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### Cover Page Footnote

The authors would like to acknowledge Dr. Marisol Clark-Ibáñez for innovating the faculty learning community on validation theory at Cal State San Marcos. They would also like to thank and acknowledge their colleagues in the Teaching and Learning Department of the University Library at CSUSM.

# Validation Theory and Culturally Relevant Curriculum in the Information Literacy Classroom

By Torie Quiñonez and Antonia Olivas

## Abstract

In four separate undergraduate information literacy classes where students predominantly identified as Latinx, two instruction library faculty revamped the standard information literacy curriculum to emphasize Latinx scholarship. They affirmed student life experience as authority in order to understand how validation theory affects the student scholar identity of first year Latinx college students from a large metropolitan area in the U.S.-Mexico border region. The two librarians who designed and team-taught these information literacy sessions are also both Latinx and come from urban borderlands backgrounds. Both identify as first-generation college students and one identifies as having a mixed status family background.

## Keywords

Latinx, validation theory, curriculum, cultural competence, funds of knowledge

## Author Biographies

Torie Quiñonez is the Arts and Humanities Librarian at California State University, San Marcos (CSUSM). She earned her master's degree in Library and Information Science from Pratt Institute. As a first-generation college graduate and Chicana, her professional interest in critical pedagogy and information literacy intersects with personal investment in the transitional experiences of Latinx and first-generation college students as they negotiate multiple identities. Antonia Olivas is the Engagement & Inclusion Librarian at California State University San Marcos (CSUSM). She spent 12 years in the Teaching and Learning department and worked very closely with first-year students from various backgrounds. She earned her doctorate in Educational Leadership from the joint doctoral program at University of California San Diego and CSUSM and earned her master's degree in Library Information Science from the University of Arizona. Dr. Olivas' research focuses mainly on the motivation to lead of underrepresented minority academic librarians and how validation theory influences information literacy and professional relationships in academic libraries.

## Introduction/Literature Review

Research shows that Latinxs are the second-fastest growing ethnic group in the United States, with a 2% growth rate between 2015 and 2016 compared with a 3% growth rate for Asians (Flores, 2017). Therefore, it is not surprising that the

number of Latinx college students has grown significantly since Solórzano, Villalpando, and Oseguera (2005) first illustrated the pipeline through which Latinx students progressively dropped away from traditional educational paths. According to a study done for the U.S. Department of Education, undergraduate enrollment for Latinx students more than doubled in that time (McFarland, et al., 2017). Despite these gains, Latinx people are still the least likely to graduate from high school, to attend college, and to earn advanced degrees (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). While there are various studies that discuss the possible reasons for this phenomenon, inequality is compounded by the fact that the political situation in the United States, and particularly in the border regions of Southern California, has exacerbated a climate of hostility toward people of color in all sectors of society, Latinx immigrants in particular (Henderson, 2018). Facing this climate in their communities of origin has often left Latinx students feeling alienated in a predominantly White college environment (Schildkraut, Jiménez, Dovidio, & Huo, 2018; Von Robertson, Bravo, & Chaney, 2016).

In this climate of heightened vulnerability, first-generation students of all backgrounds are very often alienated by the culture of higher education, including the specific requirements of scholarly research. This is brought to bear upon being tasked with completing their first academic research project and realizing that they lack an understanding of the research process. Novice researchers often assume that research is a set of skills rather than a process of inquiry, and while the discrete skills-based approach to information literacy is easier to measure (“Can you find an article using a scholarly database?” “Can you cite your sources?”), the instruction librarians who authored this study practice a more conceptual approach to information literacy. This particular approach better reflects the threshold concepts mode of the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (ACRL, 2016). In its expanded definition, information literacy is described as “the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning” (ACRL, 2016, p. 26). It is within this set of integrated abilities that the authors, who work at a mid-sized Hispanic-Serving Institution, situate the concept of “student scholar identity”. Early development of the student scholar identity can contribute to a greater sense of efficacy in college students, yet many Latinx students lack the foundational experience of the culturally specific form of academic knowledge that is necessary to build a strong student scholar identity in the context of higher education.

In their earliest experiences with information-seeking for academic purposes, students rely heavily on school and public libraries; therefore, these institutions are essential to moving students successfully through the pipeline to higher education. Unfortunately, the general lack of information literacy curriculum in traditionally under-resourced schools leaves many underrepresented students, especially from Latinx backgrounds, at an information literacy disadvantage. As a result, many

academic libraries have to fill in the gaps for students who come to college from these under-resourced schools. According to Haras (2011, p. 35), “Latinos who do graduate high school and go to college often move on without college preparatory skills and are again at risk for educational failure.” In many cases, some Latinx high schools lack rigor because there is no expectation for students to continue on to college.

Not only do their high schools leave many Latinx students ill-prepared for college, many students of color encounter the fact that libraries reflect the White cultural hegemony of higher education academic spaces. Studies have found that most academic libraries in the United States do not reflect the cultural values of their Latinx students who are, therefore, less likely to ask for research help than their White peers (Dabbour & Ballard, 2011; Green, 2012; Long, 2011; Whitmire, 2003). Long’s (2011) study in particular found that Latinx students with *no* language barriers use the library less because they don’t feel welcome, and they don’t see others like them in those environments. Latinx students who *do* experience language barriers are often immigrants or children of immigrants whom the literature refers to as Generation 1.5 (Asher, 2011). In an investigation of the experiences of some of these students entering higher education, Haras, et.al. (2008, p. 426) notes that many Spanish-dominant students go on to college without support for the development of academic literacy, and that the gate-keeping “characterized by remediation practice and enforcement of academic standards” present stumbling blocks that induce many of them to drop out.

Because many Latinx students do not feel particularly tied to the curriculum or their institutions of higher learning, it is no surprise that many of them lack a sense of belonging in these colleges and universities. By extension, academic libraries also fall under this umbrella of an “unwelcoming institution.” Green (2012) found that some Latinx students admit they don’t understand their library’s purpose or relevance to them, regardless of native language skills. Although this is disheartening to read, academic libraries can improve their services to Latinx and other underrepresented students through “greater articulation of their purpose in student success, and engaging students culturally through a critical examination of their role in Latino students’ lives” (Long, 2011, p. 511). To date there are several existing studies that attempt to gauge both the attitudes of Latinx students toward the academic library and scholarly research, and the skills required to navigate these spaces and processes (Haras, 2011; Haras, et al, 2008; Long, 2011).

So how do Latinx, first-generation college students succeed in predominantly White academic environments with little to no preparation from their high schools with regards to research and information literacy? This study will discuss how two academic library faculty of color from a four-year public institution in Southern California used validation theory teaching methods to empower four information literacy classes of Latinx first-year, first-generation students by modeling academic success and highlighting the importance and impact of Latinx scholarship. With an

orientation toward social justice and inclusion, the authors sought to reflect on their own Latinx identities in hopes of elevating the experiences of first-generation Latinx students in their information literacy classrooms. Their goal was to challenge the systems of power and oppression encountered by Latinx students in their college classrooms and communicate a sense of belonging. Similar to funds of knowledge theory (Gonzalez et al, 2005), validation theory allows for the assumption that what a first-generation student brings to college — their experience, their cultural background, and the values of their families and home communities — are all valuable and active sources of knowledge (Rendón, 1994). The curriculum described in this study uses the validation theory framework to introduce first-generation Latinx students to the scholarly community.

The authors define a student scholar as someone who can use an academic research process to create new knowledge, who comes away from the process with the ability to make meaning, and who sees themselves as a member of a scholarly community. Using critical pedagogy as a framework, the goal of their pedagogical approach is threefold: to equip novice researchers with an inquiry-based mental model of the research process, to empower students to realize their agency as creators of knowledge, and to recognize themselves as valuable members of the academic community. To date, there is no research on the effects of validation theory in academic library information literacy classroom settings. This study endeavors to fill that gap in the literature by discussing the impact of a curriculum redesign of first-year information literacy courses that incorporate validation theory.

## Theoretical Frameworks

Although validation theory is the predominant theoretical framework used in this study, one of the related theories used in this article to support the premise of validation is funds of knowledge theory. This study focuses on the use of validation theory, but for the purpose of context, funds of knowledge framework will be discussed briefly below.

### Validation Theory

In the groundbreaking 1994 study entitled *Validating Culturally Diverse Students: Toward a New Model of Learning and Student Development*, Rendón first acknowledged that generations of college students have had to change and assimilate, to “blend in,” cut ties, and erase parts of who they are, in order to succeed in the academy. “When these students enter college they are faced with unlearning past attitudes and behaviors and are faced with learning new attitudes, beliefs, and values that are quite removed from those of their cultures” (Rendón, 1994, p. 34). This echoes what critical education scholar Yosso (2006) relates in an ethnographic study of Chicanx college students. They say things like, “We have to ‘become White’ to succeed. It’s like saying ‘separate from your Mexican traditions,

transition onto a White campus, and incorporate yourself into middle-class America.” (p. 111).

By applying validation theory in their information literacy classrooms, the authors’ goal was to instead ask students to share their home and cultural experiences and demonstrate how their rich sources of knowledge can potentially affect and change the culture of the academy. What does this look like in practice? Validation involves creating classroom climate, activities, and assignments that demonstrate that Latinxs can be successful college students. One means of doing so is through practices of self-disclosure: faculty sharing their own personal stories and presenting students with examples of what successful Latinx college graduates look like.

For many first-generation students, the path to higher education looks very different from those of continuing-generation students, who have known all their lives that they will go to college. One of the authors of this study, a librarian of working-class Chicana heritage, shares with students the educational and economic value of the compromises that were necessary for her to attend college: working full-time while attending classes at night in order to pay for school, transferring to a four-year research institution after earning general education credits at local community colleges, and maintaining close ties with her family and community of origin for critical support at a time in life when young adults are expected to individuate. These actions run counter to the expectations we are exposed to in mainstream culture about how to go to college the “right way.”

The authors also demonstrated that Latinx people are valuable contributors to the body of knowledge that is studied in the classroom through thoughtful use of appropriate scholarship. For example, when students participate in an assignment that involves reading scholarly articles and discerning the disciplinary nature of the research, the authors chose articles written by Latinx scholars and/or about Latinx cultural and intellectual production. Affirming the value of student voice and experience, actively reaching out to students to offer help (not waiting for students to ask), creating opportunities for students to validate each other through practices like peer review and working in teams, and, crucially, nurturing a *familia* atmosphere built on trust and familiarity, are all validating actions.

That positive *familia* atmosphere is something students actually create on their own as a respite from alienating dorms and lecture halls. Yosso (2006) reveals that in order to support the critical navigation between the multiple worlds they exist in, some Latinx college students gather together to create “counterspaces,” both academic and social, which foster learning, contribute to community building, and, as one student describes, “nurture a supportive environment where our experiences are validated and viewed as important knowledge” (Yosso, 2006 p. 120). By creating an environment where their language practices (such as speaking Spanish or code-switching, which are often frowned upon in classrooms), educational paths, and

cultural references and understandings are normalized, the instruction librarians in this study attempted to build *familia* in the information literacy classroom.

### Funds of Knowledge

Similar to validation theory, funds of knowledge acts as a bridge between the students' personal lives and their academic lives. Funds of knowledge theorizes that the histories, cultural backgrounds, talents, and skills families possess and pass along to their children add to the information and experiences students bring with them to their classrooms. DeGaetano (2007) argues further that using funds of knowledge in the classroom strengthens student academic success through emphasizing cultural strengths and family knowledge. Culture matters, but learning new skills is often a challenge for first-generation Latinx students because the culture of higher education requires them to decode complicated academic concepts on their own. Gonzalez et al. (2005) describe the funds of knowledge instructional approach as a way to eliminate or mitigate this challenge. This approach uses the skills, knowledge, and cultural resources of these students to teach difficult concepts.

### Methods

This study utilized a mixed method research design in order to provide more robust findings. The qualitative (formative) version of this study involved three short answer reflections first-year students completed anonymously on the first and last day of the library research unit embedded in a first-year experience course. The quantitative (summative) portion of this study was a post-class survey that measured student satisfaction and understanding of validation theory methods used in the research unit. Students answered questions using a Likert scale to determine if they felt their cultures were valued in their information literacy classroom and if they appreciated seeing examples of Latinx scholars' works. As a control, the same assessments were administered to six sections of the same first-year experience course that did not receive culturally validating curriculum from their library instructors.

### Hypothesis

The authors hypothesized that the infusion of culturally relevant curriculum and validating pedagogy would improve the engagement levels of students in four of their first-year information literacy classes and help them start to develop a stronger sense of themselves as scholars. Their discussion of community values and standards, context, and authority was intended to provide a mental model for students making the transition from high school and home community to college and the academic community.

## Participants

To test the validation theory framework and curriculum, 10 first-year information literacy classes participated in this study. Using validation theory methods, the researchers taught four groups of Latinx-themed classes for first-year students who self-identified from Latinx and non-Latinx backgrounds. These classes were taught in three different academic semesters (one in spring 2017, one in summer 2017, and two in fall 2017). Serving as the control group, the remaining six classes were taught in fall 2017 by two other librarians (self-identified as White) who used the traditional information literacy curriculum.

Descriptive results show that a majority of students (67%) in all 10 classes identified as Latinx (which included self-descriptors such as “Mexican-American,” “Hispanic,” “Chicano/a,” “Puerto Rican,” “Mexican,” etc.), but a small number of students identified as Caucasian (11%) or other ethnicities (which included self-descriptors such as “Caucasian and Pacific Islander,” “White-Middle Eastern,” “Native American/White,” “Iranian” ...). There were over 200 students (n= 233) in all 10 classes who participated in the study.

### *Racial Demographics of all 10 Classes*

Student Race/Ethnicity	N=233
Latinx	155
Caucasian	26
More than one ethnicity	29
Other than above identifiers	15
No Answer	8

*Table 1.* Racial Demographics of all 10 Classes

## Setting

This study was conducted on the California State University San Marcos campus in 2017 over three semesters (spring, summer, and fall 2017). This university is located in north San Diego County, which tends toward having a conservative political climate and draws students from the surrounding Riverside and Los Angeles metropolitan areas. San Diego County shares an international border with Mexico and has a strong binational character. The university itself is a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) and in 2018 had a Latinx student population of 45% (CSUSM News Center, 2018).

## Project Stages

In the fall of 2016, the authors participated in a Faculty Learning Community (FLC) devoted to developing culturally validating curriculum related to Latinx experiences using validation theory. The instructional roles of these librarians are unique in that their focus in class is not on *content*, but on *habits of mind* and dispositions. Before the authors revised the traditional information literacy curriculum, they looked at what was already being done in the first-year research unit and realized that one of the major tenets of validation theory was already incorporated into how librarians at this university model inquiry for the novice researcher: Centering student research on issues of importance to *their own* communities, validating the notion that what students know and bring to the classroom is as valuable as what others think and know.

Confident that they had a good starting place with existing information literacy curriculum, their task was to add validating teaching methods to it. They did this by incorporating several strategies:

1. Self-disclosing and candidly telling stories about their own backgrounds and journeys to higher education
2. Adding the work of Latinx scholars and Latinx-centered research to their classroom examples of scholarly articles and disciplinary values
3. Showing students that the librarians trusted students with their personal stories and allowing an atmosphere of vulnerability and trust to grow in class.

Materials used in these four classes included scholarly articles written by Latinx scholars and popular sources from Latinx media, as well as research and information focused on Latinx communities, while the six control groups taught by “non-validating” librarians used the same materials as before (none of which had any Latinx focus). The summative and formative assessments for all 10 classes are the same and were administered during the same parts of each class.

On the very first day of class and midway through the library information literacy unit, three qualitative (formative assessment) questions were asked of all students in all ten classes:

1. What does it mean to be a student scholar?
2. Are there skills you currently have that will help you become a student scholar?
3. What skills do you need to develop to become a student scholar?

The quantitative (summative assessment) portion of this study was a post-class survey that was intended to measure student satisfaction with the research unit and the development of student scholar identity using validation theory-based questions and comments regarding Latinx communities. Using a five-point Likert scale, all students from all 10 classes were asked to respond to comments such as:

1. I felt comfortable asking my instructor questions about concepts I do not understand.
2. The instructor helped me improve my performance in the class based on my strengths.
3. Representations of my cultural identity were included in much of the course material and/or class topics.
4. Issues that are related to Latinxs and the Latinx community were discussed in a positive way (e.g., immigration, jobs, education, bilingual).
5. I was introduced to Latinx role models in class through guest lecturers, readings, service learning, attending related events on campus, and/or the instructor sharing examples during the semester.
6. My experiences in the class have helped me become a more confident student at CSUSM.
7. I have a better understanding of who I am now.

## Results and Discussion

The summative/quantitative portion of the study uses descriptive and inferential data analysis. The formative/qualitative portion of this study used case study analysis to try to develop a deeper understanding of how validation theory potentially affects the development of the student scholar identity of first-year CSUSM Latinx students. The authors coded student responses to three open-ended questions in all ten classes for themes to try and obtain more holistic and meaningful characteristics of student stories regarding their identities as scholars. Then, the findings and results from both the qualitative and the quantitative phases of the study were combined to determine if or how validation theory affects the development of student scholar identity in first-generation Latinx college freshmen.

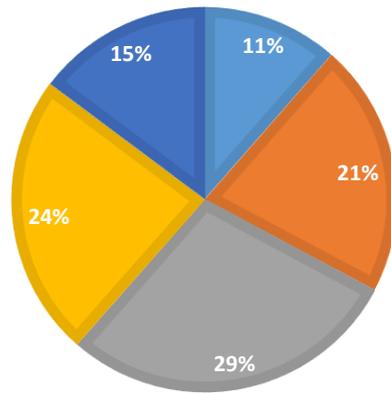
### Quantitative Results

Preliminary visual interpretations of raw data gathered from surveys shows the validation theory group either *Agreed* or *Strongly Agreed* at a higher average for questions such as “*I am more culturally aware about the diversity of Latinx*

*experiences than I was before participating in this class.”* (Figure 1a & Figure 1b) and *“I was introduced to Latinx role models in class through guest lecturers, readings, service learning, attending related events on campus, and/or the instructor sharing examples during the semester.”* (Figure 2a & Figure 2b) These, of course, were the expected results to these questions because of the course materials and examples the authors used in their four validation theory classes, whereas the control group library instructors did not modify any course materials or examples.

**CONTROL: CULTURALLY AWARE**

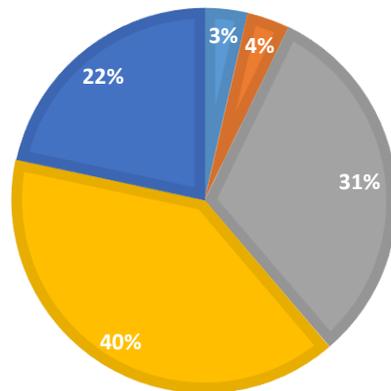
■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree



*Figure 1a.* Control Group: I am more culturally aware about the diversity of Latinx experiences than I was before participating in this class

**VALIDATION: CULTURALLY AWARE**

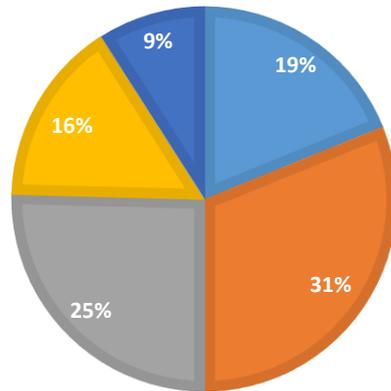
■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree



*Figure 1b.* Validation Theory Group: I am more culturally aware about the diversity of Latinx experiences than I was before participating in this class

### CONTROL: LATINX ROLE MODELS

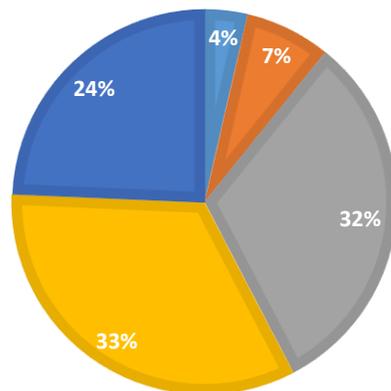
■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree



*Figure 2a.* Control Group: I was introduced to Latinx role models in class through guest lecturers, readings, service learning, attending related events on campus, and/or the instructor sharing examples during the semester

### VALIDATION: LATINX ROLE MODELS

■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree



*Figure 2b.* Validation Theory Group: I was introduced to Latinx role models in class through guest lecturers, readings, service learning, attending related events on campus, and/or the instructor sharing examples during the semester

Since there was a fairly higher number of Latinx students in those classes over White, mixed, or other ethnic students, it is not surprising that 31% of control group respondents *Disagreed* with the statement that they read books and articles written by Latinxs. What is surprising is that 16% and 11% of control group respondents either *Agreed* or *Strongly Agreed* (respectively) with that same statement (Figure

3). This is surprising because the original course materials used in those control group classes did not, in fact, use any books or articles written by Latinx scholars or with Latinx subjects. Similarly, 7% and 10% of the validation theory groups either *Disagreed* or *Strongly Disagreed* (respectively) with the same statement (Figure 4). Again, all course materials in the validation theory classes were specifically chosen by the authors to feature Latinx scholars and subjects.

### CONTROL: READ BOOKS & ARTICLES

■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

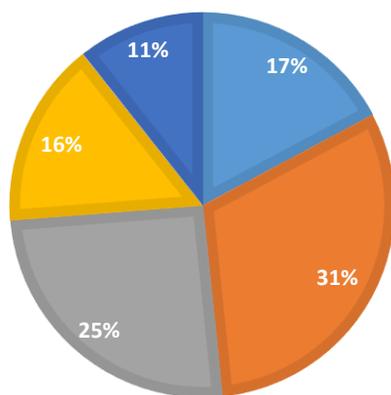


Figure 3. Control Group: I read books and articles written by Latinxs

### VALIDATION: READ BOOKS & ARTICLES

■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

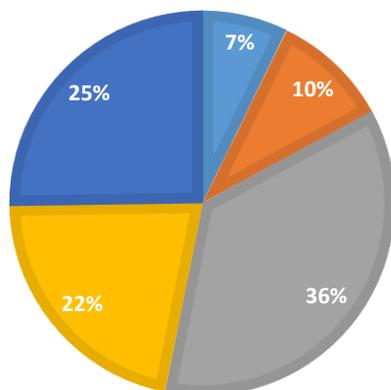


Figure 4: Validation Theory Group: I read books and articles written by Latinxs

These inconsistencies leave the authors wondering if either the students did not read the question correctly or if students simply did not read the question at all. Case in point, a fairly high percentage of both validation theory group respondents and control group respondents stated that 36% of validation theory and 25% of the

control group answered *Neutral* to that question. An important fact to note is that none of the instructors in any of the classes specifically pointed out the names of authors to students so students may not have noticed the author names for any of the readings. Of course, another reason those statistics may not align with what actually was taught in each class is that respondents may have been influenced by the survey and the setting itself. Students in these classes may have answered these questions in ways that support what *they* thought were the goals of the survey because the instruction librarians were in the room. Finally, part of the responsibility for incorrect responses has to ultimately lie with the way the researchers asked these specific questions and required students to respond. The Likert scale used on the survey ranged from “Strongly Disagree” and “Neutral” to “Strongly Agree”. Perhaps the researchers should have given the option of simply answering “I don’t know” so the respondents could have answered more truthfully rather than trying to fit their answers into something they think *might* be correct.

### Qualitative Findings

When asked to consider student scholar identity, the themes that emerged within both control group and validation theory group responses centered around both practical skills, such as time management, organization, writing, and knowing citation styles; and also intrinsic skills such as having or needing curiosity, self-motivation, and critical thinking.

Qualitative findings revealed there were no major differences in student responses from either group. When asked “*What does it mean to be a student scholar?*” both control group students and validation theory group students responded with answers such as “[*a person that*] *does something with their knowledge...*” or determining for oneself whether information is reliable/credible by “questioning everything.” One student from the control group responded that a student scholar “[*wants*] *to contribute to the world in big ways.*” Students from both groups wrote about what they perceived to be the skills and characteristics of a student scholar, and oftentimes their responses read as if they were describing themselves.

The reason for this interpretation is because students were then asked what skills they currently had that would help them *become* student scholars. Respondents from both groups consistently pointed to their own leadership skills, strong note-taking skills, and their willingness to participate in teamwork. A student from the validation theory group discussed how he/she was able to “come up with important questions” to begin their research assignments. Students also theoretically discussed their critical thinking skills and how they used these skills in both everyday life as well as in school.

Also, students responded to the question “What skills do you *need* to develop to become a student-scholar?” and most of them pointed to practical, more functional skills such as needing to develop their time management better, being more

organized, and improving their writing skills. A surprising response from both groups was how some students admitted to acknowledging they needed to seek feedback from their instructors more and ask questions when they don't understand a concept. This was surprising because although as instructors we anecdotally know students need to learn to ask more clarifying questions and seek constructive feedback, our experience is that a majority of students make assumptions about their assignments and do not ask the questions they need to seek clarification, nor do a majority of students seek feedback from professors in order to improve future work.

Lastly, one of the goals of this study and of Validation Theory was to establish a *familia* atmosphere in the classroom. In some ways, the researchers observed this was a success because students began to feel safer with not only their peers but also with us (their instructors). Anecdotally, students were more willing to share sensitive information about themselves and their lives and participate more in class discussions because of our sharing. Stories and experiences from both instructors and peers helped to create this atmosphere of trust and respect. It is unclear, however, if the control group felt the same amount of trust with their instruction librarians. It should be noted that 300 minutes (or sometimes less) with a group of students is not nearly enough contact time to be able to completely develop the fullest sense of *familia* in the classroom. In this way, librarians teaching these types of courses may be at a disadvantage in implementing this particular aspect of validation theory and may have to work harder to establish trust by sharing more vulnerable stories about their own experiences.

### Limitations of the Project

One of the biggest limitations of the project was lack of longitudinal study. It would be extremely beneficial to use these validation theory methods throughout the entire first year of student learning then measure their understanding of validation theory concepts and their own development of student scholar identities. Since the librarians at this institution only had two weeks to work with students, it was not sufficient time to measure students' self-perceived scholar identity and how validation theory may or may not have played a role in that development.

Finally, the authors feel the positionality of instruction librarians could have affected the outcome of some of the findings. There were four librarians who participated in this study, and they were from vastly different backgrounds: the authors both identified as being from Latinx, first-generation college graduates, and mixed-status family backgrounds while the other two instruction librarians were from non-Latinx backgrounds and did not identify as first-generation college graduates. A potential area for future study would be to conduct a deeper analysis of how Latinx librarians and non-Latinx librarians affect the development of student scholar identity in Latinx first-year students. Furthermore, future studies

can focus on the question of whether Latinx first-generation students will seek support from librarians with similar backgrounds and educational experiences.

### Implications of the Project

The researchers believe if students feel comfortable in an information literacy setting, students will develop a stronger sense of their own student scholar identities. Future collaborations with other librarians at similar institutions to use and test the validation theory curriculum would help information literacy librarians learn how best to contribute to successful academic outcomes for Latinx students. Using validation theory in the information literacy classroom has the potential of building the foundation for a strong sense of student scholar identity. Exposing Latinx students to successful models of Latinx knowledge producers and the important scholarship taking place in Latinx communities can empower students from Latinx backgrounds to see themselves and experience a sense of belonging in an already alienating higher educational environment.

### Conclusions

Academic librarians have the potential to help build or help destroy a student's self-identity as a scholar. Especially in the first year of a student's college experience, when their confidence and self-worth is the most vulnerable, students are looking for a sense of belonging and want to see themselves in their institutions. The authors are still hopeful that the inclusion of culturally relevant information literacy curriculum and validating pedagogy will improve the engagement of Latinx students in academic scholarship. The authors believe that the revised curriculum unit used in this study will help Latinx students develop a stronger student scholar identity by demonstrating to them that Latinxs *can* be successful college students and that Latinxs are valuable contributors to various scholarly communities. The goal of this study was to affirm the value of student voices and experiences in information literacy classrooms and to create a *familia* atmosphere of trust where Latinx students feel safe to engage in meaningful ways. It is with these beliefs and the findings in this pilot study that the authors are encouraged by validation theory methods as having the potential to empower Latinx students to envision themselves as scholars who bring with them the wealth of their cultural and community identities.

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