Recoding Discourses in Higher Education: Critical Views on Recruiting Materials for Latin@ College Students

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Published online: 17 Jun 2014.

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R. Stanton-Salazar (1997) suggested that minority students who successfully navigate the contexts of higher education are able to do so by "decoding" the system. Rather than obligating students to decode the system, we contend that institutions should *recode* the information they provide to prospective students from minority backgrounds. We focus on the promotional materials of an aspiring Hispanic-Serving Institution for our analysis.

Key words: Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI), discourse analysis, recruiting, cultural capital

As the largest and most quickly growing minority group in the United States (Núñez, Sparks, & Hernández, 2011), Latin@s have commanded increasing interest from institutions of higher education in recent decades (Tierney, Corwin, & Colyar, 2005). Of particular concern are the significant demographic disparities in enrollment numbers and academic achievement in post-secondary settings (O'Connor, 2009). Whereas White students represented 58.4% of enrolled undergraduates in the fall of 2008 (across all institution types), Latin@ students made up 12.8% (Kim, 2011, p. 11). In the same year, White students earned 61.9% of all associate's degrees and 67% of all bachelor's degrees compared to Latin@ degree achievement rates of 11.6% of associate's and 7.5% of bachelor's degrees (Kim, 2011, pp. 12–13). To mitigate some of the sociohistorical forces that have produced these lopsided trends in higher education (McCarty, 2004; Johnson, 2009; Ovando, 2003; Zinn, 2005), the U.S. government awards special status to institutions that reach (and maintain) a 25% full-time equivalent enrollment of Latin@ students.

Institutions that achieve this demographic enrollment level are eligible to apply for the designation of Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) through the U.S. Department of Education (2011). As authorized by Title V of the Higher Education Act of 1965, special grants are available through the U.S. Department of Education for qualified HSIs. Although the funding provided through these grants is dedicated to the development of resources aimed at promoting the educational attainment of Latin@s, programs supported through these efforts generally benefit all students at the school. More important, institutions with HSI support have the potential to increase Latin@ enrollments and educational attainment in the face of the continuing social and political inequities confronting students from minority and low socioeconomic backgrounds (Johnson, 2006, 2009;

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Johnson & Brandt, 2009). For these reasons, institutions with significant Latin@ populations are especially motivated to boost enrollments to attain this designation (Torres & Zerquera, 2012). Yet although nearly half of all Hispanic students enrolled in higher education attend HSIs, only 6% of colleges and universities in the United States have the official designation (Crisp & Cruz, 2010; Núñez et al., 2011). In this discussion, we take a look at the promotional efforts of Washington State University Tri-Cities (WSUTC) as it works toward becoming the first public university in the state of Washington to receive the HSI designation.

CONTEXT

As part of the Washington State University (WSU) statewide four-campus network, WSUTC primarily serves communities located along the Columbia River Basin located in southeastern Washington. Although the entire WSU system comprises more than 25,000 students, WSUTC has an enrollment of approximately 1,500 (WSU, 2012). Even though WSUTC has the fewest number of overall students compared to the other campuses, it boasts the highest percentage of "multicultural students" (23%; WSU, 2012)—the majority of whom are Latin@ (18.1%; WSU, 2011). This trend can be attributed to the wealth of the minority communities in the surrounding counties. Although the state of Washington reports an overall Hispanic population of 10.2% (of 6,733,250 total residents), Table 1 demonstrates that WSUTC is situated within counties that have significantly denser populations (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

As evinced by these statistics, there is great promise to augment educational access to Latin@ students in the surrounding counties—making WSUTC a strong *potential* HSI (Torres & Zerquera, 2012). Conversely, though, the fact that WSUTC has been providing undergraduate degrees since 1989 begs the question: *Why have Latin@ enrollment numbers continued to remain under the HSI level in a region with such a significant Hispanic population*? Although national statistics concerning Latin@ participation in higher education suggest that similar trends at WSUTC should not be surprising, the answer to this question involves more than acknowledging broad statistical patterns.

Not only does WSUTC host a significant number of minority students, but approximately 40% of its current students are first-generation college students—again, most of these students are Latin@. This trend aligns with previous studies showing that 48.5% of Latin@s are first-generation college students—the highest level of any ethnic group (Bell & Bautsch, 2011, p. 1). Working with communities that have high Latin@ populations means that WSUTC needs to

TABLE 1
Hispanic Population by County in South-Central Washington

County	Total Population	Hispanic
Franklin	75,500	63.8%
Adams	18,300	57.9%
Yakima	239,100	45.6%
Benton	172,900	18%

continue developing strategies to make college more accessible for ethnically and academically diverse groups of students if it is to achieve the HSI status. Although this includes a broad array of college preparation, recruitment, and retention services, our focus in this article is to take a closer look at the promotional recruiting materials used by WSUTC within the surrounding communities. Effectively recruiting first-generation Latin@ students requires paying special attention to the ways in which traditional institutional discourses impede access to higher education by eliding the prior knowledge and experiences of minority students. Through our analysis, we hope to communicate a deeper understanding of the discourses used in standard promotional materials in order to develop strategies for addressing the distinct cultural and linguistic patterns of the surrounding communities.

THEORETICAL APPROACHES

College, Culture, and Capital

As Vargas (2004) explained,

> Low-income, minority, and first-generation students are more likely not to understand the steps necessary to prepare for higher education which include knowing about how to finance a college education, to complete basic admissions procedures, and to make connections between career goals and educational requirements. (p. 2)

Offsetting these inequities requires an array of both direct and indirect interventions (Boden, 2011). Among the most critical components to accomplishing this goal are family engagement (Corwin, Colyar, & Tierney, 2005; Gándara & Bial, 1999; Schmidt, 2003; Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005; Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005) and strong social networks (Boden, 2011; Crisp & Cruz, 2010; Rios-Aguilar & Deil-Amen, 2012). In addition, Weerts and Sandmann (2010) have pointed to the growing importance of community engagement and the vital role of particular internal agents who are able to span institutional divides with external groups to create wider university access.

Stanton-Salazar (1997) explained that mainstream groups develop social networks that overlap with and extend into higher education social networks, making the transition to (and through) college contexts less intimidating. Yet for minority groups, "attempts at help-seeking and network development within mainstream spheres usually occur within the context of differential power relations and within social contexts that are culturally different, if not alienating to, cultural outsiders" (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 4). Whereas some might see this as a reason to encourage Latin@ students to reconfigure their social networks that mirror mainstream groups (Rios-Aguilar & Deil-Amen, 2012, p. 180), it might be more feasible to effect large-scale change by having institutions of higher education reconfigure their social networks to more effectively map onto the social and cultural capital of Latin@ students.

For this shift to occur, we must be mindful of applying innovative (and effective) methods of "intellectual and cultural scaffolding" (Corwin et al., 2005, p. 4). Such a shift must include revisiting commonly held views of social capital (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). For example, Ortiz, Valerio, and Lopez (2012) insisted that "it is crucial that programs aiming to prepare Hispanic students and families for higher education make efforts to increase their social capital and promote an

understanding of how to navigate within the higher education system as a first-generation student" (p. 145). Ortiz et al.'s stance has a positive thrust, but it also prioritizes institutions of higher education as instruments to increase social capital (i.e., without mentioning that the increase in capital is only in one type of context). Rios-Aguilar and Deil-Amen (2012) problematized studies that view capital as something that individuals either have or do not have instead of looking at how levels of social capital fluctuate across culturally situated contexts (pp. 180–181; cf. Bourdieu, 1986, 2004).

Stanton-Salazar (1997) outlined the challenges facing Latin@ students when institutions impose a monolithic view of social capital based on White middle-class norms. The evaluation and recruitment processes used by institutions to attract and select minority students "largely entail perceptions of the student's ability and willingness to adopt the cultural capital and standards of the dominant group," whereby perpetuating the "ideological mechanisms that hinder help-seeking and help-giving behaviors within the school" (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, pp. 7–8). To compensate for these types of marginalizing institutional practices, Villalpando and Solorzano (2005) endorsed the concept of *cultural wealth* "to encompass, along with students' unique cultural capital, other accumulated assets and resources such as students' navigational capital, social capital, economic capital, experiential capital, educational capital, and aspirational capital" (p. 18).

Discourses of Higher Education

Weerts and Sandmann (2010) emphasized the importance of establishing effective lines of communication between universities and the surrounding community, especially "since organizations may carry their own coding schemes (i.e., distinctive language and terminology) not easily understood by another group" (p. 709). Becerra's (2010) work on the perceptions of barriers to college enrollment further highlights the impact of linguistic and cultural acculturation in this process for Latin@ communities. Becerra pointed out that "higher acculturated Latinos may have learned how to successfully navigate the majority culture system or at the very least have the English skills necessary to do so" (p. 195). Although linguistic acculturation emerged as the variable most related to perceptions of barriers in that particular study, linguistic elements should not be seen as limited to levels of English proficiency. Muñoz's (2008) discussion of "unraveling the notions of dual socialization" further illuminates the complexity of this context for Latin@ students (p. 101).

Drawing from Gee's (1989) view of discourse, Stanton-Salazar (1997) contended that

the notion of institutional Discourse plays a vital role in understanding how networks are deeply implicated in the social reproduction of inequality. Control over institutional Discourses is often a prerequisite for participation in networks that yield institutional supports necessary for success in school and society. (p. 12)

From this vantage point, Stanton-Salazar explained that minority and first-generation students who have successfully navigated through institutions of higher education have learned how to "decode the system" (p. 13). In this light, *decoding* the system includes tapping into and making sense of the cultural logic of the dominant group to access institutionally based funds of knowledge.

As indicated in discussions on first-generation college students (Burciaga, Pérez Huber, & Solorzano, 2010; Coffman, 2011; Perna, 2005), it must not be assumed that students who are proficient in English will automatically be able to decode the system to understand the nuances of higher education through explicit descriptions and examples offered by educators and institutional agents. In addition to the type of linguistic acculturation described by Becerra (2010), we must also acknowledge students' social and cultural familiarity with institutions of higher education. When engaging prospective Latin@ students and their parents, not only should we consider *what* we discuss when talking about college, but it is imperative that we reflect on *how* we talk about college.

Understanding the factors that influence how Latin@ students and families access information about higher education is a complex issue (O'Connor, 2009). Whereas Stanton-Salazar's (1997) view of decoding the system implies the ability of the student to decipher mainstream institutional discourses, we contend that institutions should *recode* the system for prospective students in order to facilitate this process. *Recoding*, in this sense, involves contouring the discourses of higher education around the social capital and funds of knowledge in surrounding communities as a means of scaffolding students' cultural wealth and leveraging access to mainstream discourses. Recoding the way in which institutions communicate with students and families can mitigate some of the tensions involved in this process by prioritizing and integrating students' background experiences into the promotion of higher education.

METHODS

Considering the relatively low overall number of Latin@ students attending WSUTC (relative to the surrounding community demographics), the goal of this discussion is to analyze the university's promotional materials to determine whether they are effectively engaging first-generation Latin@ students. By analyzing the rhetoric communicated within the university's promotional materials, we point out underlying domains of traditional higher education discourse that potentially encumber Latin@ students from accessing the necessary information for entering the university.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis as a field of inquiry spans multiple approaches and traditions (Brown & Yule, 2003; Johnstone, 2002). As Rogers (2011) explained, "Critical approaches to discourse analysis recognize that inquiry into meaning making is always also an exploration into power" (p. 1). Nowhere does this resonate better than in institutions of higher education where discursive norms are historically rooted in White middle-class expectations of communication. Considering the emphasis in this discussion on the generation of texts to publicize the benefits of higher education, applying a critical lens to the discursive components within these texts illustrates explicit instances of how institutional access is mediated through language.

Using a multimodal approach to discourse analysis (Kress, 2011), we intend to determine the categories of underlying background knowledge needed to decode the institutional discourses most apparent throughout the promotion and recruitment stages of the higher education

attainment cycle. The analytical focus for this study is based on key vocabulary and concepts applied in the promotional material of WSUTC. To accomplish this, we sought out specific terminology that presumes an a priori understanding of concepts constituting specific discourses surrounding the promotion of higher education. Specifically, we looked for terms that apply to the following discourse domains: (a) institutional discourse, (b) academic discourse, and (c) financial discourse.

The documents used to inform our overall analysis ranged from program-specific materials to handouts that contained information about various subjects (e.g., the transfer student information booklet). The documents were analyzed for terminology and concepts constituting the discourse domains listed previously. Once grouped according to the discourse domains, the terminology was divided into multiple thematic categories that constitute each domain. We provide examples from each category to illustrate how they construct and perpetuate their particular discourse domain. Our analysis concludes with suggestions for recoding the concepts to enhance communication with first-generation Latin@ students.

ANALYSIS

Considering the vast amount of text-based materials produced by universities, we decided to glean specific examples for this analysis from the informational "grabber" because it is among the most commonly viewed promotional materials at WSUTC (2011). This brightly colored pamphlet is designed to summarize WSUTC's academic offerings, financial resources and obligations, as well as the specific social benefits particular to the Tri-Cities campus. Although the terminology displayed here is divided into distinct categories, we want to point out that the actual vocabulary words (listed or implied) are not mutually exclusive between domains or thematic categories. The lexical examples provided here should be seen as communicating the underlying meaning of the discourse domains. Furthermore, the examples listed under each category are not meant to represent a conclusive list; rather, they should be seen as representative of much larger pools of terminology and concepts that are commonly used in similar contexts.

Institutional Discourse

Promotional materials like the WSUTC grabber tout the benefits of the university, provide initial steps for applying, and communicate institutional norms. This is accomplished by tapping into a prospective student's knowledge of higher education administrative processes and patterns of social engagement. Because the benefits of a university are described through terminology that is based on this prior knowledge, a statement that might effectively and accurately promote the institution can actually be counterproductive if it is too obtuse to communicate the underlying message. We contend that institutional discourse comprises four thematic categories:

1. *Institutional descriptors:* terminology that distinguishes specific types of institutions of higher education as well as their inherent features
2. *Clerical infrastructure:* words and concepts that outline different administrative processes that encompass activities from application to graduation

TABLE 2
Thematic Categories of Institutional Discourse

Institutional Descriptors	Clerical Infrastructure	Administrative Personnel	Social Engagement
• university	• admissions	• Chancellor	• campus life
• college	• application	• Dean	• student clubs
• community college	• recruiter	• Department Chair	• student involvement
• fully accredited	• student affairs	• President	• student lounge
• top-tier research university	• prospective student	• Provost	• student ambassador
	• transfer equivalencies	• Academic Director	• student life

3. *Administrative personnel:* titles that point to individuals with high levels of institutional status
4. *Social engagement:* activities, locations, and events that promote social interaction and support across various campus contexts

In Table 2 we list specific examples of the language used within each thematic category.

The four categories range in conceptual complexity as well as in the immediacy of their importance. Although students may be easily confused by the actual terminology within the administrative personnel category (because of the bureaucratic complexity involved in higher education), the confusion stemming from this vocabulary should not affect their acclimation to an institutional context to the same extent as misunderstanding the concepts and activities within the clerical infrastructure category. Thus, because the terminology encompassing the clerical infrastructure often involves more commonly used words (e.g., *admissions, transfer*, etc.), there might be a greater propensity to overestimate the clarity of their meaning. Similarly, the terminology used for institutional descriptors is often so common that it is easy to forget that its distinctions are easily lost and misunderstood. Because the hypernym *college* simultaneously indexes "universities," "colleges," "community colleges," as well as departmental "colleges" within universities, students are often confused about the differences (and benefits) of each and tend to look for more tangible institutional features (e.g., tuition cost, location) when deciding which school best fits their needs.

Aside from academic offerings, other features that are generally used to entice students can be grouped under the domain of social engagement. Again, although the vocabulary used to portray these resources is considered rather common, the descriptions lack nuance and leave students without an understanding of the purpose of concepts like "campus life" or "student involvement." Moreover, descriptions of specific "student clubs" can greatly enhance students' notion of what extracurricular activities are available—which are usually much more extensive than at the high school level. Because the concepts and terminology constituting institutional discourse provide a pathway for accessing higher education, this component requires special attention during the preparation and promotion stages of the higher education cycle. When institutions recode these types of concepts earlier in the process, students will be able to scaffold their understanding of the general process of higher education to better prepare themselves for the academic rigors of college.

Academic Discourse

One of the most fundamental commonalities that institutions of higher education share with secondary schools is the concept of taking classes and studying content-specific information. Although scaffolding this conceptual similarity provides a platform for discussing the school-based characteristics of a college, promotional materials tend to overlook the discrepancy between how this looks on an everyday basis between the two contexts. Without understanding that there is a great difference between academic procedures in high school and college, students might not recognize areas of confusion and might omit important requests for further clarification—causing extreme stress as their college careers begin. Here we highlight four thematic categories that organize a student's knowledge of academic processes in higher education:

1. *Student classifications:* descriptions of student enrollment, academic status, and background
2. *Programmatic determiners:* terminology that deals with academic specialization and the attainment of specific credentials
3. *Instructional components:* individuals, concepts, and resources that pertain to classroom instruction and academic preparation
4. *Timeframe indicators:* information describing distinct periods of time and the resources that outline institutional schedules

Lexical examples of these categories are included in Table 3.

As with the thematic categories constituting the institutional discourse domain, the concepts surrounding a student's academic knowledge range in complexity and immediacy of importance. For example, prospective students know that enrolling in college will make them "students," but the multiple classifications of students can be difficult to decipher—especially with the nebulous distinction between "traditional" and "nontraditional" students. Although that example might

TABLE 3
Thematic Categories of Academic Discourse

Student Classifications	*Programmatic Determiners*	*Instructional Components*	*Timeframe Indicators*
• full-time student	• degree	• professor	• semesters
• part-time student	• associate	• faculty	• quarters
• traditional student	• bachelor's	• adjunct	• term
• nontraditional student	• master's	• academic advisor	• credits
• transfer students	• doctorate	• syllabus	• university calendar
• undergraduate student	• major	• writing center	• office hours
graduate student	• minor	• student resource center	• course catalog
	• academic offerings	• research paper	• application deadlines vs. priority deadlines
	• department vs. college	• 100–400 level	
	• program endorsement		
	• placement exams		

not affect the students' status once they are enrolled, being flooded with terms like this might pose challenges for students when processing important enrollment materials (e.g., financial aid documents) that distribute resources according to the number of credits a student takes. In such cases, knowing the difference between full-time and part-time status—or even undergraduate and graduate designation—can make a big difference when trying to decode the enrollment process.

Another category that carries a lot weight during recruiting activities involves the array of programmatic determiners that are listed in informational documents like the WSUTC grabber. It is common for large institutions to promote the benefits of their academic offerings by highlighting all of their degrees, majors, and professional programs. Not only is this confusing, it can be intimidating to students when they are expected to know the difference between different degrees and levels of degrees—which are commonly listed as a swirl of confusing acronyms. In addition, prospective students often find it difficult to understand how degrees differ from majors, how quarter systems compare to semester schedules, and why a 2-year associate's degree in criminal justice differs from a bachelor's degree in criminal justice—other than the two additional years of tuition and time. This largely stems from a lack of exposure to the institutional knowledge concepts described previously. Although students have time to navigate these concepts once they are enrolled, we must take note of their potential confusion during the promotion and recruitment activities to ease their anxieties during the process of choosing an appropriate institution.

Students are also faced with planning their classes and finding the resources necessary to be successful in class. Terminology listed in the instructional components category constitutes a large part of students' everyday interactions. Although prospective students probably would not benefit from an extended description of the different types of instructors they will have, describing the relationship between the individuals who will guide them through their courses (e.g., academic advisors, tutors, professors) demonstrates the infrastructure of support that most institutions have to help students succeed. Moreover, outlining the different levels of courses available and how the numbers correspond to students' level in school can make the titles of course offerings seem less intimidating. Clarifying these types of conceptual obscurities will allow students to focus on one of the most intimidating steps in preparing for higher education—how to pay for it.

Financial Discourse

Unlike the K–12 public education system in the United States, universities charge students to attend. Although this might seem normal to those who have been to college, or even grown up in the United States, it may come as a surprise to many individuals—especially considering the (often) exorbitant dollar amounts required. Based on our analysis, we contend that the domain of financial discourse comprises of two broad conceptual categories. Whereas the category of institutional expenses involves concepts surrounding services and resources that students must pay for, the category of financial assistance indexes terminology involved in helping students pay for such expenses. Examples are outlined in Table 4.

Conceptually speaking, the notion of "tuition" tends to be more easily comprehended (and explained) than many other institutional concepts (e.g., general university requirements vs. professional program prerequisite courses). Even though "tuition" might be evident, the distinction between "resident" and "nonresident" can be rather confusing—especially in communities

TABLE 4
Thematic Categories of Financial Discourse

Institutional Expenses	*Financial Assistance*
• tuition	• financial aid
• resident tuition	• maximum assistance
• nonresident tuition	• grants
• direct vs. indirect costs	• loans
• other fees and charges	• scholarships
• anticipating your expenses	• subsidized vs. unsubsidized loans
• textbooks	• FAFSA
	• school codes
	• work study

Note. FAFSA = Free Application for Federal Student Aid.

where "residency" is associated with immigration status. This becomes even more problematic considering that only 12 states allow students with an undocumented immigration status to attend public universities without paying out-of-state (i.e., nonresident) tuition rates—Washington happens to be one of those states (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2011). Even when the nuances of "tuition" are clarified, students must wrestle with the notion of "direct vs. indirect costs" and "other fees and charges." Although living at home can mitigate many of students' "indirect costs," listing these costs as part of the overall cost of college in promotional materials can be intimidating.

After the initial shock of tuition rates, students are eager to learn about ways to finance their education. This domain includes resources that either facilitate or impede students from enrolling. Although most high schools have financial aid workshops, distinguishing between loans, grants, and scholarships is difficult for many students. This process is further complicated because of the variety of technical terms involved in filling out Free Application for Federal Student Aid forms (e.g., *subsidized vs. unsubsidized loans, school codes, work study*). Finally, although scholarships are prestigious and extremely beneficial, obtaining them can be a formidable task. Even though scholarship opportunities are numerous, figuring out the most appropriate sources, not to mention the actual mechanics of applying (e.g., finding application forms, writing letters, finding recommenders), can be overwhelming for students. Even though solid mentoring and broad social networks can help students navigate these obstacles, students without prior preparation on how to obtain financial resources tend to lag behind those who have this preparation in this highly competitive process.

Recoding Discourses

Although many institutions are very motivated to tailor resources to better service Latin@s and other minority groups, the interface of communication between institutional agents and the actual students is still mediated through discursive patterns that stem from White middle-class cultural practices. Stanton-Salazar (1997) adeptly pointed out that minority students who successfully penetrate the social and cultural barriers surrounding higher education have acquired the ability

to decode the system. What about the students who struggle to decode the system? Our charge here is to promote the need to communicate higher education terminology and concepts in more contextually appropriate ways. That said, we do not endorse merely omitting the esoteric terminology within the discourse domains; rather, we maintain that careful attention needs to be placed on how the vocabulary and concepts are phrased and presented within documents as well as how institutional agents talk about the texts with prospective students and their families (Ortiz et al., 2012).

Although recoding all of the discursive points described previously is beyond the scope of this discussion, we do provide an example of how to approach this process. In Table 5 we focus on the domain of institutional discourse and consider one lexical example for each thematic category. Here we demonstrate examples of recoding in two ways. First, we offer a way to integrate textual support within promotional documents to clarify subsequent uses of the terminology. Second, we list potential strategies for expanding on these concepts during interpersonal interactions with prospective students and families.

Although these examples of recoding might seem rather commonsensical to those involved in higher education, they are intended to highlight common concepts as a way to demonstrate the need for clarification. The process of recoding should be based on the contextual needs of each particular institution. When institutions recognize a communicative disconnect between their outreach efforts and the surrounding communities, the recoding framework proposed here allows institutional agents to analyze their promotional materials in terms of the different domains of discourse and focus on the concepts being conveyed within each category. Given that it is probably not feasible to recode the entire range of terminology within the discourse domains, our approach to recoding involves both textual and oral strategies.

TABLE 5
Examples of Recoding Institutional Discourse

Thematic Category	Lexical Example	Recoded Textual Support	Recoded Interpersonal Strategies
Institutional descriptors	college	The word *college* is commonly used to describe all institutions of higher education.	Provide pamphlets or pictures of different types of institutions. Highlight similarities and differences with students and parents.
Clerical infrastructure	admissions	The admissions office includes employees who help students apply and evaluate their applications.	Explain the application process and describe examples of students who were admitted and those who were not. Point out options for those who were denied.
Administrative personnel	dean	A dean is an administrator who manages different academic departments.	Compare a dean's position to that of a school principal, and relate teachers to professors.
Social engagement	campus life	Campus life refers to the social activities and interactions that students experience on campus.	Show pictures of students engaged in a variety of activities like clubs, cafeterias, studying, athletic events, dorms, libraries, and so on.

Because the promotional materials of each college must adapt to the contexts of particular communities and students, methods for identifying problematic concepts and terminology can be accomplished in a variety of ways. For example, partnering with school counselors or college preparation groups in middle and high schools (cf. Tierney et al., 2005) can allow universities to conduct surveys and informal interviews with students to gauge areas that need recoding. To ramp up the students' motivation to contribute input, universities can use interactive and entertaining activities and games to collect this type of information. Similar activities can also be done during recruiting and community outreach events. The discourse domains and thematic categories provided in this discussion can be used to guide such activities and organize the collected input from students and community members. Furthermore, results can be contrasted with input from incoming college freshmen during orientation. This final step can help identify gaps (and similarities) between the comprehension of prospective students and those who were able to navigate the system and actually enroll.

Identifying problematic vocabulary and concepts within printed promotional materials can provide rich opportunities for expanding conversations with prospective students and their families to scaffold them to contexts that are more familiar and validate their cultural wealth (Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005). Furthermore, the fact that many terms and concepts are categorically versatile and used across multiple domains makes it even more difficult for students to decode the system. Recoding these points both textually and orally can significantly mitigate confusion and apprehension of higher education. Finally, with the current emphasis/dependence on Internet-based information materials, universities looking to reach out to first-generation minority students must recognize patterns of unequal access to online resources and prepare alternative techniques for disseminating information (Pathways to College Network, 2004).

DISCUSSION

Rather than establishing a blueprint for rewriting promotional materials to more effectively recruit first-generation Latin@ students, the thrust of our discussion has been to heighten an awareness of distinct communicative features in higher education that tend to marginalize minority students. By focusing on the promotional and recruitment stages of the higher education attainment cycle, we have been able to isolate potential discursive incongruities that may deter students from attending institutions of higher education—whereby reinforcing historical trends in Latin@ academic attainment. Although the structure of higher education in the United States is steeped in tradition, we believe that certain components can be restructured to carve out additional space for accommodating traditionally underrepresented groups.

Because this discussion is based on the promotional materials of one university, we encourage further contributions on recoding strategies implemented by other institutions—across all stages of higher education. We are especially interested in further dialogue surrounding promotional materials in Spanish (as well as other minority languages). Considering the substantial dialect and lexical variation among the numerous Spanish-speaking communities in the United States (Lipski, 2008; Zentella, 2002), it is essential to take a closer look at how those materials are constructed and promoted to gauge their effectiveness.

Although recoding materials into the community language is important and symbolically powerful, assuming that Spanish-speaking communities will automatically understand and embrace

promotional materials just because they are written in Spanish once again ignores the complex and esoteric nature of the higher education discourses described here. Moreover, if institutions provide native-language materials and do not see an increase in enrollment from the community, there might be an inclination to blame the community for not *wanting* to attend. This caveat is not meant to dissuade institutions from producing native-language materials; on the contrary, we recommend conducting the same type of discourse evaluation as described here to ensure that the content is (re)coded appropriately.

Conclusion

Discussions of discourse are inherently wrapped up in "power and inequality" (Rogers, 2011, p. 1). This particular discussion has emphasized how power and inequality are reproduced through traditional higher education discourses in promotional recruiting materials. Instead of expecting students to decode higher education discourses, we argue that institutions are obligated to recode the way in which they communicate with minority—and minoritized—communities. Our emphasis on recoding the system to make higher education more accessible is twofold. We hope to help universities and colleges enhance the effectiveness of their institutional recruitment and promotional efforts to increase their Hispanic enrollments. More important, though, the approach we espouse here is aimed at improving the overall educational opportunities of Latin@s and other minority students. Alone, this strategy might not level the historically entrenched academic and social barriers that continue to discourage Latin@s from attending college; it can, though, help pry open more space for scaffolding background experiences to chip away at the walls of exclusion that continue to encircle higher education.

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