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Title

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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5vn8m3hk>

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Publication Date

2025-08-08

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Situating California Central Valley

The California Central Valley is an impactful place for Latinx students to decide and make a decision on their plans after high school. The California Central Valley (CV) consists of rural unincorporated territories to large suburban and urban towns. For rural CV Latinx students, geography strongly shapes their choices after high school, which is exaggerated by their proximity and exposure to resources to higher education, as a possibility.

Parameters

A series of 4 interview conversations with students who graduated from 600 students or less CV High Schools from Merced and Fresno County were asked a series of questions surrounding familial and community support, college and career readiness at the high school level, and preparedness and expectation for life after high school. All students identified as first generation students.

Leslie Story

Leslie, a current 4th year student at the University of California, Berkeley shared her experience as a first generation college student from a rural town in CV Fresno County. Leslie was introduced to the idea of higher education (college) from her family of matriarchs from a young age. Leslie stressed that although she was exposed to schools and opportunities she personally had to deep dive to figure out what was possible for her future as she wished to pursue her education away from home.

Despite attending UC Berkeley now it was not easy for Leslie to be on this journey. She was part of college preparation programs like; Advance Placement ([AP](#)) classes, Dual

Enrollment classes, [Upward Bound TRiO](#), and Advancement Via Individual Determination ([AVID](#)). Leslie recognized that her geographic location in the Central Valley presented limited exposure and opportunity. Despite participating in college preparatory programs, her experiences led her to realize that moving away—and choosing not to follow the community college route—was the best path forward. As she states:

“I understand, like how much I could have saved just by going to community college, but... I think it was a fear that it would hinder my own personal growth and because my like familial role as an eldest, would conflict with my desire to step out of my comfort zone and really figure out who I was, because until then I was a student. I'm a sister. I'm a daughter. I just felt like it was time for me to figure out myself as well.”

Leslie's powerful testimonial showcases how within the rural latinx community in the CV geographical context and being the oldest child came with intense pressure. As the eldest she had ties with cultural and familial responsibilities and navigating the guilt associated with moving away from the CV was challenging.

Claudia Story

Claudia, a student at a local community college in her county, shares her story with deciding her post-secondary plans as a rural Latinx student in the CV. Claudia was first introduced to college –like Leslie– through her parents and relatives tossing the word around in conversations about the future aspirations for her. Claudia spent all her childhood attending a rural school with same classmates and raised in an agriculture centred economy and workforce. Therefore, college to Claudia and to her family was seen as a valued, but yet incomprehensible road. She participated in college prep programs like AVID and took an AP Class yet, the road to what to pursue after high school was unclear for her. Claudia met with her high school counselor

a number of times who she asserted was helpful however the deciding factor for her was geographic locations. Highlighting most of her exposure from schools outside of the CV came from limited field trips from extracurricular college prep programs, television and media, as well as inner friends. Claudia interestingly, despite attending school and being in community with school staff that often referenced prestigious well resourced universities like UC Berkeley, Stanford, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, and NYU she felt unaware of realistic pathways to those institutions. Claudia instead expressed that staying within a [45-minute drive of home felt safer and more familiar, especially to first-generation](#) oldest sibling college students. It is important to note that Claudia is also the oldest sibling in her family. Her story largely connects to the societal and cultural reflection of the Latinx community, however for rural CV Latinx students it extends as despite having the characteristics to attend high ranking academic institutions further away choose to remain at nearby home colleges, because of the closeness of family in the Central Valley. Noticeably, large and well renowned universities remain furthest from CV students like Claudia, ranging one hour to five hour drive or more.

Moving Forward

In all, by centering the voices and experiences of rural latinx students from the California Central Valley aspirations and preparedness for post-secondary plans needs to be discussed more. Leslie and Claudia and various CV students have expressed themselves as resilient leaders through their transformational motivation to pursue higher education and forge out their journeys post secondary. CV students despite the challenges of exposure and proximity to colleges, rural Latinx students are motivated. Seeing their racial geographic location in the CV not as a marker of bad faith for the future, but as an opportunity to grow. Therefore, as a call to action lawmakers, non-profits, state agencies, and stakeholders focused on equitable education should

shed more light and resources on an often overlooked and underestimated community, because of geographic location and nurture the futures that Latinx Central Valley students have begun to grow, including but not limited to; creating sustainable pipelines for CV to higher education through community partnerships. Creation of more higher education campuses in CV and increasing the transfer rate for CV students to four year institutions.