

# No Template When Being the First: Implications for Aspiring Latina Leaders



## American College President Study

The American Council on Education (ACE) produced the American College President Study (ACPS)—the most comprehensive, in-depth, and frequently cited source of information about the college president—and its related material, with generous support from the TIAA Institute. *The American College President: 2023 Edition* is the ninth iteration of ACPS, and the data it presents provide a comprehensive view of the demographics, challenges, and experiences of college presidents, helping all stakeholders gain a holistic understanding of higher education leadership and better reflect on ways to diversify the presidency. More information about ACPS can be found at [acenet.edu/acps](https://acenet.edu/acps).

## TIAA Institute

The TIAA Institute helps advance the ways individuals and institutions plan for financial security and organizational effectiveness. The Institute conducts in-depth research, provides access to a network of thought leaders, and enables those it serves to anticipate trends, plan future strategies, and maximize opportunities for success.

To learn more, visit [tiaainstitute.org](https://tiaainstitute.org).

## American Council on Education

The American Council on Education (ACE), the major coordinating body and convener for all of the nation's higher education institutions, provides leadership and a unifying voice on key higher education issues and influences public policy through advocacy, research, and program initiatives. To learn more, visit [acenet.edu](https://acenet.edu).



ACE and the American Council on Education are registered marks of the American Council on Education and may not be used or reproduced without the express written permission of ACE.

American Council on Education  
One Dupont Circle NW  
Washington, DC 20036

© 2025. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

# **No Template When Being the First:** Implications for Aspiring Latina Leaders

Cynthia Estrada and Eric R. Felix



Scholarship on women leaders in higher education has broadly emphasized diversifying leadership roles and improving women's representation in presidential roles, with more attention paid to gender alone than to the intersections of gender and racial/ethnic diversity (Garza Mitchell and Garcia 2020; Santamaría et al. 2022). However, as research demonstrates the positive impact of diverse leadership on student success, there is growing interest in expanding racial, ethnic, and gender representation in higher education leadership (Cross and Carman 2022; Hines 2023).

Despite this interest, significant gender disparities persist in college presidencies, especially for women of color. According to the most recent American College President Study (ACPS), women in leadership roles are still outnumbered by men two-to-one, with fewer than one in three women presidents identifying as women of color (Melidona et al. 2023). Notably, Latinas are rising to the presidency more quickly after application and appointment than other women, yet little is known about their experiences once in the role. This brief focuses on the distinct ways Latinas lead as college chief executive officers (CEOs) once they reach the position.

Women are represented in higher education leadership primarily at associate degree-granting institutions (or community colleges), holding 43.6 percent of presidencies (Melidona et al. 2023). These positions are especially attractive to Latinas because community colleges enroll the highest proportion of students of color, aligning with Latina leaders' dedication to advancing equity and supporting the communities they represent (Estrada et al. 2024).

Latina presidents continue to find themselves as trailblazers—being the first Latina to lead their respective institutions—a role that presents both challenges and opportunities. However, their leadership journeys frequently meet with obstacles such as limited mentorship opportunities, underrepresentation in leadership networks, and the complex task of addressing racial justice issues within their institutions (Melidona et al. 2023; Sangha-Rico and Hernández 2021).

According to *The American College President: 2023 Edition*, more than half (55.2 percent) of Latina presidents had initiated steps to tackle racial justice, yet some encountered criticism (13.8 percent) or external inquiries on topics like critical race theory (10.3 percent). The Latina leaders whose experiences are shared in this brief are deeply attuned to issues that arise because of white supremacy. They understand that oppression is systemic, intersectional, and very real. Most importantly, they try to actively combat structural racism on campus despite the pushback they receive.

Despite the challenges they face, Latina presidents exhibit a strong sense of preparedness and resilience. In responses to ACPS, a majority felt equipped to address racial justice issues (51.7 percent); had a clear understanding of board expectations (65.4 percent); and possessed a realistic assessment of their institution's challenges (66.7 percent). This resilience is deeply rooted

in lived experience. Research shows that Latina community college presidents draw upon cultural intuition, a leadership approach grounded in their experiences with marginalization, professional expertise, scholarly training, and the realities of leading in complex institutional settings (Estrada et al. 2024). This profound connection to culture, community, and purpose fuels their resilience and unwavering commitment to advancing equity, even when met with resistance.

Many of these presidents also seek guidance from peers, with 41.4 percent expressing a desire for mentorship and support. These insights highlight the importance of fostering robust leadership networks and pipeline programs to support Latinas in their presidential journeys. To truly support aspiring Latina college presidents, the field must deepen their understanding of what it means to lead as a Latina in these spaces—what it takes to break barriers, navigate resistance, and persist in a role where so few have before.

Community colleges are engaged in a major leadership transition, with retirements creating openings for new leaders and fresh approaches (Eddy and VanDerLinden 2006; Royal et al. 2023). These shifts present an opportunity to reimagine leadership in ways that honor the lived experiences and cultural intuition that Latina presidents bring to their roles (Estrada et al. 2024).

This brief offers an intimate look into their journeys, the struggles of being the first, the weight of expectations, and the moments of joy that remind them why they stay. Rooted in conversations with Latina presidents, our insight provides distinct narratives of the ways Latinas lead as CEOs. By sharing their stories, the field can understand Latina leaders' experiences in community colleges beyond the numbers. It is not enough to simply open doors; the field must understand their experiences once in the role. For the Latinas in this study, this means grappling with heightened visibility, exclusion, and the constant pressure to prove themselves in ways their counterparts may not be expected to. It requires navigating institutional politics, resisting pressure to assimilate, and fighting for equity despite workplace opposition. However, what may be most inspiring is that despite these challenges, Latina presidents find deep fulfillment in shaping institutions that serve marginalized communities, knowing they are paving the way for future leaders.

## Methods

The following are narratives of five powerful *mujeres* whose identities must remain confidential. At the moment, representatives of U.S. state governments and the federal government are attacking diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts while actively devaluing the unique contributions of communities of color. For this reason, I am careful in providing any identifying information outside of their position and ethnic identity.

The Latina community college presidents highlighted in this brief are deeply committed, highly qualified, and in many cases more prepared for their leadership roles than their counterparts. During our time together, we—as a research team predominantly made of women of color—engaged in *pláticas*, a Chicana feminist methodological approach that honors the lived realities of Latinas (Fierros and Bernal 2016). *Pláticas* are holistic conversations with an emphasis on culture, vulnerability, and reciprocity. Through our *pláticas*, it was evident that Latinas are drawn to community colleges, where their identities reflect those of many of the students they serve. Their personal experiences as first-generation college students from low-income families, daughters of immigrants, and English language learners acted as a source of motivation to lead in ways that positively impact the lives of students, including those most marginalized by society.

These Latina leaders hold presidencies across a range of community college contexts (i.e., rural, suburban, and urban) at Hispanic-Serving Institutions. Each president holds a doctoral degree and brings decades of experience in education, and their tenures in their current roles had spanned from six months to five years at the time of our *pláticas*. While I do not include their names or institutional affiliations, what remains unchanged is the level of insight, vulnerability, and strength they shared in recounting their journeys as Latinas in power. If you are an aspiring Latina leader in the community college system, let the reflections that follow guide you. They offer insight into what you may encounter, what you have the power to change, and what values can keep you grounded as you lead.



## You May Be the First. You Are Not the Last.

All the *mujeres* who participated in this study were the first Latinas to lead their institutions. Early in our conversations, it was evident that this reality shaped how they viewed their presidency and the pressure they carried in the role. One powerful image that emerged more than once in our *pláticas* was the “wall of presidents”—the collection of portraits of their predecessors in the role—which serves as a visual and symbolic reminder of the absence of leaders who look like them.

As a result, aspiring Latina leaders must recognize: *You will stand out.*

One leader said, “I am serving as the first Latina, first woman of color to be the president of [my institution], and the college is over 70 years old. I share a wall of presidents where I am the only person of color. I think that says a lot...I think it communicates that a path is possible and a path is being created for others here at the college for our students.”

Often, Latina leaders find themselves as the only ones in positions of power. The “wall of presidents,” executive cabinet, and trustee board are glaring reminders that higher education leadership has long been reserved for white men. This reality is not lost on any of them; they know they are the first to sit in these roles and to be responsible for institutions that were not designed for them. The “wall” is a constant and static physical representation of the groundbreaking nature of their presidency. Being the first does inspire a deep sense of pride in Latina leaders, especially when they can define the presidency in ways that reflect their authentic selves.

Still, this trailblazing role also carries considerable challenges. Being the first comes with significant pressures and heightened expectations, which these *mujeres* all acknowledged in our *pláticas*. Because they are the first—as one Latina president shared—“they [higher education institutions] are not used to it.” These presidents are defying norms, which can feel like a huge responsibility. Many explained that as the first Latina president of their institutions, they feel as though they are “representing all Latinas.”

Thus, future Latina leaders may expect to *carry the weight of representation.*

There is no template to follow; this can present challenges, especially when others expect you to fail. All Latina presidents expressed feeling added pressure to perform well within their roles because of their underrepresentation as leaders.

They said, “As women of color who are in these leadership positions, we feel a greater sense of responsibility. And if other people are not going to get what they need to get done, I need to make sure it gets done. And I assure you a male does not feel that way. They probably would not be as concerned—much less pushing a participatory governance structure forward. But we gotta do what we gotta do. No matter what, [Latinas] have to be better prepared than anyone walking into any room. They have to do the homework. They have to be better prepared than they need to be knowledgeable, because there are many people that will doubt you.”

Latina leaders can also feel this sense of responsibility extending beyond their official duties. One leader shared, “I’m being invited to a number of community organizations that in the past did not feel they had a place at the college, like the Hispanic Chamber...So in addition to your regular work, you have a responsibility because now you represent women and you represent Latina women....So you’re being invited, and you’ve been asked to participate in a number of things. So that’s part of that responsibility. But I’m just grateful that I’m able to do that.”

These statements illustrate the dual burden and privilege that Latina leaders experience as they navigate leadership roles within higher education. On one end, there is a sense of pride and gratitude in being invited to be seen and recognized. On the other end, it is added labor. And while community spaces like the Hispanic Chamber may appreciate their efforts as Latina presidents, others do not.

### *People can and will question your leadership.*

Many of the Latina leaders in this study recounted experiences where others made assumptions about their identity, often dismissing or overlooking their status as presidents altogether. More than one Latina described an instance where they were assumed to be supporting staff to the president. One said, “I can’t tell you how many times people have questioned my role. When they say, ‘What do you do?’ and I go, ‘I’m the president,’ they think [I am] the [Associated Student Body] president... And I say, ‘of the college,’ and they’re like, ‘The whole college?’ And I’m like, ‘Yeah, the whole college.’ That’s because, like you said, there’s [so few] of us. I can probably name several of them [Latina presidents].”

Because Latina community college presidents are so few and far between, they encounter assumptions that undermine their authority and credibility and reveal persistent racial and gender biases about who holds power. Another Latina leader shared an instance where a campus constituent assumed that the white man in the room was the president, ignoring her throughout the meeting. She stated that when she walked in, “he asked me if I was in the right place” and then “spent 10 minutes thinking he was talking to the man in charge.” These interactions send a clear, harmful message that Latina presidents do not belong in leadership roles and cast doubt on their legitimacy. Undermining their positions of power creates additional barriers Latina presidents must overcome to be seen and respected as leaders.

Despite these added challenges as “one of the few,” there is a silver lining. There is a sense of pride in having made it. They recognize that their pathway to the presidency has been anything but easy and to be granted the opportunity to shape their campus cultures is exciting. As one Latina president stated, “[higher education] structures were not created for us....so you get to pave your own way.” It is a chance to change the way the field understands leadership and set a course for a new generation of presidents.

Something that keeps Latina leaders going is the fact that *you are needed to shape the future.*

One leader said, “Because this [points to self] is not what the president looks like. This is not how a president behaves, right?...I embrace that because women of color deserve to see people like them in leadership positions....It’s a privilege; it’s an honor to serve in this role and represent. It’s kind of like I’m paving the way, and it comes with its trials and tribulations, but I think it will have an impact on people who come after me.”

While confronting racism and sexism can be exhausting, it also serves as motivation to continue paving the way for future generations. The Latina presidents in this study found immense satisfaction in embracing their identities whilst rejecting normative notions of leadership. They drew strength and inspiration in knowing that their presence and equity-oriented efforts would open doors for future Latinas who may or may not necessarily see themselves as leaders.

## **Navigating Power & Institutional Politics**

The ability to redefine leadership in new ways is one of the added benefits of serving as president. At some point throughout their presidency—whether it be from the first day to a few months in—Latina leaders have recognized that “you can only listen and give space so much as to why things have been done a certain way.” At some point, they must “insert [themselves]” and lead in their own way. That too, however, comes with its challenges. Among the many critiques Latina presidents face, their appearance is often scrutinized and policed, adding another layer of pressure to conform to traditional leadership standards (i.e., cis-White men).

As such, future Latina leaders can *expect to be pressured to assimilate, but they don’t have to.*

One leader stated, “I wear dresses. I wear high heels. I don’t want to be placed in a box just to make someone else feel comfortable about what a college president should look like.”

How Latina leaders chose to present themselves played a significant role in how they experienced their role. Their appearance—from their hair to the clothing they wore—was often commented on or outright scrutinized. One president shared that she felt like she had to “have a [specific] appearance and maybe [even] a demeanor that was different than [her] own.”

The Latinas in this study shared that they were often perceived as hypersexualized because of their identity, leading to pressure to “tone down” their appearance. They described being told to wear longer dresses and muted colors, shorten their hair, and adopt a more traditionally masculine presentation to be taken seriously. Despite this reality, the Latina leaders of this study described ways they actively reject the pressures to assimilate to the dominant culture (i.e., White men). They wear heels, their natural hairstyle, bold colors, and gold jewelry as acts of resistance. As one Latina stated, “...being fully present in my work doesn’t mean that I have to abandon family or cultural roots or upbringing, [instead, it is] an intentional merging of them.”

But visibility alone is not enough. *You have to fight for equity—constantly.*

All of the Latina leaders in this study would describe themselves as student-centered and driven by equity. In fact, many of them stated that the reason they chose to serve in leadership roles within the community college system was because of their diverse student body and open access structure. One study participant shared that she would not “want to work anywhere else other than a community college” because their purpose is to “create opportunity and access for everyone, regardless of the choices they’ve made in life [or] their ethnicity.” Another stated that her inspiration came from knowing she would be working with and for “first-generation, low-income students of color.”

As presidents, they recognized the power of their positions and were committed to using them to create lasting change in service of minoritized student populations. One Latina leader described feeling “a sense of urgency to do something in terms of equity and inclusion.” This urgency was experienced by all the Latina presidents in this study, especially following the COVID–19 pandemic and the unrest following the murder of George Floyd in May 2020. Such efforts, however, did not come easy. More than one Latina leader described instances where assumptions were made about who they would select during the hiring selection process based on their own identity.

One Latina shared, “I was told in my very first year by a couple of individuals that the faculty thought that I was talking too much about equity...It did make me wonder if I was a white woman, or a white male, would we be having a different conversation?...[At the time], I think [there were] two or three faculty hiring processes in motion....As it turns out, there were Latinos in the pool, but the committees did not want to put them forward because they said that if they forwarded any Latinos, that as a Latina president, I was going to automatically pick them. And so I pushed. I shut these committees down, and I said, “If you can’t give me three candidates....then apparently we don’t have a good pool, so we need to go back out.”

Despite their intentions to serve all students, their actions are often met with scrutiny, especially when advocating for equity. Even with these pressures, the Latinas in this study understood the importance of representation and led with conviction, pushing institutions to live up to their mission to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. Part of leading institutional change means gaining board approval for key decisions, which is often a political process that requires strategy and resilience.

For this reason, aspiring Latina leaders should consider that *the board is another political arena they must navigate.*

One president said, “As the president, I have to be very strategic and intentional about really managing up, educating the board, so that they ultimately support the work I’m doing.”

As Latina leaders work to transform their campuses into more equity-oriented institutions, they must also navigate the complex dynamics of their boards. Board meetings require careful political strategy and can present complex and often unseen challenges. It involves building buy-in from board members who may not see eye to eye with them on their vision. One of the study participants shared that dealing with her board is one of her “major challenges” because of “the politics.”

Educating or negotiating with board members takes time and energy that Latina leaders could better spend transforming their colleges. Another leader stated that she found herself having to engage in “code-switching to the degree that [she] didn’t even know [she] had in [her].” To her, interacting with the board required a level of performativity that felt tiresome. It feels performative because—like the other Latina leaders of this study—they value leading with authenticity, which is an approach that is not always recognized or appreciated in higher education institutions, where leaders are often expected to assimilate into dominant norms. Rather than conform, many Latina presidents push back by intentionally centering their cultural identity and authentic leadership style as a form of resistance.



To aspiring Latina presidents, the leaders who participated in this study say *there is power in leading as yourself*.

For Latina leaders, authenticity is not just a form of leadership; it is an act of resistance, a source of strength, and a guiding principle. In spaces that demand assimilation, the Latina presidents in this study find power in bringing their full selves to the table. Their culture, family, and communities are all a part of who they are and how they lead. They recognize that because they are underrepresented in their roles, they must be unapologetic about who they are and what they care about. Being seen requires intention, and for these Latina leaders, that means embracing and expressing their identities with clarity and pride.

As more Latinas seek to enter leadership roles, they should remember: *your stories are needed in these spaces*.

Whether at the start of their presidency or later in their term, the Latina leaders in this study consciously decided not to hide who they are but to lead authentically and center what matters most to them. One leader reflected on preparing for her first speech at the college, where she felt tempted to focus on something more conventional or—as she put it—“academic.” She said, “My husband told me, ‘Just tell them who you are. Tell them why this is important for you. Tell them about your journey.’ That’s how we communicate. We tell stories about family. So that’s what I did.”

Prompted to “tell them who [she was],” she focused on her cultural values through storytelling. She shared “a bit of [her] heart, a bit of [her] journey...[and] a piece of who [she] was.” For Latina presidents, storytelling is a powerful way to build connections with their campus communities while modeling a leadership style rooted in vulnerability and authenticity. Make no mistake; while their leadership is grounded in authenticity and vulnerability, these women are also bold, assertive, and unapologetically powerful in how they show up.

One president said, “I’m not fulfilling a job title. I’m fulfilling a purpose. And as long as I know that, I can keep going.”

For Latina leaders, showing up fully and unapologetically is about honoring why they are in these roles, which is to create institutional change for those most in need. This is especially important in the context of California, where nearly a quarter of all enrolled community college students identify as Latinas themselves. These leaders draw motivation and power from knowing they are disrupting the status quo to build “long-lasting change.” To the Latina presidents in this study, their work matters, and what they do makes a difference for those often oppressed by the structures they lead.

## Your Presence Alone Inspires Others

Latina visibility in leadership roles matters significantly. For students, staff, and community members, seeing a Latina president can shift their beliefs about what is possible. Even in our *pláticas* with them, it was difficult not to constantly find ourselves in awe of their brilliance, humility, and steadfast devotion to their students.

As a research group predominately made up of women of color researchers, we were inspired after each *plática*; all of us left with a desire to agitate the status quo in higher education. These moments of connection and recognition serve as powerful reminders of the impact authentic leadership can have; one that is rooted in culture, heart, and community.

One leader said, “I can’t tell you how many people—particularly women and women of color—tell me, ‘Oh my God, seeing you in this role makes me believe it’s possible.’”

Another said, “I wasn’t sure whether my story would resonate, but I took the risk and shared my immigrant background. After my speech, the entire room stood up and applauded. Later, people told me, ‘I’ve never heard a president tell a story like that before.’”

And another said, “Students have come up to me and said, ‘I never thought I’d see a Latina president. Now I know I can do it too.’ That’s why I do this work.”

When Latina leaders share their stories and lead authentically, they inspire belief, belonging, and possibility in others. Their presence disrupts long-standing norms about who belongs in leadership and affirms that culture and lived experience can be an asset in higher education. As a result, their presidency extends far beyond policy or position; it lives in the hearts of those who see themselves reflected in their leadership. And while some of the impact is immediately visible, some of it unfolds quietly.

One leader said, “I had a faculty member tell me, ‘I used to question all this talk about racial equity. But after seeing the way you lead, I get it now.’ That was huge.”

Another said, “I was at a national conference, and a young Latina came up to me and said, ‘I’ve been following your work. You inspire me.’ I didn’t even know she knew who I was.”

In the day-to-day grind of navigating politics, pushback, and all the challenges of leading for equity, it can be easy for Latina leaders to lose sight of their impact. The constant demands of the job and resistance from campus constituents can overshadow the quiet ways their presence and commitment are shifting culture. And even when it’s not immediately visible, their leadership is planting seeds for future generations through everyday interactions, tough decisions, and the values they embody.

## Hold Onto Affirmations in Hard Moments

Doubt and isolation are real experiences for Latinas, but the affirmations they receive from students and their communities are anchoring reminders of why they lead. Holding on to moments of influence becomes a strategy for resilience, helping them push through the noise and stay aligned with their purpose. The words ground and sustain them.

One leader said, “I’ve had nights where I thought, ‘Maybe I don’t belong here.’ And then I remember the student who told me, ‘Because of you, I didn’t drop out.’ That’s what keeps me going.”

Another said, “People will doubt you, challenge you, undermine you. But when you go home, look in the mirror and ask yourself three questions:

1. Am I a woman of integrity?
2. Did I do everything I could for my students today?
3. Did I support my team as best as possible?

If the answer is yes, then nothing else matters.”

When the work is hard and the resistance is strong, Latina leaders are reminded that their presence, stories, and leadership matter deeply to those who have never seen themselves reflected in positions of power. Ultimately, Latina leaders measure success not by external validation but by their integrity, service to students, and support of their communities.

## Conclusion and Tangible Takeaways

The narratives shared in this brief emphasize how much work higher education must do to support Latina leaders—particularly those who are firsts. The stories of these five Latina leaders challenge the field to reflect on how our institutions are structured, who they are designed for, and what must change to make leadership more inclusive, sustainable, and affirming for Latinas. The experiences shared here are not outliers; they are evidence of systemic barriers that require intentional disruption and not at the expense of women of color. Higher education must move beyond performative commitments and invest in structural change to better support Latina leaders. Below are key takeaways and recommendations to help institutions proactively assess and transform their practices.

## Key Takeaways:

- **Latina leaders are often the first.** Being the first means heightened visibility, added scrutiny, and the constant pressure to prove oneself while carrying the weight of representation.
- **They face persistent oppression at the intersection of race, ethnicity, and gender.** Latina presidents are often mistaken for support staff or student leaders, revealing deeply entrenched stereotypes about who belongs in power.
- **They are driven by purpose.** Despite systemic resistance, Latina leaders remain focused on serving students, especially those who need it most, such as those from low-income, first-generation, and racially minoritized backgrounds.
- **They face institutional and political challenges.** Leading equity efforts often causes backlash, and board politics can consume significant emotional and strategic energy.
- **They lead with authenticity.** Rejecting assimilation, these leaders embrace their cultural identity and use it as a foundation for their leadership approach.
- **Their presence and efforts have an impact.** Latina presidents inspire belief and possibility in others, even when they may not realize they are being seen.
- **Affirmation sustains them.** In the face of doubt and exhaustion, students' words and reminders of their purpose keep them grounded and moving forward.

## Recommendations:

- **Move beyond representation.** It is not enough to hire Latinas into presidential roles; institutions must also foster environments where they are valued, supported, and allowed to lead with authenticity. Visibility without respect and authority reinforces harm rather than progress.
- **Redefine what leadership looks like.** Latina leaders bring relational, community-rooted, and equity-centered approaches to their institutions, often challenging traditional, hierarchical models. Institutions must expand their definitions of leadership to include culturally grounded practices.
- **Rethink preparation pipelines.** Leadership programs must go beyond assimilation-focused training and instead uplift the strengths, experiences, and values that Latinas already bring. Preparation should not require them to leave parts of themselves behind to be considered "presidential."
- **Train boards to understand equity leadership.** Boards of trustees play a critical role in enabling or undermining presidential leadership. Board members must be required to undergo ongoing professional development in racial equity, cultural humility, and anti-bias practices.
- **Center mentorship and comunidad.** Latina presidents often experience isolation in their roles. Institutions and professional associations must create intentional support networks rooted in cultural understanding, sisterhood, and collective care.
- **Protect time for purpose-driven leadership.** The emotional labor of equity work is real. Latina leaders should not have to spend the majority of their energy justifying their vision. Create institutional structures that honor their time, values, and well-being.

While each leader in this study faced unique challenges, what unites them is a deep sense of purpose, a commitment to equity, and the courage to lead as their whole selves. They are transforming not only their campuses but also the very meaning of leadership in higher education. The question that remains is not whether Latina leaders are ready; it is whether our institutions are prepared to receive, support, and grow with them.

## References

- Cross, James David, and Carol A. Carman. 2022. "The Relationship Between Faculty Diversity and Student Success in Public Community Colleges." *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* 46 (12): 855–868. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2021.1910595>.
- Eddy, Pamela L., and Kim E. VanDerLinden. 2006. "Emerging Definitions of Leadership in Higher Education: New Visions of Leadership or Same Old 'Hero' Leader?" *Community College Review* 34, no. 1 (July): 5–26. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0091552106289703>.
- Estrada, Cynthia, Eric R. Felix, Erin Nicole Reyes Vedar, and Elizabeth Jimenez Perez. 2024. "Latina Community College Presidents: Drawing from Cultural Intuition to Disrupt Leadership Norms in Higher Education." *Education Sciences* 15 (1): 35. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15010035>.
- Fierros, Cindy O., and Dolores Delgado Bernal. 2016. "VAMOS A PLATICAR: The Contours of Pláticas as Chicana/Latina Feminist Methodology." *Chicana/Latina Studies* 15, no. 2 (Spring): 98–121.
- Garza Mitchell, Regina L., and Lisa R. Garcia. 2020. "A New Hope: Shifting the Gendered Discourse Around Community College Presidential Leadership." *Journal of Women and Gender in Higher Education* 13 (2): 157–174. <https://doi.org/10.1080/26379112.2020.1781650>.
- Hines, CharMaine Y. 2023. "Gatekeepers to the Community College Presidency for Leaders of Color." *New Directions for Community Colleges* 2023, no. 202 (Summer): 47–62. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20568>.
- Melidona, Danielle, Benjamin G. Cecil, Alexander Cassell, and Hollie M. Chessman. 2023. *The American College President: 2023 Edition*. American Council on Education.
- Royal, Angel M., Walter G. Bumphus, and Kent Phillippe. 2023. *The State of Community College Leadership: 2023*. American Association of Community Colleges. <https://www.aacc.nche.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/LeadershipReport.pdf>.
- Sangha-Rico, Ruby, and Susana Hernández. 2021. "Latina Senior Leaders in California Community Colleges: Leadership as Disruption and Resistance." *Journal of Applied Research in the Community College* 28, no. 2 (Fall): 17–32.
- Santamaría, Lorri J., Liliana Manríquez, Adriana Diego, Dona Alberta Salazar, Claudia Lozano, and Silvia García Aguilar. 2022. "Black, African American, and Migrant Indigenous Women in Leadership: Voices and Practices Informing Critical HRD." *Advances in Developing Human Resources* 24, no. 3 (August): 173–192. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15234223221100847>.

