schedules.

Although similar in some regards, Eli’s academic and personal schedule contrasted sharply with Aracely’s (m: mathematics) schedule at Regional State. Also enrolled in five courses, Aracely spent approximately 11.5 hours in seated class time. Shortly after we exited mathematical proofs, Aracely remarked, “I need to meet my sister” as she leaned to greet me with a peck on the cheek. A sophomore in high school, Aracely’s sister had called her the night before. She was struggling emotionally and unsure whether she wanted to continue going to

school. Aracely told her that she simply needed a break and inviting her to campus was Aracely's way of supporting her sister while fulfilling her academic responsibilities. That afternoon, Aracely her sister and I ran a series of errands before Aracely's next class at 3:00 pm. We drove by the bank, checked on the dogs Aracely had agreed to dog sit for a friend and went to Wal-Mart for a few groceries. After, we retreated to Aracely's dorm before her next class. In addition to her class responsibilities, however, Aracely worked several hours each day tutoring 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders. Although she wasn't involved in any student organizations at the beginning of the study, she later joined the health and fitness campus club as part of the course requirements for the kinesiology class she was taking. She often spent evenings studying at her boyfriend's house and typically devoted Sundays to church and visiting her father and sisters, who lived in the outskirts of town but nonetheless close to the university.

The type of activities comprising students' daily schedules, along with the perceived levels of stress that these activities imposed, capture the ways in which both universities helped students develop class-based habits and lifestyles. In Chapter 2, I demonstrated how routine campus offerings sidelined the cultural repertoires of non-dominant student groups. Although Hispanic study respondents gained valuable developmental opportunities from dominant group practices, they also sacrificed opportunities to nurture indispensable forms of cultural capital. In Chapter 3 I assessed how instructional classroom practices also equipped students with stratified academic and behavioral competencies. In this chapter I analyze how campus initiatives and academic supports, in concert with students' academic and employment commitments, structure behavioral decisions that reflect the group practices of distinct social classes.

Studies that have profiled social dimensions of life on college campuses, including Greek life (Pike and Askew 1990), athletics (Shulman and Bowen 2001) and student organizations

(Hurtado and Carter 1997; Stearns, Buchmann and Bonneau 2009) find that students involved in these experiential programs develop instrumental cultural, social, human and economic capital. Conceptualizing campus socializing opportunities, such as internships, community service and student organizations as the “extra-curriculum,” sociologist Jenny Stuber (2009) argues that the extra-curriculum enables access to cultural and social capital, which reaps profits among privileged classes. Because social class position at college entry influences extra curriculum involvement, however, Stuber (2009) argues that these campus programs reproduce class inequalities. Tracing the campus experiences of Mexican-origin students from the same working-class and low-income backgrounds, however, reveals that the robustness of an extra-curriculum varies across school type. It is not simply that higher resourced or more selective schools “pull students into” (Stuber 2011:115) the extra curriculum, but the extra curriculum in these settings also reflects more prescriptive and rigid middle-class behavioral expectations than do programming opportunities in broad access institutions. Students attending more selective institutions are socialized to display the cultural and social capital that serves as a gateway to distinctive occupational spaces while students in lower status institutions develop undervalued cultural and social capital through their own after school curriculum.

Beyond demonstrating how experiential programs equip students with indispensable forms of capital, my concern in this chapter rests on explaining how these institutional efforts transmit values and beliefs associated with distinct social classes. To help accomplish this objective, I further assess how relative extra-curricular responsibilities, along with other academic obligations, structure students’ everyday schedules. I find that students develop distinct forms of cultural and social capital depending on the rigidity of a university’s extra curriculum. Embracing a narrow middle-class culture frame, Flagship University employed exhaustive and



deliberate efforts to equip students with skills emphasizing individualism and competition through continuous growth and self-investments. Lacking the financial and cultural resources to deliver these opportunities, Regional State embraced a loosely-articulated middle-class frame that emphasized completion through the fulfillment of basic requirements. In the absence of more explicit expectations, students prioritized family and employment responsibilities over school involvement as part of their daily schedules. They nonetheless fulfilled these tasks with relative ease and self-confidence. Their counterparts who confronted a rigid middle-class culture, on the other hand, led hectic schedules that while imposing undue academic burdens, equipped them with valued forms of cultural and social capital.

### *Flagship University*

Flagship drew on its transition, leadership and scholarship-based programs to encourage adoption of mainstream, middle-class habits. In addition to helping the university address student retention problems, these programs were notable for helping students develop the cultural skills that prevail among high-level, managerial classes. Transition programs, for instance, introduced students to on campus resources and also facilitated course registration by reserving students a seat in high-demand classes. In addition to providing students opportunities to participate in first-year transition programs, Flagship also recruited Liberty students to participate in one of a variety of leadership programs. Leadership programs adhered to different criteria when selecting students for their programs. In one program for instance, students were invited to participate in the program based on whether their predicted graduation rate was lower than the graduation rate of students in their college. Another program looked at a combination of factors including persistence, potential and perceived need for the program. Thus, the odds were high that these

programs invited high numbers of first-generation, low-income and racial-ethnic minority students to participate.

As an incentive to participate, developmental programs offered students a wealth of academic and/or financial resources, as well as a number of leadership development opportunities. Transition programs, for instance, facilitated course registration for their program participants by reserving them a seat in high-demand classes. One leadership program provided students substantial scholarship money—approximately \$20,000 over the course of their four years at Flagship. Of perhaps greatest importance, though, these programs operated under a mantra that a successful college experience includes the development of valuable leadership, communication and community-oriented traits. Of the 30 Flagship respondents interviewed, 28 students were involved in either a transition program, a leadership program or some type of other scholarship-based program, which included a developmental component. Beyond preparing students for high-level managerial positions, these programs helped reinforce Flagship's rigid middle-class frame of individualism and ambitious career pursuits.

*Distinction and introspection.* Developmental programs at Flagship helped students improve their academic performance as they also encouraged distinction and continuous self-evaluation. Although some workshops helped students develop standard job market materials like writing a résumé and cover letter, others helped students develop competitive professional portfolios. When asked about some of the most memorable workshops, Cami (m: sociology), discussed an activity in which the concept of the golden circle was used to demonstrate how students should cultivate their personal brand and persuade others to buy their products. Just as Apple emphasized the superiority of its product features as a selling point, students were encouraged to identify and promote their skill sets in similar ways. In a separate workshop,

Mariana (m: international relations), who held a program leadership role, took students through a leadership assessment. Mariana and her co-leader asked students to rate themselves on four traits: self-awareness, transparency, morals and values and consideration of criticism. Beyond evaluating themselves on specific leadership dimensions, program leaders challenged students to develop an action plan:

We really want to hear their feedback and how they are going to implement the skills they already have and the skills that they're learning to be[come] a leader. And the leadership position that they're holding right now, or they want to hold later.

Even though Mariana participated in these workshops as a program participant during her first year in Flagship, she now served as a program mentor. This job enabled her to fulfill the leadership program's internship requirement. Performing self-assessments were not only ways to help students improve their leadership potential, but by designating a leader-based role as a future standard, these workshops also reinforced middle-class mindsets centered on growth and fulfilling career ambitions (Lamont 2000; Jensen 2012). As a program leader, Mariana was also able to exercise important communication, managerial and organizational skills.

In addition to participating in several developmental programs, Eli was also enrolled in a career development seminar through the school of engineering. Designed to equip students with vital professional skills like networking, confidence-building and self-promotion, instructors took students through a variety of business scenarios. The importance of self-critique to achieve an objective became evident to Eli when course instructors introduced students to the job negotiation cycle. The negotiation cycle included three components: Listen, Process and Take Action. To help students become acquainted with the listening process, one instructor asked the students to hold a three-minute conversation with each other and then take a survey on how well

they listened. At the end of the brief period, the instructor asked the class: “What are some things you learned about yourself?” Eli was the first to respond:

I interrupt people when they talk. I do that.

Instructor: Did you just realize that or—

Eli: No, I do that. I know I do. See I did that right now.

Eli blushes as some light chuckles are heard throughout the class.

Engaging in self-assessments enabled Eli to understand the type of skills required in distinct professional contexts. Moreover, by helping students identify how they could perform effective leadership or professional competencies, program leaders not only helped students understand their competitive strengths but also their weaknesses. Conveying a mindset of growth and distinction, introspective tendencies served as valuable cultural capital.

*Instrumental relationships.* Developmental programs at Flagship also taught respondents that paving pathways, which would facilitate academic and professional success, required not just self-awareness but also instrumental relationships. Despite their working-class upbringing, respondents discussed forms of what sociologist Stephen J. Ball (2003:83) refers to as operant social capital, a type of capital that derives from networks, which provide access to valued resources. Ball (2008) found that in contrast to the more familial and personal social capital that working-class students in his study referenced, operant social capital prevailed among students from middle-class backgrounds. On one level, students from Liberty were able to develop friendships with other program participants who shared highly similar background characteristics and academic experiences. A related advantage of being a program participant is that students could approach program leaders or workshop presenters with a number of questions related to navigating campus life or other academic-related issues. Program involvement, thus provided students with opportunities to develop network connections in an organic way.

Programs, however, were more deliberate about equipping students with operant social capital. Because programs commonly assigned students a mentor and advisor, Flagship respondents, particularly those affiliated with multiple programs, counted on an extensive array of mentors and advisors. Mentors were usually advanced undergraduate students who had also participated in leadership, transition and scholarship programs as first-year students and who had undergone a degree of training to oversee incoming program participants. Staff members on campus advised students on issues related to course scheduling and registration. Twenty-one students reported having at least one mentor in Flagship and 23 students referenced also having a designated advisor.

Matthew (m: advertising) reported having as many as nine mentors. As he described, such a large mentorship network alleviated the potentially overwhelming academic experience at Flagship:

I actually have nine mentors. So, I got a lot of support when I came here, and I did not expect that. Because it was really stereotypical that Flagship is like, you're alone, you do your own thing. I was kind of scared when I came here. But then I got into that leadership program. And then I got like, I'm a transition program scholar so I have—that's where I get most of my mentors from. And they're there for anything.

Referencing Flagship's reputation of staunch individualism, Matthew believed his mentors helped alleviate his initial trepidation. As previous program participants, mentors were ideally suited to facilitate students' transition to campus not only because of shared socioeconomic and/or racial-ethnic background similarities, but because they could also empathize with students' feelings of isolation and unease. For instance, when asked about a memorable program experience, Ninny (m: English) spoke about her mentor:

He helped me come into a place where I feel a lot more comfortable to myself. Knowing he was there to listen to me whenever I was having a hard time in school. He was really helpful. He's really relatable because he's—he was a student... And he understands what it's like to come from a background where it's just like, different from here.

In addition to facilitating students' integrative experiences, mentors connected students with important academic and other campus involvement opportunities. When Matthew mentioned applying for an internship in engineering in Argentina, he credited an advisor for keeping him informed about these opportunities. Mia (m: undeclared/liberal arts) also expressed learning about Discover Flagship, an annual campus event that introduces parents and members from the surrounding community to the diversity of research and knowledge on campus, through her mentor. Mentors also provided detailed study-related advice on courses that students were actively taking as Rick (m: undeclared/business) explained:

We've talked about basically for example, a test or exam we've taken and don't feel too good about or we feel we need help with, and they'll make the suggestion that we study this particular way. Or they'll give us tips on different places we can study that have worked for them.

The high levels of support available through these programs not only helped students academically but they also empowered students to draw on these resources whenever they encountered any obstacles. Despite experiencing financial constraints, students viewed academic spaces at Flagship as resource-rich, in line with middle-class cultures of abundance and limited material constraints (Stephens et al. 2014). Fey (m: neuroscience) described this environment when she discussed the utility of her developmental programs:

Okay, if you're struggling here, there's someone here to help you. Or if you have a question, here's someone who will have an answer for you.

Because relationships played a strategic role, developmental programs also established opportunities for students to develop connections with individuals in distinct professions. Hugo's (m: business) mentor through a professional development program in the school of business, for instance, worked for a real estate startup in Mauve City. As the online webpage described, the program intended to assist students with "those 'off the record'" career or

industry-related questions. In describing the requirements of her scholarship program, Amber (m: government and sociology) had mentioned the strong networking emphasis of the program. When asked what her program shared with her about networking, she underscored the importance of someone's position and not necessarily the content of the program's message:

It's not what they say, it's who they bring in. For every event, they bring in alumni and they're like, this is an alumni in law. If you're interested in law, then this is who it is.

Connecting students with professionals in high status positions were ways in which Flagship not only institutionalized opportunities for network development but also reinforced the type of relationships that students should be establishing. Network connections would be instrumental for longer-term success even if the precise form that success would take was not yet clear. When asked why she felt it was important to continue nurturing relationships with her advisors and program coordinators, Mariana first admitted that cultivating relationships was something she had “always been good at doing.” She then illuminated how developmental programs had taught her to view these relationships as providing important future returns:

And again, like I said, they really pushed networking in the two programs that I'm in so that's something that I've always carried with me. So, if you nurture those relationships, you never know where it's going to take you or the opportunities that could open up. And it could just be even for personal. You can meet a friend. And have that friend last you a lifetime. You just never know.

*Professional boundaries.* Institutionalizing a culture of continuous introspection to position students as competitive leaders was one way in which developmental programs at Flagship nurtured a middle-class habitus of self-actualization and growth. By connecting students with individuals in strategic positions, programs further underscored the instrumental role of relationship networks. A third way in which Flagship instituted a narrow class frame to facilitate adoption of middle-class habits was through teaching respondents about professional boundaries.

In an effort to help students obtain a job as well as prepare them for a competitive occupational market, schools within the university, including liberal arts, business and engineering, made detailed job market handouts available for students in their career centers. Ranging from how to structure a résumé, write a cover letter, prepare for a company information session, or evaluate job offers, career handouts provided students with detailed roadmaps that outlined the precise steps to take or behaviors to display when engaging in a specific job market activity. In addition to providing students with troves of job-preparation advice, colleges also provided handouts outlining appropriate dress styles. For instance, colleges concurred that students should dress in conservative business casual or business professional dress depending on the type of job gathering or event. White socks were a definite no and women were advised to be mindful of tight-fitting clothes, wear hosiery and avoid open-toe heels.

Developmental programs staff also tasked program mentors with reinforcing boundaries of dress and appearance during regularly scheduled mentor-mentee meetings. Mia (m: biology) recalled that when her mentor helped provide internship advice, he had advised students, “not to wear stilettos or something exaggerated.” Mia surmised that this feedback had to do with the negative impression that stilettos might give off. However, she was a little more perplexed by the makeup advice that her mentor provided:

I know he said something about makeup. You weren't supposed to wear too much. Just natural. Don't go putting too much makeup on yourself. That was interesting. I thought if anybody wants to put whatever makeup they want, they can do that.

As a leadership program mentor, Mariana clarified that although she held a value-free perspective, professional boundaries were important because it was a way of helping students control the response in a social exchange:

So, I feel like if you were to go with pink eyeshadow and hot pink stilettos, I personally don't think there's anything wrong, especially if you're a girl and you want to express. But



there's also that line of professionalism. You want them to take you seriously so you're going to dress the part too.

In line with the information mentors provided to program mentees, career handouts for the school of engineering encouraged minimal makeup. The college of liberal arts also discouraged loud colors. Even though Mia did not fully understand why certain types of makeup were more desirable than others in professional settings, as the following exchange reveals, her mentor had helped her reshape her initial viewpoints.

Mia: I guess I would do the same thing. Because he's giving me these tips and if I really want to get in and I want to be considered, I would follow what he would say.

Alma: Why?

Mia: Because if I really want the spot, I want to do whatever I can to get in.

Mia's interaction with her mentor underscored how Flagship's reputation, coupled with the perceived legitimacy of the developmental programs, helped her adopt boundaries demarcating professional and non-professional status. Because internal colleges, developmental programs and other school administrators enforced the same attire script, professional boundaries became more pronounced and gained greater validation. Moreover, by admitting that "[she] would follow what her mentor would say" and "do whatever I can to get in," Mia highlighted Flagship's class cultural emphasis on fulfilling ambitious career pursuits through continuous self-investments.

Rigid professional boundaries, however, did not mean that expectations of dress were rigid. Rather, respondents learned that boundaries of dress and attire governed distinct social contexts and that it was important to adapt to these settings. As an example, when I asked Amber (m: government and sociology) if she could attend a program event with distinguished program alumni in her current attire, she responded:

No. For orientation, it was more casual because it's orientation. For the banquet, we had to dress business professional. And our next event is going to be a picnic so I assume we can dress in shorts.

Adhering to these attire prescriptions was important, “because we were meeting the board and we were meeting alumni [and because of] the whole networking social aspect of it.” Career centers also typically distinguished between business professional and business casual dress. Thus, implicit rules governing student’s attire demarcated the settings that were professional and those that were not.

In addition to reinforcing professional boundaries, developmental programs conveyed that symbolic boundaries were ways of establishing one’s status and identity relative to other group members (Lamont 1992). One leadership program, for instance, required that students dress business casual when they attended regularly scheduled program meetings. When I asked Abigail (m: human development and family sciences) why this was a requirement, she explained how program administrators tried to help students leverage their attire to elevate their standing. Professional dress not only enabled students to approximate the social standing of the person they were interacting with, but it also reflected the university’s high-status reputation:

Because they try to instill in us that when you are meeting people that are important that you dress the part of what you're in front of, I'm assuming. And also, because we are going to be doing internships ... I think it's just so we represent the university well when we have speakers come over.

In addition to functioning as a status marker, Abigail explained that dress was also a strategic way to command respect. Referencing leadership program speakers who held distinguished roles in the university, such as deans, professors or accomplished alumni, Abigail added:

If you come and there's people in t-shirts, shorts, stuff like that, it's like whatever, I'm just talking to college students. But when you're in a room of young kids who are very in their suits and ties, nice dresses, nice skirts, whatever, you know...

Studies of class mobility in higher education have documented ways in which the university’s differential valorization of middle-class culture leads to a stigmatization of working-class culture (Hurst 2010; Lehmann 2014). As an institution that was strongly vocal about its diversity efforts,

coupled with the fact that many, if not most, developmental program participants shared working-class backgrounds, I did not find that developmental programs or career centers referenced non-professional forms of dress and self- presentation in condescending ways. Liberty students also shared that their mentors were not partial to distinct forms of dress and merely sought to prepare them for the realities of the job market. In an effort to ensure occupational competitiveness, however, narrow middle-class frames of professionalism helped students erect boundaries between middle-class cultural habits coded as professional and working-class habits coded as non-professional.

*Self-oriented schedules that tax.* Programs required that students meet with their mentors and advisors on a periodic basis. Along with middle-class repertoires of independence, growth and self-reflection, Flagship University structured students' schedules in ways that also introduced students to middle-class lifestyles. Although these schedules may have been designed to help students enhance their productivity, they had a concerning downside.

During the second week of my participant observation, Kasia's anxiety resembled Eli's. That Monday, Kasia had stayed up until 4:00 am working on homework. The following Wednesday she had three regularly scheduled back to back classes that started at 11:00 am and ended at 2:00 pm. She had also volunteered to present a poster during research week for which she needed to rush to immediately after calculus. Realizing Kasia would miss out on lunch, I had offered to skip chemistry and purchase lunch for her so she would have a chance to eat during class. After her poster presentation, Kasia would swing by her professor's office to ask her a few questions in preparation for her exam on Friday. Although some of these appointments were not part of Kasia's regular Wednesday schedule, this level of activity did constitute a norm for Kasia and most respondents at Flagship. Even though Kasia did not have lectures scheduled on

Tuesdays and Thursdays, she needed to fulfill volunteer commitments, attend discussions and also lab.

So, it's just, I think I take an hour break between my volunteering and my lab to eat and then I go to lab. So, my day basically starts at 10:00 am and it ends around 7:00 pm because lab has a minimum six-hour requirement. So I try to space it out three hours on Tuesday, three hours on Thursday but lately I've been doing eight hours. Why? I don't know. I guess I just have to do more.

Sociological scholars have found that students spend less hours on classroom study than in previous decades (Arum and Roksa 2011; Pascarella et al. 2011). The strong culture of persistence, leadership and competition at Flagship, however, meant that Liberty students had limited time to devote to non-work or non-academic activities. As high achieving students at their respective high schools, students saw themselves needing to devote extra efforts to not only meet the level of challenge of their classes but to develop competitive résumés as the developmental programs had trained them to do. It wasn't uncommon for students to devote most of their time to academic study as Abel (m: mechanical engineering) had shared:

I usually study after I finish my classes. And I end at 5:00 pm most times. And when I end at 9:00 pm, I have to study after that. I usually try to study in between. And my weekends, I study as well.

Although studying and class responsibilities dominated the schedules of most Flagship respondents, some students from Liberty also fulfilled a range of extracurricular commitments. Hugo's (m: business) detailed outline of his weekly schedule, for instance, reveals that students had minimal time to devote to any activities that did not involve strenuous efforts or high levels of concentration.

Hugo: So, Mondays, I have one class. And the rest of the day, I either spend studying or going to review sessions. Tuesdays, I have class from 8:00 am to 2:00 pm. And then in the afternoon, I have a club meeting. And Wednesdays I have one class and in the afternoon I have mentor training. And Thursdays I have class also from 9:30 am to 2:00 pm and in the afternoons I have a club meeting. And Fridays, I only have one class and the rest of the day is spent reviewing or doing assignments or homework.

Alma: What about weekends?

Hugo: Saturdays I work.

Hectic schedules, which included extensive study, volunteer, mentoring and paid work responsibilities, helped students develop indispensable cognitive skills and leadership traits. Fast-paced schedules, however, also helped students become accustomed to a middle-class culture lifestyle. In these settings, calendars structure family life, children participate in organized activities and the home is seen as a holding space for brief breaks (Lareau 2011). Students' schedules at Flagship revolved around appointments, downtimes were usually filled with résumé-building activities and time seemed to always be in short supply. As Nel (m: media studies) admitted when she talked to me about her student responsibilities, "So I have almost no time to myself, which has been a problem." Despite preparing students for high-status, managerial positions, this pace of life also took on physical and emotional tolls. When I commented on how busy he was, Mauricio (m: economics) admitted:

Yeah. It's really draining. It wouldn't be as bad if the hours weren't throughout the night. I work till 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning. So it gives me a little break to do homework before I have to work—like three hours. And I usually get most done. But it's not enough time. But in order for me to get that time, I have to sacrifice sleep. So, I usually go to class with less than six hours of sleep.

Pressures resulting from taxing workloads in tense and competitive college environments (Cookson and Persell 1985; Horowitz 1987) burdened Flagship respondents. In addition to draining students' physical and mental energies, packed schedules also impacted students' abilities to form meaningful relationships. Not feeling like they had sufficient time to prioritize opportunities for cultural immersion or to establish friendships contributed to feelings of isolation and loneliness. Nel, for instance, who had admitted she seldom had time for herself, described her only friendships as her roommate and the girl she met at orientation. Nel missed her high school friends with whom she had more meaningful connections. Moreover, when I

asked Sara (m: acting) if she ever took part in Flagship cultural events celebrating Mexican-American heritage, such as Lotería or Cinco de Mayo, she blamed her schedule conflicts for not being able to attend even though she really wanted to, “And I’m like.... Man, I missed it, I could’ve gone, could’ve met people... And I always find myself wanting to go so I don’t feel lonely.” For students like Nico (m: rhetoric & writing, sociology), tightly packed schedules came at the expense of not being able to develop professional connections with his professors, “I feel like I never have that time to want to go and see them. But I definitely want to and I know that I need to.”

Rigid middle-class frames that encouraged career development and personal growth also emphasized a healthy sense of well-being. This balanced approach would help sustain productivity and also help protect students from the deleterious consequences of frantic, anxiety inducing schedules. For this reason, in addition to equipping students with teamwork, personal branding and professional development skills, workshops also taught students techniques of resilience and self-confidence. Mentors and program leaders carried a basic responsibility to inform students about counseling and mental health centers on campus. Some invited speakers were also counseling center experts that spoke to students about ways to cope with depression or general forms of adversity. Nico commented on how one speaker discussed self-affirmations when she addressed impostor syndrome. As Fred (m: government) described, part of the leadership and transition program included lectures on “how to keep mentally healthy, how to not freak out, how to relax [and] how to handle your stress.”

Ironically, even though most Liberty Stream students came from close-knit families who were often students’ strongest sources of support, program workshops and other campus resources at Flagship seldom discussed family networks as mediums through which students

could address difficult times at Flagship. By establishing deliberate mentorship connections, introducing students to prominent leadership figures on campus and bringing students together with like-minded and similarly situated peers, Flagship programs encouraged students to develop a community with peers. Non-academic kinship networks, however, were seldom recognized as valuable communities or as relationships to nurture. In line with middle-class cultures where engagement with relatives is infrequent and deprioritized (Lareau 2011), Flagship not only viewed family time as filling a time slot on a schedule, but it also framed it as a time suck. On a handout labeled “time ‘black holes’ that prevent us from getting things done,” family time was analogous to watching tv, playing video games, socializing and texting. The handout asked students to evaluate how significant of a problem activities like family, sleep, tv/video games, cell phone/texting, among other perceived time sucks, posed. It is important to clarify that these resources were not aimed to discourage students from nurturing family ties or from engaging in any of the other activities listed on the handout. In fact, other centers on campus, like the mental health center, encouraged students to engage with family and friends as a valuable self-care tool. Taken in conjunction with other extracurricular programs on campus, what these resources underscored was the rigidity of Flagship’s middle-class culture frame. In this environment, family did not structure students’ lives. Rather, family held a designated appointment time in their schedules. Institutionalized leadership and career development opportunities thus encouraged lifestyles in which a career-first and work devotion schema (Blair-Loy 2001) characterized students’ lives. Cami (m: sociology) could not help but wonder on what she had missed out on as she summarized the heavy toll:

We always reflect back on [what] we could've been at Regional State and getting money back. Basically, getting paid to go to Regional State. It wouldn't be as stress[ful]... I remember we were making fun of each other not too long ago. Like they're over there with their family, going wherever they want. We're here balding, anxiety, depression.

We're always like, we could've been over there. But we always try to tell ourselves it's worth it. It's worth it. It's worth it.

### *Regional State*

As the theory of racialized organizations posits, Regional State, like Flagship, also embodied organizational schemas tied to resources that favor distinct racial groups (Ray 2019). Preparing students for the same professional middle-class mainstream, Regional State sought to equip students with some of the same habits Flagship cultivated in its student body: an orientation towards individualism, continuous introspection and a growth mindset. Regional State, however, did not count on the wealth of financial and human capital resources that Flagship possessed. Moreover, Regional State also enrolled a greater proportion of students who required extra institutional supports to meet college-level skills requirements. Prioritizing this student population was important in order to meet basic graduation goals. These issues meant that Regional State was less effective at enforcing a rigid middle-class cultural frame on campus. Because professional development, networking and self-assessment opportunities were available on a limited and inconsistent basis, Regional State's middle-class culture frame could be characterized as having malleable boundaries and emphasizing task completion rather than future leadership.

Whereas 28 students were affiliated with at least one transition, leadership or scholarship program in Flagship, seven students at Regional State mentioned being involved in one. The inability to access important workshops like time management, notetaking, or anything related to navigating campus life meant students had fewer supports to assist them in their transition to college than did respondents at Flagship. Moreover, Liberty respondents attending Regional State faced another disadvantage. Because of their high-achieving backgrounds, they were often overlooked by transition programs and courses at Regional State that were designed for students



perceived as needing to develop benchmark college skills requirements. As an example, university administrators and several students discussed a first-year transition to college course. This course delivered some of the same benefits as those Flagship developmental programs delivered. It facilitated connections with other students and faculty, taught students important academic study skills, encouraged identification of strengths through self-assessments and improved students' understanding of the learning process. Although this course was only required for students with a low entrance exam score and a class rank below 25%, any student could enroll in the course. However, given the course's optional terms, along with the perceived benefits of graduating earlier rather than later, it did not appear that the course attracted many students for whom it was not required. Two study respondents mentioned taking this first-year course.

*Episodic social capital.* Regional State also institutionalized opportunities to encourage the development of valuable academic and social ties. However, it did not establish a networking-driven culture. Of the 30 Regional State respondents, seven mentioned having a designated mentor. In these instances, mentors connected students to campus resources and provided valuable academic advice as Liberty students had experienced in Flagship. Yet, the importance of building instrumental relationships as a matter of practice was less clear at Regional State than at Flagship for two notable reasons.

First, mentoring relationships were loosely structured and established spontaneously. Students who had not been paired with a mentor through a mentoring program described ways in which they had taken it upon themselves to apply for a mentor through the campus-wide mentorship program or someone had reached out to them during orientation. Although Teresa (m: biology/premed) met with her mentor weekly and Oscar (m: electrical engineering) also met

with his mentor “a couple times,” other students met with their mentors as needed. As Rebecca (m: biology/premed) described her mentor’s valuable support, she also suggested that they didn’t generally meet on a consistent basis:

She was like, you can go [see your] professors if you want to see who the professors are. You can go here to buy books. It's cheaper. And she made me feel very welcome and very ... secure. And I still didn't have a face for the messages. Who's sending me these messages? But she was very nice. And then we decided we were going to meet here in school like, oh, we should go out and grab some lunch together. And I was like oh, now I remember you.

A majority of Liberty respondents, however, did not have a mentor at Regional State. These students shared that while it was important to have someone who could advise them on different aspects of their academic lives, they resorted to the resource that was most effective and more easily accessible. For instance, several students relied on their academic advisors to guide them through course scheduling concerns. Others, however, resorted to professors, friends or relatives when they’d had unpleasant experiences with their advisors. Speaking about how she obtained academic advice, Ester (m: civil engineering) shared:

They have mentors. Not mentors. Advisors. I have advisors. But they're different. Every time I go, it's someone different. I know some students have the same one, but I haven't had that experience.

When I asked if she saw a different advisor during each of her visits, she added:

Yeah. I actually never go. When I want to ask something regarding school or what classes I should take, I just go to my civil engineering department and talk to any other professors that know more.

Other students also shared Ester’s skepticism regarding the perceived help that advisors could provide. When Bianca (m: business management) sought her advisor’s advice, she felt like her advisor didn’t have time for her:

I felt like I wasn't getting the attention I needed. It was like, what are you here for? I see the difference between someone like ‘Hi Bianca. How is your day going? What can I help you with today?’ Or whatever. Yesterday, it was like, ‘So what are you here for?’

Lisa (m: rehabilitation services) had a similar experience as Bianca. Lisa had felt rushed through her appointment with her advisor. Lisa, however, also believed that having a mentor could have helped, “Because honestly I feel lost sometimes. And every time I would go to these advisors, I get different things.” Thus, it wasn’t uncommon for some respondents to turn to their professors for the type of academic guidance and support that Flagship students generally received from advisors and mentors. Several other respondents mentioned seeking guidance from a sibling or a close friend. Others navigated academic life largely on their own. Asked if she ever consulted with anyone prior to signing up for classes, Dara (m: civil engineering), was quick to respond, “No. I just follow the degree plan I’ve been following.” The scarcity of not just mentorship opportunities, but guidance, required that respondents figure out their own ways to obtain important academic information. Regional State thus encouraged the development of instrumental social ties in fragmented ways.

The second reason why Regional State was less effective than Flagship at building a network driven culture is because networking exchanges generally concerned short-term situations rather than leadership-driven and long-term career growth objectives. Students in Flagship, for instance, met with industry experts and prominent campus figures, in addition to participating in workshops that equipped them with long-term leadership skills. At Regional State, seven students were affiliated with a scholarship or leadership program. These students spoke positively about workshops such as time and money management or the power of positive thinking. Without these programming structures in place, however, mentors prioritized assisting students with immediate needs rather than with leadership or career preparation skills. For instance, Marlo’s (m: psychology) mentor gave him “tips [on] how to be successful transitioning from high school to college.” Although Rigo (m: mathematics) didn’t have a formal mentor, he

did have unique access to specialized tutors through the College Assistance Migrant Program at school. The program connected him with tutors that would work around his schedule to assist him with homework or as he mentioned, “anything.” Teresa (m: biology/premed) was the only student who suggested her mentor might provide helpful long-term advice when she mentioned that her mentor would check-in with her once a week and also ask about her plans. However, considering Teresa summarized the type of support her mentor provided as, “Just check up on how my classes were going,” she reinforced that mentors’ assistance tended to be limited to students’ current situations.

Through its campus-wide mentorship program, Regional State institutionalized opportunities to help students develop productive, mentoring relationships. However, taking advantage of these opportunities not only required that students were aware of the value of building instrumental social networks but that they also take the initiative to apply for these opportunities. Flagship students did not need to take this extra step even though they had enrolled in college with virtually the same level of social capital awareness as their counterparts. Liberty students at Flagship were paired with mentors through their developmental programs. Flagship respondents attended regularly scheduled workshops, which emphasized the importance of building relationships, and were incentivized to meet with their mentors regularly. At Regional State, loosely structured mentorship opportunities, unclear understandings on who could serve as a supportive resource, as well as relationships focused on facilitating immediate experiences rather than preparing students for long-term success, contributed to an environment in which social capital was seen as episodic and relevant for distinct situations rather than as a long-term cultural practice. Sociologists Mariam Ashtiani and Cynthia Feliciano (2015) have argued that low-income youth derive greater benefits from professional mentors who are

embedded in college, like a coach or employer, due to their positive impact on a student's likelihood of completing college. This study helps further that type of college plays an important role on the extent to which students can access diverse forms of professional mentorship.

*Professional basics.* On a Thursday afternoon, as I waited for Alan (m: kinesiology) to finish in social ecology lab, I walked into the Regional State business school to get a better sense of the school's career preparation materials. I perused the Regional State business school bulletin board, which featured a number of flyers promoting informational sessions with employers, such as Pricewaterhouse Coopers and the FBI. Other flyers informed about community events with the local food bank as well as student organization meetings. Unable to locate any substantial job preparation material, I asked the staff member in the front desk if any such materials were available. She responded that there were not. However, at the time of our exchange, a business school administrator happened to be walking into the office and had overheard my inquiry. She explained that if I needed job preparation advice, the career center, which was located in the main building, would surely help me. "I just didn't want you to leave thinking that we had nothing," she said.

Regional State's career center served its entire student body. Although Regional State enrolled approximately half the number of students that Flagship enrolled, the institution made substantially fewer career preparation materials available to students. As mentioned earlier, obtaining any type of career preparation advice bordered on overwhelming at Flagship. Each of the major schools and colleges had a designated career center, which made stacks of handouts available for virtually every imaginable stage of the job process. Job market handouts at Regional State were limited to the most essential job-related issues: preparing a cover letter and developing a résumé. Handouts advising students on how to prepare for successful internship and

interview experiences also supported a loosely defined middle-class frame that allowed more room for subjective interpretation. As an example, in the same handout that delineated tips for successful interviews, the bullet point on dress read:

Dress the part. It is just as important to know how to dress for the interview as it is to know the company's mission and values. Know the company culture.

Considering the limited availability of information, what “dress the part” entailed was not entirely clear. Although online resources on the Regional State Career Center website elaborated on appropriate interview dress, this additional information limited attire descriptions to two bullet points. These bullet points described the difference between business casual and business professional. In contrast, a similar handout in Flagship's engineering career center listed the following under a header labeled, “Actual employer quotes about preparing for interviews.”

Plan on attending the interview dressed for success with a tailored suit with conservative business attire in mind. Get new interview shoes and pay attention to details because the interviewer will.

An additional handout labeled “Dress for Success,” which provided exhaustive attire instructions was readily available as a supplement to the interview handout at Flagship. This handout distinguished between attire recommendations for men and women and also provided instructions regarding habits that could influence a first impression (i.e., smoking, use of excessive cologne or perfume, use of backpacks). It provided tips on how to add variety to a suit, where to purchase one at an affordable price and encouraged students to be mindful of the quality and the fit.

Regional State's second tip on the aforementioned handout, which advised students to “Know the company culture,” also illustrated the university's cursory approach to professionalization and their struggle to deliver clearly articulated professional templates.

Flagship did not merely suggest familiarity with company culture but ensured students understood how to accomplish this task as well as how to use this information:

Come prepared with previous research on the organization which you are interviewing. This is easily obtained by visiting the company's website and visiting the latest press releases.

Earlier in the handout, they had advised:

Research the position and the company. Find connections between your personality/experiences and the job requirements/company.

Although Regional State and Flagship embraced highly similar professional boundaries, ambiguous templates at Regional State not only left greater room for subjective interpretation but also did not always establish clear guidance. Professional boundaries were more clearly demarcated for Flagship students considering respondents also participated in career and leadership workshops or carried on mentorship discussions that reinforced the same professional expectations. Moreover, attending some developmental program meetings dressed in business casual attire provided students an opportunity to put some of these professional skills into practice. The majority of Regional State student respondents had no such opportunities. The most prescriptive information that Regional State provided was a schedule outlining recommended yearly strategies for landing a job upon graduation. As with their social connections, it was largely up to the students to seek out career preparation information.

*Family-oriented schedules that challenge.* Early one Monday morning, after his 8:00 am course in Mexican-American studies, Victor (m: bilingual education) and I walked towards his apartment. He had three and a half hours before his next class. He needed to watch two videos for his history class and complete the readings for philosophy, which met right after history. Victor had worked Thursday through Saturday of the previous week. Averaging 22 work hours per week, he assisted high school students on their financial aid applications as part of the

Americorps program. After work on Saturday, he'd driven to Mexico to visit his mother. While with her, Victor took a three-hour nap, completed an online exam for Spanish and spent the rest of the weekend hanging out. This Monday, when he arrived at his apartment, Victor knocked on his roommate's door and playfully chastised him since he had yet to wake up. Victor sat on the couch and released a soft groan when he realized that each of the videos for history was about 45 minutes long. He decided to watch recaps of the Grammy awards on Snapchat and after 15 minutes or so, began watching the first video for history. Half-tuned into the video, he periodically checked his cell phone.

Victor's schedule captured a common scheduling pattern at Regional State. School and work operated in the periphery of family life rather than structuring students' core responsibilities. As demonstrated in Chapter 3, students at Regional State did not experience what they perceived as excessively demanding study assignments. These relatively manageable course expectations, coupled with minimal on campus program or student organization responsibilities, helped support daily schedules that allowed students to devote greater time to non-school responsibilities. Moreover, a combination of strong familistic values, proximity to family and economic constraints, meant students at Regional State spent greater time with family. Greater time to interact with family should not be misinterpreted as suggesting that Regional State respondents were less busy than Flagship respondents. Regional State respondents frequently helped their parents with house chores, looked after or tutored family members, all while working and attending classes. In fact, 16 Regional State student respondents revealed working during the course of the study compared to 11 at Flagship. What study findings clarify is that Regional State students did not lead frantic schedules characterized by a high



degree of developmental and self-enhancing activities. Students sustained busy schedules with pronounced boundaries separating family from school and work life.

At the time of the study, three Regional State students lived in on-campus housing. Because the vast majority of students lived with parents and commuted to campus, students attempted to complete most of their school assignments while they were away from home. Rather than scheduling student organization commitments or mentor meetings, students made strategic use of free time between classes to complete their homework, as Uvaldo (m: nursing) described:

I go to class. And during the breaks, if my professor assigns me to work, I usually do it during my break so I don't have to do anything when I get home.

Completing homework while at school was an important objective because it enabled students to fulfill other non-school responsibilities once they got home. As Bela (m: biology) shared what her schedule looked like during the course of a week, she explained that completing homework at school was a way of also being able to meet other priorities:

And then on Thursdays, like today, I go to class from 9:00 in the morning up until 3:00 pm and I stay on campus for about an hour or two. Nothing more than that. And I just finish little things so that way when I go home, again, I don't have to do homework. Because tomorrow, I have to wake up at 7:00 in the morning to go to work... And then Sundays, I mostly just go to church with my mom or my sister.

At times students described time with family as a leisure opportunity. In these instances, students weren't concerned about studying for exams or other school tasks. Marlo (m: psychology) underscored his non-obsessive approach to school even though it still held a priority for him:

I take some time off. Like I'm not just like school, school, school, school. Like I watch TV. I listen to a lot of music. I talk to my mom or I go with my friends...or cousins. [I] go to my grandma's house.

Although Marlo visited with relatives primarily on weekends, he visited his grandmother's house approximately twice a week. Spending leisure time with family was also important for Oscar (m: electrical engineering). Admitting that, "I usually just do my homework here before I leave [school]," Oscar also added that he spent time with his mom on Monday mornings and "just talk[ed]."

Family time though was not always synonymous with leisure time. Setting aside school time to complete homework also enabled students to fulfill work associated with other family responsibilities. Oscar spent his Monday morning not just chatting with his mom but also helping to feed their farm animals. Oscar initially stated that the animals were "not really that hard to take care of—just give them water and stuff like that." Yet, he and his mom looked after approximately 30 chickens, three goats, two dogs and a couple of roosters. Hence, while it wasn't a difficult chore, it was certainly a time consuming one.

For other students, responsibilities at home involved looking after vulnerable family members. Several students, for instance, devoted time at home to take care of nieces and nephews. Erasmo (m: nursing) discussed running errands for his parents, including picking up his grandmother from the doctor. Both Aracely (m: mathematics) and Dara (m: civil engineering) tutored their siblings. In addition to looking after his nephews, Rigo (m: mathematics) also helped his mother with dinner, washed dishes or cleaned the house. When I asked if he ever completed homework at home, Rigo responded:

Yeah but I would do it usually towards the night. But I would try to do it here in school. When we were studying, if anything, I would do homework for the next day. Let me just do my homework so I don't have to worry about it for tomorrow.

Rigo reserved schoolwork for school hours. In instances when school hours were insufficient to complete his homework, schoolwork came after his family commitments. Like her peers, Lisa

(m: rehabilitation) adhered to a simple schedule with pronounced school and home boundaries.

In a tone that conveyed a trace of guilt, she also suggested that this arrangement did not allow her to be very involved in school, “I’m not that involved though because I’m the type just to go to classes and go home.” When I asked her if she had a choice in her scheduling arrangements she responded:

I sort of feel like I put myself in the situation. Because my little sister, she’s autistic and my mom’s a single mom. And so, I don’t know, I feel like I need to go home and help with my sister.

Lisa’s response illuminated a common quandary among Regional State students. Her reference of “sort of feel[ing]” that she placed herself in a strict class-then-home schedule, suggested that although she was making an autonomous decision, her perceived “need to go home” and assist her single mother had also shaped that decision. Thus, even if students may not have been required to assist with family responsibilities, circumstances associated with their working-class backgrounds compelled them to help out at home.

Teresa (m: biology/premed) was one of the three respondents who lived in on campus housing at Regional State. Teresa aspired to be a surgeon. She was a member of an honors organization as well as the university’s chapter of the Health Occupations Students of America. In addition to needing to meet volunteer requirements and attend regularly scheduled meetings, she further described a weekly study schedule that mirrored the ones her counterparts in Flagship had described:

I only have one class on Mondays but usually afterwards, I try to do as much homework as I can. And I’m usually studying a lot during the week. Tuesdays and Thursdays, those are my busy days. I have three classes. So, I’m either, I tend to go the LAC a lot, which is the tutoring center. And I’m there studying. I’m there finishing off a report that I need to do for the next day.

Given the long years of study involved in the profession Teresa had chosen, as well as the leadership abilities required, Teresa could have benefited from the opportunities that developmental workshops at Flagship provided. However, the absence of these institutionalized structures meant Teresa had more time to devote to activities of her choosing. In addition to going out with friends, Teresa also followed a family-centered schedule and visited her family four times a week. As high achievers, students worked hard to meet their school responsibilities. However, they also worked hard to keep school-related tasks from infringing on their after-school home lives.

A loosely structured middle-class frame meant students received less detailed instructions on how to fulfill essential professionalization tasks. Thus, Regional State institutionalized opportunities to help students achieve basic goals, such as graduating with a job, rather than drilling the importance of developing a competitive brand that would ensure long-term growth.

Although students had limited accessibility to the type of cultural and social capital held in high esteem in mainstream professional spaces, a flexible middle-class frame was not without advantages. Unlike students at Flagship, Regional State students did not demonstrate the same anxiety over the potential consequences of not logging sufficient volunteer hours, missing important on campus commitments or even failing a class. When asked about his homework load, Gustavo (m: mechanical engineering) shared:

It's manageable. It feels natural actually. It doesn't feel like it's overwhelming or underwhelming...I'm not stressing. I don't drink coffee, not anymore, but I have time to drink some hot chocolate and just relax. I have time to spend time with my brothers or sisters. I'm not always like homework, work, homework, work. No. Sometimes I just don't do it till the day it's due and I'm not stressing about it. It's easy. You know.

Like Gustavo, Victor had a tendency of watching videos for history and completing homework shortly before class met. Other students disclosed similar homework habits. In addition to

leading relatively manageable day-to-day schedules, students also cherished not having student organization responsibilities precisely because this enabled them to prioritize their well-being. When I asked Alan (m: kinesiology) to explain his preference for relaxing at home, going to the rec center or playing video games instead of being more involved in student organizations, he responded:

I think it's more beneficial for me because I relieve a lot of stress during that time. It [leisure activities] keeps me in line with school. I'm playing basketball. I have my fun and whatnot, and after, I don't feel stressed out so much or like I could go study after or just do whatever, do homework, do anything I need to do after.

Most respondents did not feel the need to pack their schedules with a long list of activities and unlike Flagship, Regional State also did not provide opportunities that would require students to fill their schedules.

Several students did comment on their exhaustion. This exhaustion was generally tied to students' work and academic commitments. Neither of these students disclosed spending time on extracurricular activities. However, long commutes between the Regional State main campus and its sister campus, which was located at about a 60-mile distance in Grand City, contributed to this exhaustion. Dara (m: civil engineering) described the same travel issues that had burdened Alan during the course of my participant observation:

It was so stressful. I would go to Grand City on Mondays and Wednesdays and I had to take the shuttle and I had to wake up at 5:00 am just to catch the shuttle at 7:00 am.

Although Regional State respondents had access to a counseling center on campus, mental health resources and general advice on how to balance stressful schedules were not nearly as ubiquitous and accessible as in Flagship. Regional State also did not train its students to seek professional forms of therapy with the same emphasis and regularity as Flagship did. However, whereas positioned as a potential "time suck" at Flagship, periodic family visits served as an organic form

of therapy for students at Regional State. When I asked Veronica (m: mass communications) whether she felt exhausted at the end of a school day, she responded, “Kind of. But I get home and my energy comes back. I just get overwhelmed here at school going from class to class.”

Both students who lived in off campus housing did not have daily access to their families. These students, however, adopted coping strategies that deprioritized school-related affairs. Sarita (m: Spanish), for instance, outlined a schedule in which she woke up at 6:30 am, worked at McDonald’s until her class at 4:40 pm and was not able to leave campus until 9:50 pm. When I asked her if there were ever times when she did not have an opportunity to study, her response conveyed an attitude of resignation rather than ardent competition, “Yeah. There is. I’m like, oh, screw this! I’m tired.”

### *Conclusion*

Analyzing the ways in which universities institutionalize middle-class frames of professionalism illustrates how they also socialize students to adopt class-based habits and belief systems. By incentivizing participation in elaborate leadership programs, emphasizing the importance of individual growth and packing students’ schedules with networking and growth opportunities, Flagship did more than just pull students into the extra curriculum (Stuber 2011). Through a middle-class frame that was rigidly defined and consistently enforced, Flagship equipped students with detailed scripts that helped them develop middle-class professional repertoires. This training, however, resulted in physically and emotionally draining, appointment-driven schedules that left little room for family and other working-class leisure activities.

Ambiguously defined professional skills, scarce opportunities to develop social networks and minimal incentives to participate in leadership development courses contributed to Regional State’s loosely structured middle-class frame. From a conventional academic perspective,

Regional State students were missing out on opportunities to develop critical forms of capital. Regional State respondents, however, embraced schedules that allowed greater opportunities to both interact with family and also assist with home tasks. Students were relatively unconcerned about padding their résumés even though they worked hard to fulfill their core academic responsibilities and also aimed to secure competitive, high-paying jobs. Four-year schools' differential positioning within the status hierarchy, coupled with available campus resources and student needs, thus plays an important role on how students are socialized to enter not just the occupational workforce but an upwardly mobile class culture.

## CHAPTER 5

### Conclusion

In addition to fulfilling a set of moral, spiritual and leadership growth objectives, a college degree has for centuries also served to preserve one's social standing. The exclusivity that graduating with a four-year degree affords helps reinforce why the postsecondary educational system, perhaps more than most institutions, is one that thrives on prestige. Few would disagree that a degree from an institution with greater admissions competition, regardless of its future earnings power, signals greater academic prowess. However, the preceding analyses, which assess how core academic processes vary across differentially selective universities, contextualizes the circumstances under which a more selective institution yields advantages for the most vulnerable student groups. I underscore that despite being on track to achieve the same four-year degree distinction, upwardly mobile students attending more selective universities, which enroll greater shares of affluent students and possess greater operating revenues, are socialized to embrace a narrow set of mainstream middle-class cultural skills. The parameters that define an upwardly mobile class culture are less clear for working-class Hispanics attending a less selective, Hispanic-serving institution (HSI) with greater shares of low-income co-ethnics. Students attending this less selective university saw little difference between their working-class cultural dispositions and those associated with their upwardly mobile class cultures. Thus, the universities in this study reproduced the cultural practices associated with the racial-ethnic and social class backgrounds of their respective student bodies.

When evaluating a university's effectiveness based on how well it equips students with the cultural resources most valued in mainstream, middle-class social and professional spaces, Flagship University provided clear advantages. Working-class Hispanics attending this more



selective institution gained valuable academic and occupational skills from a university curriculum designed for an academically competitive, predominantly White and socioeconomically privileged student body. Courses and developmental programs not only reinforced mainstream middle-class practices and beliefs but students also understood the importance of prioritizing these behaviors each time they set foot on campus. Not only did the academic ethos at Flagship encourage increased civic involvement and social awareness, but it also endorsed the food and language practices characteristic of an affluent American mainstream. As students shared, course instructors who challenged students' existing cognitive schemas and equipped them with process-oriented skills, not only delivered more stimulating and challenging academic experiences, but also reinforced middle class values of intellectual exploration and autonomous decision making. Finally, developmental programs that structured opportunities for students to develop introspective tendencies, instrumental social capital and occupational cultural capital, helped prepare students for a competitive job market. Students' schedules thus resembled the hectic schedules of mainstream middle-class culture as they scurried to make time for program, classroom, job and other extra-curricular requirements. Embracing such a rigidly defined upwardly mobile culture further conveyed that the class culture, which students aspired to attain, was fundamentally removed from the one associated with their ethnic-class origins.

Hispanic students at Regional State, a majority-Hispanic and working-class institution, fared less well when adopting a mainstream, middle-class culture as the measure of institutional success. Campus organizational norms that sidelined middle-class cultural repertoires by deprioritizing opportunities for civic-engagement and intellectual exploration left students questioning whether they had been shortchanged of a more enriching college experience. Routinized and authoritative course practices not only inhibited course engagement but also

contributed to underchallenging learning climates. Finally, despite taking noticeable measures to equip students with the cultural and social capital often required for academic and occupational success, Regional State's less rigid extra curriculum and more loosely defined middle-class frame meant Liberty students had significantly fewer opportunities and resources than their counterparts at Flagship to develop competitive job market portfolios. Taken together, core academic processes at Regional State moderated rather than maximized student development and reinforced repertoires of conformity (Kohn 1959; [1969]1977), interdependence (Stephens, Fryberg and Markus 2012) and essential skills (Bernstein [1973] 2003), which are cultural traits more commonly associated with the working-class.

#### *An Overlooked Tradeoff*

There is a hidden cost to attending a more selective institution and an immeasurable benefit in attending one with greater ethnic-class consonance. These tradeoffs are related to how ethnic class structural contexts shape students' upwardly mobile class cultural experiences. Despite the limited accessibility of mainstream middle-class cultural skills, Hispanic students attending a predominantly Hispanic, working-class institution, navigated college life with an ease and self-assurance that helped them maintain a personal sense of well-being and healthy academic self-concept. Widespread Mexican product offerings and a strongly bicultural organizational culture, which resembled the cultural arrangements in students' own communities, encouraged rather than questioned students' consumption behaviors. Instructors who embedded ethnic-class cultural repertoires in classroom content helped students understand the learning environment as theirs rather than as a foreign cultural arena demanding strenuous behavioral and cognitive retooling. The less permeable boundaries that separated family from school and paid work affairs, while at times imposing constraints on students' autonomy, also enabled them to draw on

non-academic measures, such as family or work achievements, as measures of satisfaction and accomplishment. Although students may have missed out on the type of capital building opportunities that carry occupational rewards, students nurtured alternative cultural capital, like enhanced bilingualism, team-orientations and time-management skills that were derived from the balance of their family and school commitments. As a result, and to a greater extent than Flagship respondents, Regional State study participants could claim greater ownership of an upwardly mobile class culture that, save for the economic component, had been theirs all along.

Acquiring the class cultural resources that would set them apart from students attending less selective institutions exacted heavy well-being penalties for Flagship respondents. Inhabiting a largely dissonant ethnic-class context meant that in contrast to Regional State study participants, Flagship respondents engaged in greater self-monitoring tendencies. An organizational culture that sidelined students' language and food practices, coupled with a highly individualistic, and at times detached classroom curriculum, discouraged students from exercising their ethnic-class cultural repertoires. Teaching approaches that either intimidated students or undermined their contributions, coupled with high levels of academic competition, reminded students of their intellectual under preparation. Moreover, the rigidity of a middle-class professional frame, which equipped students with indispensable job market and occupational knowledge, also helped normalize exhausting everyday schedules. With some exceptions, Flagship students appeared to be working in perpetual overtime to adapt to an upwardly mobile class culture that largely contrasted their Hispanic, working-class way of life.

### *Implications for Inequality*

I have argued that students' sociocultural positioning, relative to the structural characteristics of the universities they attend, plays a decisive role on their opportunities to maintain and develop

proficiency in a variety of class cultures. The findings I present underscore the importance of disaggregating the component parts of upward mobility. Although Liberty study respondents may, in some indeterminate future, be able to exchange their four-year degree for greater earnings, the type of school they attend plays an important role on whether they can both appreciate and participate in heterogeneous cultural environments. In other words, a college degree may facilitate upward mobility in material terms, but a stratified system of higher education helps preserve inequality in matters of cultural practice.

Cultural reproduction—replicating the distribution of cultural capital among social classes to preserve existing hierarchies (Bourdieu 1973)—took two different forms in this study. At an institutional level, this research suggests that more affluent universities are better able than lower resourced institutions to equip their student bodies with clear academic and occupational advantages. Relative to their similarly positioned counterparts who attended a broad access HSI, working-class students in a higher resourced, more selective institution had greater opportunities to develop extensive networks of productive resources. Because more selective institutions appear to also invest more heavily on the development of a set of narrowly defined middle-class cultural skills, these students are likely to be better equipped with the cultural resources that mainstream audiences consider worthy and distinctive. They are also better positioned to reap occupational advantages stemming from their shared cultural similarities with high status employers (see Rivera 2012; Koppman 2016). Considering graduates from less selective institutions receive fewer employer responses than do degree-holders from top-ranked institutions (Gaddis 2015), the cultural acquisitions of students attending more prestigious schools only enhance their competitive advantage in middle-class professional markets.

The second way in which a horizontally stratified university system reproduces cultural inequality is through the reinforcement of existing racial and class hierarchies. Although tempting to designate more selective schools as a superior choice, the more selective institution in this study also played the greatest role in strengthening the perceived inferiority of Mexican-American culture. Despite arriving in Flagship with strong racial-ethnic, working-class repertoires, including bilingual fluency, a familistic orientation and an attitude of interdependence, students readily understood the sidelined status of these practices. While Flagship did not discourage students from engaging in their ethnic-class cultural practices, the dominance of a rigid middle-class culture meant students deprioritized their own behaviors to achieve more seamless incorporation. Despite the promise inherent in Regional State's attempts to elevate the status of Mexican-American working-class culture as a way of mitigating cultural disparities, the disproportionate representation of low-income and Hispanic students in lower status institutions (see Fry and Cilluffo 2019) will continue to undermine these efforts. The class cultures that thrive in broad access institutions will thus also be viewed as holding secondary status relative to the cultures endorsed in more prestigious schools.

Studies assessing Hispanics in four-year colleges and universities document marginalized student experiences, which are often attributed to dominant group or gatekeeper misperceptions of ethnic, working-class culture inferiority (Yosso et al. 2009; Hurtado 1994; González 2002; Valenzuela 1999). Other researchers identify similar practices at HSIs (Lerma, Hamilton and Nielsen 2020; Sánchez 2019). As I demonstrate in this study, Hispanic students continue to experience forms of discrimination tied to their ethnic, working-class dispositions. However, I further that accounting for Hispanic students' sociocultural positioning within their broader school environments complicates traditional understandings of minority student exclusion.

Because students at Regional State faced limited opportunities to cultivate mainstream middle-class cultural capital just as students at Flagship struggled to exercise ethnic, working-class cultural repertoires, exclusion takes qualitatively distinct forms based on the extent to which dominant school characteristics align with students' sociocultural backgrounds. Working-class Hispanics undergo marginalizing experiences not solely based on perceived mismatches between their cultural dispositions and those endorsed by the school, but also because they are unable to develop cultural competencies that carry currency across heterogeneous class settings. While confidently moving between these boundaries is how omnivore elites protect their privileged position (Khan 2011; Peterson and Kern 1996), campus sidelining processes, coupled with dominant class cultural practices, ensures members of the Hispanic, working-class are unable to do the same.

### *Policy Implications*

I assess how characteristics associated with school selectivity impact the upwardly mobile class cultural experiences of Hispanic students in an effort to help maximize students' academic development. The importance of ensuring low-income and working-class underrepresented minorities can participate in campus experiences that are as academically and culturally enriching as their more privileged counterparts is especially time sensitive in a post-secondary educational landscape witnessing increasing levels of racial-ethnic diversity (AAC&U 2011). Given the uniqueness of the student body composition at Regional State, few would disagree that attempting to model campus cultures without minority-majority student bodies after this school would be impractical. However, I contend that it is similarly shortsighted to continue relying on a narrow set of elite and research-oriented institutions to shape the cultures of colleges with a substantial working-class and/or minority student body as others have previously suggested (see

Pascarella 1997; Deil-Amen 2015). Because students gain indispensable knowledge and growth opportunities from the dominant class cultures across both of the institutions profiled in this study, educators and policymakers are challenged to help students access both without perpetuating cultural hierarchies. I offer the following recommendations to assist in the design of more institutionally-focused, implementable solutions:

First, because incorporating models of social responsibility, sustainability and environmental literacy into the course curricula helps students develop competencies and attitudes associated with serving as positive change agents (Rowe 2002), colleges can institutionalize course requirements designed to stimulate discussions on any number of global or local issues, as was the case at Flagship University. While some universities may rely on current liberal arts or cultural studies course requirements to fulfill this objective, the additional course requirement would reinforce that an ethos of self-reflection, exploration and civic engagement underlies campus life rather than select academic disciplines. Similarly, while ethnic studies curricula in higher education have advanced critical dialogues, relying solely on an ethnic studies department to serve the needs of underrepresented students conveys that minority cultures bear relevance in designated institutional spaces (see Garcia and Okhidoi 2015). Without including ethnic studies departments and course requirements as part of a holistic strategy of inclusivity that encompasses all aspects of campus life, these isolated approaches risk reinforcing students' sidelined status. Representing working-class and racial-ethnic minority cultures across core courses such as, language and composition, chemistry fundamentals or political science, would facilitate their mainstream recognition.

Second, prior experimental research finds that minor interventions such as conveying a culture of interdependence in university welcome letters reduced stress level gaps between first-

generation and non-first-generation students (Stephens et al. 2012). Nicole M. Stephens and colleagues' (2012) research suggests that universities have short-term, affordable interventions at their disposal to foster both a more inclusive campus experience and a more academically stimulating one for racial-ethnic minorities. In addition to encouraging consistent community involvement, institutions can consider how they can bring their communities into the university as a way of not simply aiding them but also embracing marginalized cultures. While I generally observed middle-class, often White business owners at Flagship, universities could devise programs to help minority business owners, who cater to working-class groups, obtain the proper institutional approvals to provide their business services on campus. Moreover, if regional universities face resource limitations that impact their ability to fund student organizations, hosting coordinated and recurring campus debates in high-traffic student areas and facilitating local or national news information outside of classroom settings, could help emphasize the importance of being immersed in national and global dialogues. While short-term changes may seem trivial, integrating underrepresented class cultures into the quotidian student experience helps shift sidelined cultures a step closer to mainstream recognition.

Third and as it relates to classroom pedagogy, this study reinforces the call for greater Hispanic and racial-ethnic minority faculty. Although Hispanics comprise 19% of the share of college students (de Brey et al. 2019), in 2017, Hispanics accounted for only 5% of all full-time faculty in degree-granting colleges and universities (Snyder, de Brey and Dillow 2019). Considering there are greater shares of first-generation rather continuing-generation students within the population of Hispanic college student attendees (Redford and Hoyer 2017), increasing the representation of Hispanic faculty, across all universities, would help students view the academic curriculum as more representative of diverse voices. In addition to the



documented positive associations between minority college faculty and a racially inclusive curriculum (Milem 2001) as well as student matriculation (Hess and Leal 1997), having a classroom leader who shares students' background experiences may help validate the habits and tendencies of a minority group. The importance of genuine, holistic cultural inclusion and not simply numerical representation cannot be understated. As others (Quaye and Harper 2007; Brayboy 2003) assert, creating a culturally inclusive academic environment is as much of a responsibility for faculty holding dominant status on campus as it has been for racial-ethnic minority faculty. Thus, designing curricula that minority students can better relate to will require the shared commitment and consistent enforcement of all faculty.

Finally, high-achieving minorities attending less selective schools with lower academic competitiveness experience distinct academic challenges. Although the students in this study experienced greater academic validation from a more culturally-relevant curriculum, the curriculum content did not always challenge them to contemplate more complex issues beyond the immediate problem-solution at hand. Similar to the tightly structured leadership and professional development program opportunities at Flagship, broad access institutions can consider building a robust honors curriculum for their most academically competitive students. School administrators could offer explicit incentives to participate in this more advanced curriculum to high-achieving students during orientation. They could, of course, make this structured honors curriculum accessible to the broader student body. Providing incentives to participate in the honors program, such as assigning students a mentor, disbursing a monthly stipend or delivering career assistance, would not only promote greater program involvement and expose students to more rigorous coursework, but it could also help students develop the type of occupationally-valued social and cultural capital that the study found to be in limited supply.

Although Regional State did offer a number of honors course opportunities during the time of the study, its optional terms meant the honors program had little visibility on campus.

I opened this study by describing the puzzling situation of Aracely who opted to attend an unassuming regional university despite her formidable academic accomplishments. This study helps explain why there is not a simple answer for Aracely's original question regarding why she should consider pursuing a college degree outside of Liberty. Although Aracely may have foregone a more heavily resourced school curriculum, she received a respectable one from a fully accredited, burgeoning institution. She did not grapple with uncomfortable and unsettling social exchanges, which challenged her perceived sense of identity and self-confidence, at least not in the same degree as her peers. And she also enjoyed greater opportunities to nurture familial bonds on a regular basis. Time will reveal how Aracely's experience at Regional State positioned her for the middle-class occupational market. What this research helps clarify is that broad access, regional universities, like more selective institutions, offer unparalleled advantages. It is thus incumbent on educators to move beyond the allure of school prestige as a singular measure of superior school choice. A consideration of the cultural tradeoffs involved in attending differentially selective institutions will best position students to understand the type of upwardly mobile class cultural experience that awaits them.

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## APPENDIX A : METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

### *Interview Recruitment Procedures*

My grounded theory approach, coupled with natural field site occurrences impossible to have anticipated, necessitated a purposeful sampling strategy (Creswell 2007) that evolved at distinct moments during the data collection process. Motivated to understand the upwardly-mobile collegiate experiences of Hispanic students from a particular community, I selected the universities relevant for the study after I had identified the community of interest. I selected all field sites based on the extent to which they captured the central study phenomenon as well as their accessibility. Thus, my original goal was to recruit respondents who had attended either Regional State University or Flagship University and who had graduated from two high schools located in one particular Liberty Stream city. I had selected this city because it met the demographic characteristics of my study criteria and existing working relationships with community members would help facilitate access to potential study respondents. As an example, although we had not maintained frequent contact, I had met one school official as a 7<sup>th</sup> grader when I attended a junior high school in Liberty Stream. Like the study respondents, I had also grown up in Liberty Stream. Additionally, some of my family members held jobs in the school district. Although these family members did not facilitate connections with any particular individual, they did help me better understand the district's organizational layout, and this knowledge enabled me to understand whom to contact. I provide a more detailed account of issues related to positionality in a separate section below.

Unfolding in two distinct stages, the beginning of fall 2016 through the end of spring 2017 constituted the first official study recruitment period. In August 2016, I approached the school principals at each of two Liberty Stream high schools. Upon learning about the study,

they both graciously agreed to work with their respective school administrators to provide me with a list of potentially eligible students. Each school provided between 85 to 95 total names, including phone numbers and email addresses, of students who had graduated in the top ten percent of their 2015 and 2016 senior class. I elected to make graduating in the top ten percent a requirement for study participation to help reduce academic achievement differences across the study samples. Other eligibility criteria included: identification as Mexican-origin, enrollment at Regional State University or Flagship University and sharing a working-class background.

I ended up reaching out to most of the names on the lists I received considering a large number of ineligible candidates had already reduced the list in a drastic way. As an example, ineligible candidates reduced the list of 2015 students for one school by a third. These students were ineligible because they were not enrolled in either Regional State or Flagship, and I had determined this by perusing their Facebook profiles. Unfortunately, I did not record the names of colleges or universities that these students attended. However, my recruitment notes indicate that at least one student was enrolled in the local community college and another was not enrolled in any college. Another substantial portion of students simply did not have a working phone number.

I contacted most students who might have been eligible for the study by phone but reached out to several others by email. I did not adhere to a systematic selection approach when deciding which respondents to call first and selected numbers at random. However, I did regularly jump from the top of the list to the bottom, as well as the middle, considering the names had been alphabetized. Moreover, I also did not call students whose last names suggested a non-Hispanic origin. Considering Liberty Stream is a predominantly Hispanic community, I excluded only about a dozen names, which suggested a non-Hispanic origin. After calling and

introducing myself, I explained to students how I obtained their contact information, described the study, reviewed the eligibility criteria and invited them to participate. Understandably, most students were skeptical about sitting down for a phone call with a stranger. In these situations, I would follow-up via email with detailed information about the study so prospective respondents could have more time to contemplate their decision. Considering many of the students on the list had not attended either Regional State or Flagship, these efforts only yielded six study respondents (three at Flagship and three at Regional State). I realized that I needed to modify my recruitment strategy swiftly.

I turned to the suggestion that one school principal had provided to obtain contact information for additional study participants. He wondered if it would be easier to recruit from enrolled students at each university. I had overlooked this approach due to my goal of limiting recruitment to one specific city. However, when my original strategy proved unworkable, I broadened the sampling pool to include students who had graduated from a high school located in the same Liberty Stream county. To fulfill recruitment goals and obtain a more exhaustive list of potential study respondents, I made a public records request at both Regional State and Flagship. Given the large number of requests they are used to processing, Flagship charged an estimated \$65.00 for this service. Regional State, however, provided this information at no cost. In January 2017, each of these universities provided a list of students who had enrolled in their respective universities as first time students during designated years. The Flagship list included students who had enrolled at the university anytime between summer 2015 through fall 2016 and who held a permanent residence address in one of a series of Liberty Stream zip codes. The list of Regional State students included only students who had enrolled as of fall 2016. In addition to

students' names, the university also provided each student's email, phone number, major and classification.

Given the expanded pool of potentially eligible study respondents, I recruited additional participants using stratified sampling. I recruited respondents from within subpopulations, which represented different cities in Liberty Stream, rather than from the larger pool of potentially eligible participants. Leveraging virtually the same contact approach I had used when I recruited students from the high school lists the principals had provided, I selected names to contact from within a subpopulation or city in no particular order. I also continued to exclude students with last names that were of non-Latino origin. I modified this selection approach in one important way though. As the spring academic term came to a close and as I wrapped up the first recruitment phase of the study, I sampled names based on whether they appeared to help balance the study's gender representation. For instance, if respondents who identified as male were underrepresented in my sample, then I would select names that are traditionally associated with men when it came time to contact a new student.

As with the six students I had initially recruited, I followed a pre-established phone script each time I called a potential study participant. By the time I had comprehensively explained the study to interested respondents, answered any questions and determined whether they met the eligibility criteria, the duration of one phone call could take up to 20 minutes. We typically discussed students' high school ranking and their parents' level of education or occupation during these calls. Although identifying as Mexican-origin and graduating from Liberty Stream were two additional eligibility factors, I did not spend too much time on these issues considering the probability that students did not meet these two criteria was relatively low.

Given my early experiences when reaching out to students, I made slight but important adjustments to my original phone script as the recruitment process evolved. For instance, there were several instances when students mistook me for a telemarketer and hung up before I had a chance to explain why I was calling. On other occasions, some students told me they would get back to me and never did. In yet another occasion, a student mentioned not wanting to get into any trouble and just wanted to focus on his studies. Thus, during subsequent calls, I made it a point to explain to students why I had reached out uniquely to them as early as possible in the conversation. For instance, I occasionally pointed out their upbringing in Liberty Stream or their major. By also being transparent about a few other key items, I also tried to minimize sources of apprehension. For instance, during each conversation, I emphasized that the interview would be conducted in a public location on campus and that all study findings would be strictly anonymous. I also explained that I would hand them the cash honorarium as soon as we completed the interview and that they would not have to undergo any extra hassles to obtain this small gift. I would also reference locations on campus where I had already met with other study participants to help underscore the legitimacy of the study and to assure students that they would not be the sole study participant. I was able to interview 32 students during the 2017 winter/spring academic term. These included 16 respondents at each university and equal numbers of women and men within each of the samples.

Because I contacted respondents from cities that mirrored the population size and median income of the original city, I prioritized cities based on their geographical proximity to the original city. In other words, as I exhausted opportunities to enlist respondents from one city, I moved on to a city that was situated at an incrementally greater distance from the original city but that nonetheless shared similar income and population size characteristics. I planned to

recruit respondents from bigger and wealthier cities only if I did not achieve data saturation with the initial respondent pool. Because of the smaller number of potentially eligible study participants at Flagship, I had to expand the list of cities from which I was recruiting students when I first collected data at Flagship. Thus, at the end of the first recruitment period in the spring of 2017, I had more Liberty Stream cities represented in the Flagship sample than in the Regional State sample. Despite these constraints, I did not need to recruit respondents from wealthier cities at either university.

One day, during the course of performing fieldwork in Flagship, I enjoyed a casual lunch conversation with two long-time friends one hot spring day in April. As I talked to them about the ongoing study, one of my friends wondered if it might help to send potential study respondents an email first, where I could describe the study in detail and then follow-up with a phone call. I had shied away from the email approach because it was unsuccessful when I had attempted to recruit students from the lists the high school principals had provided. My friend, however, suggested that it might help elicit greater student interest if I could reference the email that I would have previously sent when I followed-up with a phone call. Although I was wrapping up recruitment for the spring 2017 academic term, I adopted his suggestion for the fall academic term, which to my delight, ended up making the second stage of the recruitment process more efficient.

The second recruitment stage took place between September 2017 through November 2017. Considering I had exhausted the list of potentially eligible study respondents at Flagship, I asked both universities to generate another list of students who met the same criteria I had specified during my initial request in December 2016. The only difference between these two separate requests was that during fall 2017, I only requested information for students who had



recently enrolled. Requesting a second list of students at Regional State was not crucial but it did help level out what would have been significant differences across the study samples at both schools. As an example, the December list of potential study respondents included students who had enrolled in school at the beginning of the 2016 academic term. In fall 2017, these students would have been second-year students. Had I not enlisted students who enrolled during summer or fall 2017 at Regional State, the Regional State sample would have included a substantially greater number of second year students than the Flagship sample.

I recruited study participants both through email and phone call contact methods during the second recruitment stage. My goal of minimizing characteristic differences across both study samples also led me to adopt a combined stratified purposeful and maximum variation sampling strategy (Creswell 2007) as I tried to achieve representativeness across a variety of dimensions (i.e., gender, major) in both study samples. As an example, because the scarcity of eligible study participants at Flagship during the spring had required me to broaden the cities represented in the study, I sampled students within these cities when I went back to Regional State during fall 2017. Additionally, I had roughly less than two months to complete the remaining student interviews and participant observation case studies at each school. To make the recruitment process slightly more efficient, I looked up respondents' physical addresses on Google maps. If the location of their homes suggested an upper-class residential community, I skipped these respondents on the list and designated them as likely ineligible. In ambiguous cases, when the income classification of a residence was unclear, I reached out to a respondent.

I first emailed students from the designated cities of interest and proceeded to select them in an unsystematic fashion. The only potential coherence to my selection approach is I would often move between the top, middle and bottom of the working list. If the list of potential

respondents for a particular city may have been short, I usually called or emailed all potentially eligible participants on the list. The email explained the study, delineated what participation entailed, disclosed the honorarium amount, specified the eligibility criteria and invited a student to participate on a voluntary basis. Because of prior email non-responsiveness, I also made an important change. Reasoning that signing the email with more details beyond my name might signal greater credibility, I included the name of my university, the department in which I was enrolled and my PhD candidacy in the signature line. If students did not respond to my email within one week, I followed-up with a phone call. Because I proceeded with, “I just wanted to follow-up on the email I sent you” shortly after greeting them, students seemed more receptive to hearing about the study.

I prioritized reaching out to men at each school because of the slightly greater difficulties recruiting male study participants. Men, for instance, had lower email response rates than women. According to my email records, although I sent a study invitation to 18 men and 18 women at Flagship, only three men responded to these emails compared to 13 women. Interestingly, these three male respondents happened to be ineligible for the study. Two were ineligible due to their non working-class backgrounds and one did not specify a reason for his ineligibility. At Regional State, the response rates via email were lower than at Flagship. Of the 15 men that I emailed, only one responded, who again, turned out to be ineligible for the study. I emailed 49 women at Regional State and seven responded. Recruiting men required slightly greater combined email and phone efforts. While I was able to coordinate interview dates and times with a slightly greater number of women through email, I still followed-up with some by phone. I employed a relatively strict maximum variation approach to sampling (Creswell 2007) during these phone follow-ups. I first followed-up with respondents whose majors were not

already represented in the study. Because early interviews and observations suggested important curricular and attitudinal differences across majors, I made a conscious decision to broaden the majors represented in the study. This approach, however, was more limited at Flagship where the pool of total eligible study participants was substantially smaller than the one at Regional State.

Although the resulting sample at Regional State reflects methodological interventions to achieve greater heterogeneity, it was difficult to have achieved a substantially more random sample at Flagship University. The limited number of working-class respondents from Liberty Stream who were enrolled in Flagship as first- or second-year students meant that I contacted a vast majority of potentially eligible study respondents. Differences in the number of first and second-year student participants across the study samples are primarily attributed to student public records turnaround times, which were much lengthier at Regional State than at Flagship. One early recruitment decision may have also overstated the average household income amount of study respondents at Regional State. Lacking clarity on the size of the sampling pool or the accessibility of eligible study respondents, coupled with looming timelines, I initially did not turn away study respondents who reported combined household incomes over \$50,000 provided they met other working-class measures. I actually interviewed one study respondent whose interview I later excluded from the study because although he was a first-generation college student, he reported a \$70,000 income and his mother held a position as an elected official. As I better understood the field sites, I became stricter about the income criteria. Thus, since I happened to recruit from Regional State first during the early winter/spring 2017 academic term, the Regional State sample captures several more respondents whose families possessed higher incomes.

### *Participant Observation Case Studies*

The important role that embedded trust within a relationship or community plays to help carry out immersive participant observation cannot be overstated. I, unfortunately, did not know any of the study participants prior to the interviews and therefore, had limited opportunity to establish this trust. Because I would select eight study participants for the observation portion of the study from the pool of interviewees, I relied on these hour and half to two-hour interviews to build rapport. As with the interviews, I employed a strategy of maximum variation (Creswell 2007) to achieve a diverse student sample.

Issues related to time constraints and trust, played an influential role in not only selecting the observation study participants but in determining how this portion of the study would be carried out. Because I spent half of each academic term at each university campus, and I sought to shadow each participant for at least two weeks, this schedule favored recruiting the earliest interviewees at each school, at least during the winter and spring academic terms. During the fall term, I recruited two participants from my sample of late spring interviewees. Moreover, three female interviewees turned down the opportunity to participate in the observation component before Victor graciously agreed to participate. These three declinations, however, enabled me to modify the components involved in the participant observation, allay student concerns and encourage participation. As an example, I had initially communicated to respondents that the study involved shadowing them across all of their school and family affairs. Given the reticence of the first student to whom I pitched this idea, I subsequently modified the observation component to include only school-related affairs.

A few other adjustments helped enhance student confidence and enabled me to successfully recruit all eight case study participants. For instance, while students understood that

my observations included dorm and apartment life, I also stressed that they had the option to ask me to refrain from observing them at any moment and during any particular situations. As I spent increased time shadowing them, some students became more comfortable having me around, shared more personal information and also invited me into other family settings. My time shadowing Mia for instance, was cut short due to unexpected class cancellations. Both Mia and Alan, however, had grown so accustomed to my regular tag alongs that they questioned the brevity of the observation component. As the data reveal, the aspects of student life that I was able to observe vary widely across the eight case study participants.

I selected the first two respondents at each university with the intent of achieving representativeness. As an example, Victor helped represent the off-campus student experience at Regional State while Bela helped capture the living with family commuter student experience. When I transitioned to performing fieldwork at Flagship, Kasia proved to be an ideal study candidate not solely because she lived off campus but because like Bela, she was also a biology major. Achieving this congruence could help me better identify differences across institutions. Mia helped capture the dorm experience at Flagship and provided an arts perspective given her undeclared major in the school of liberal arts. The importance of capturing heterogeneity within student experiences, however, guided how I selected each of the four remaining study participants during the fall. For instance, I invited Aracely to participate because I questioned whether her impressive academic record, which several other students at Regional State also shared, played a role in the opportunities she pursued on campus. Alan further helped shed light on the third generation-since-immigration student experience considering Victor, Bela and Aracely all identified as second-generation. At Flagship, Eli helped represent the third generation-since-immigration student experience and Rick's background helped provide insights

regarding the second generation and business major student experience. Kasia and Mia both had one parent who had been born in the U.S.

Understandably, my efforts to achieve a representative sample may have also biased the data in unintended ways. For instance, the desire to capture different immigrant background experiences prevented me from sampling congruent majors across both schools. In hindsight, this study would have benefited from understanding the day-to-day experiences of an engineering major at Regional State considering Regional State invested significant resources in the school of engineering, which I learned both from my time at the university and from engineering major interviewees. I also cannot ignore that a “good” interview or shared personality characteristics with an interviewee could have unconsciously led me to reach out to certain students first. Conscious of these issues, I invited several students who showed greater timidity during their interviews to participate in the observation component. Some of these students turned down the opportunity.

It is also possible that the inability to capture the experiences of students who declined to participate could have led to slight misrepresentations. For instance, two women (one at Regional State and the other at Flagship) expressed enthusiasm when they learned about the participant observation component but ultimately turned down the opportunity due to their parents’ wishes. Whether their parents’ demands also influenced the extent of their involvement on campus is an issue my data may not have thoroughly captured. Another male student was also eager to participate in the observation component but ended up declining the opportunity given such an intense week of exams. He was simply too busy. The student’s schedule, however, supports Chapter 4 findings concerning Flagship respondents. Ultimately, I asked 13 total students to participate in the observation component of the study but five declined.

My experience conducting fieldwork involved a series of regularly overlapping, yet equally indispensable tasks. Although I strove to conduct all interviews separate from the case studies, I often scheduled interviews during gaps when a participant observation respondent may have needed some personal study or otherwise private time. As a result, I was frequently carrying out any variation of the following activities through the entire recruitment period: scheduling interviews, conducting interviews, shadowing respondents, emailing professors and sending emails or text reminders confirming future interview appointments.

Evaluated holistically, my recruitment strategy may reflect semblances of a tangled cobweb. Early recruitment dead ends necessitated abrupt changes. Academic term timelines drove a selection strategy during the early stages of the study, which changed slightly as the study evolved. Efforts to prioritize the safety of my respondents and provide reassurances of the study's minimal risks, also led me to adapt the study components to the unique needs that surfaced. I have periodically questioned whether I could have approached the data collection process in a more sequential way and with greater linearity. As an example, as I interviewed students at Flagship, I realized that a substantial number of them were all members of one specific program on campus. This program had been designed to serve low-income and/or working-class students. In hindsight, I could have recruited Flagship respondents from this program considering doing so would have eliminated a great deal of work associated with the screening process. This recruitment approach, however, would have included its own selection bias considering not all low-income or working-class students at Flagship were eligible for the program.

Thus, one advantage of my unvarnished cobweb approach to recruitment, which demanded long and exhausting nights of calls and emails, is that it captures a sample of students

that is broadly representative of the first-generation, working-class Hispanic student experience. Although study respondents likely differ from other similarly situated co-ethnics across the nation based on their communities of origin, the resulting sample captures a relatively unfiltered snapshot of the typical high-achieving, working-class, Hispanic college student. In other words, any similarities concerning student practices or campus affiliations for a particular university, are more likely driven by social processes occurring within a university context rather than by students' self-selection into those groups. Additionally, the strong similarities in the academic backgrounds of both groups also provide greater support that student propensities to develop distinct interests and behaviors share greater relation to available institutional resources and opportunities rather than to academic characteristic differences among students. I credit the cobweb approach for helping facilitate this representativeness.

#### *Positionality and Data Collection*

As a Mexican-American woman who also grew up in Liberty Stream, my upbringing, class background, gender and ethno-racial demographic characteristics positioned me in unique ways to engage with study participants. Contrary to popular belief, I do not have reason to believe that my identification as Mexican-American played a significant role in the process of data collection. Several respondents expressed a desire to participate in the study even if I was not offering an honorarium and a few others would not have participated in the study had it not been for the honorarium. Neither of these respondents, however, expressed or suggested they were doing so because of our shared racial-ethnic background. Most students seemed willing to participate in the study once I assured them of its institutional credibility and minimal risks, and not due to anything related to my ethnicity.



However, practices associated with a shared ethnic, working-class background did facilitate access to respondents and also served to help build greater trust. As an example, I drew on my bilingualism to conduct four student interviews in Spanish. While these students could have just as easily answered my questions in English, they appreciated the opportunity to be able to answer them in the language they often used in social exchanges. On several occasions, I also used Spanish to communicate with parents when contacting respondents by phone. Being able to explain to parents why I sought to speak with their son or daughter facilitated my eventual connection with a prospective study participant. Moreover, by handing over the phone or passing along my message, parents were also implicitly approving my communication with their child, which appeared to encourage greater student receptiveness.

In other instances, my familiarity with prevalent practices in the region also enabled me to build rapport with students. As an example, I began asking all respondents about music preferences largely because Flagship respondents had conveyed that listening to the music they accustomed at home, helped alleviate feelings of homesickness and facilitated a home connection. While most respondents referenced mainstream pop, rap and reggaeton music preferences, some (men in particular) referenced regional, authentically Mexican varieties, including banda, ranchero and norteño. When I probed about these preferences, often times citing lesser known, regional artists as examples, respondents disclosed their genuine music interests with greater ease. On one occasion, a respondent pulled out his audio listening device to show me the actual songs on his playlist after a brief discussion on our music preferences. He also stayed a while longer after our interview had ended to ask me questions about my broader work.

My strong familiarity with the cultural practices in Liberty Stream, however, also required that I take important measures to avoid making assumptions about the experiences or interests of study respondents. One specific measure that I adopted to avoid personal bias was deliberately seeking clarification on issues that a respondent had not been explicit about but that would have confirmed patterns in the data based on my interpretation. For instance, during his interview, Tomás mentioned that he and his friends chatted while barbecuing whenever he visited them in Liberty Stream. Aware of the subtle, yet important differences between a barbecue and a carne asada, I asked Tomás if he and his friends were grilling items like hot dogs. Tomás responded, “No. I guess it's not a barbecue, not like an American barbecue” and then clarified, “It's [a] carne asada. Yeah. That's what I meant to say.” In yet another interview, I found it interesting that Veronica at Regional State mentioned liking “super Mexican music.” Since she provided examples of what she meant by super Mexican music, and I was familiar with the artists she referenced, I had a strong idea of what “super Mexican music” entailed. I nonetheless probed, “What do you mean when you say super Mexican music?”

There were also moments of slippage—instances in which a respondent corrected my assumptions, thus reminding me that I could not lose sight of outlier responses. When I interviewed Cami, partly due to the references she had made about her mother, coupled with the strong pattern of familism that I had identified among a large number of respondents, I mentioned to her that it struck me as though “you hav[e] a pretty close family.” I sought to move onto the section of my interview instrument covering the family and did not realize Cami’s parents were divorced. When I asked Cami to help me better understand her family situation the word she used to describe her family was, “dysfunctional.” My awareness of my insider status

prior to entering the field site, coupled with longstanding standards of qualitative research, however, helped me limit situations that could result in biased responses.

I was also struck by the extent of the influence that my gender—a factor that does not play a central role in the study’s substantive analysis— may have played in the process of data collection. Since I had only known each observation study participant for a roughly two-hour period, enlisting female participants would have likely presented a more formidable challenge had it not been for my female positionality. At the time of the study, students at one university were still reeling from the violent murder of a woman on campus. This incident, coupled with my own safety concerns, was one reason I emphasized to students at both schools that they would retain full control of the observation component throughout the two weeks. Participants were free to limit my observation to distinct activities and/or events and to also end their participation at any moment, even if it was prior to the two-week timeframe. Although researchers of any gender identity could have also provided these assurances, it is less certain that female study participants would have readily agreed to late evening carpool rides with aman (given widespread gender stereotypes) as two of them did so with me when they were prioritizing their safety. It is also worth considering whether Aracely would have invited a male researcher to hang out in her dorm with her and her sister during the first day of observation. Even if issues of trust or safety were not a concern, gender differences could have also played a role in the information that respondents elected to share. Aracely, Bela, Mia and Kasia, for instance, all disclosed varying levels of details regarding their relationships with their boyfriends. On the other hand, while my gender may have facilitated access to meaningful data among women, it may have also deterred men from speaking about similar topics. Eli, for instance, was the only male respondent who shared information with me regarding romantic relationships.

Given the status signals that attire can transmit, it took me a while before I settled on a consistent choice of dress during the course of performing field research. Because I was simultaneously shadowing and interviewing participants, I often scheduled interviews when a student I was shadowing needed to study alone or was otherwise engaged in a private affair. On these days, I did not allow myself attire options. I tried as best as possible to approximate an undergraduate student attire. I usually wore jeans, a fitted top, sneakers and carried a backpack. On really hot days, I opted for flip flops, a basic tee and a knee-length skirt. One time, I had minimal time to spare between a kinesiology class and a respondent interview, so I carried out this interview in gym clothes. These dress choices proved to be relatively effective considering students in different classes would occasionally ask me questions they would ordinarily ask their peers. Some asked if I had done the assigned readings, what answer I selected on a question or why was I taking such copious notes. In one medium-sized class, one of the professors also revealed forgetting that I was participating in class as a researcher and not as an enrolled student.

I had a little more dress flexibility when I was not actively shadowing a student. In these instances, however, I worried that business casual attire would create an unnecessary status boundary between participants and me. Mindful of the formalities that govern academic spaces, I did not want study participants to feel a need to deliver sanitized responses. At the same time, I was also concerned that my desire to blend with the undergraduate crowd might not help my credibility as a researcher when interacting with faculty members or administrators whom I interviewed separately. (Skeptical of the value of an observational study and its potential to compromise classroom activities, one professor had not allowed me to observe his classroom. More on this below.) Hence, I dressed in business casual attire only when I was meeting faculty or administrators. If I was also interviewing study respondents on these days, I would simply

draw on colloquialisms or other shared characteristics in an attempt to reduce self-monitoring tendencies.

Irrespective of my positionality, sitting-in on a class for the purpose of recording professor-student exchanges, introduced a strong intervention in an otherwise natural environment that risked biasing the data I collected. This potential for bias was nonetheless reduced at Flagship considering many of the classrooms I observed enrolled large numbers of students. See Table 3.1. Although I notified professors of the days I would be attending class when I emailed them to explain the study and obtain their approval, many only knew my name and no other distinguishing characteristic while I actively collected data. Several professors at Regional State, however, admitted or displayed signs of nervousness while I sat-in on their class. I could only conclude that this nervousness was related to my presence and that this unanticipated visit could have also led them to modify their teaching styles. Because most professors received short notice of my visit though (usually a week), and they were unable to anticipate how I would be evaluating their pedagogical practices, I did not believe the risk of potential bias to be significant. To address this issue though, I held a short debrief with some study respondents at the end of an observation period. I sought to determine whether respondents believed that my classroom presence had in any way altered classroom dynamics. Bela had sensed her statistics professor had devoted more time explaining problem solutions and engaging with students when I was in class. Alan also believed his late-night kinesiology professor would have released class early if I had not been observing. These student participant insights thus point to potentially understated study findings at Regional State in Chapter 3, the classroom chapter.

The vast majority of course instructors at both universities were enormously supportive of this research and enthusiastically welcomed me in their classes. However, securing permission

to sit-in during class was not always a straightforward task. At Regional State, several professors required email follow-ups before responding to my initial inquiry. There were a few others who I paid unannounced visits to during their scheduled office hours considering they did not respond to my follow-ups. Four course instructors—two at Regional State and two at Flagship—did not grant me permission to observe their classes. Three did not provide an explanation, mentioning only that it was simply not possible. Although I asked these professors for a brief interview in lieu of not being able to sit-in during class, none responded to this request. I took extra efforts to try to secure the permission of the fourth professor. I waited for him before class one day. I also waited an entire classroom period to speak with him at the end of class and also visited him during office hours. After a virtually hour-long discussion about the study in which I also engaged his questions concerning my advisor's research, he did not grant me permission to observe his classroom. He followed-up with a cordial email both thanking me for respecting his decision and detailing the reasons for his refusal: it would have been imprudent to potentially compromise indispensable classroom time in light of the uncertainty surrounding the value of my observations. Ironically, I employed substantial efforts to preserve the natural classroom environment and minimize disruptions. Not doing so would have compromised the integrity of my own study.

Arguing that it is incumbent on researchers to account for their subjective tendencies throughout the course of the research process, Alan Peshkin likens subjectivity to “a garment that cannot be removed” (1988:17). Although it is highly possible that I overlooked subjective behaviors inaccessible to my consciousness, the actions I have described capture my best attempts to understand the intervening role of my subjectivity as I designed the study and actively collected data. My hope is that this awareness enables readers to better understand the

methodological circumstances, social characteristics and interactional dynamics that gave rise to the precise student voice that this study was able to capture.