The Latinx Guide to GRADUATE SCHOOL

GENEVIEVE NEGRÓN-GONZALES
and MAGDALENA L. BARRERA

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We dedicate this book to the up-and-coming
Latinx/a/o scholars and practitioners.
¡Ánimo!

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Acknowledgments

This book is a labor of love. While it may be clear that this project was motivated by our love for our former, current, and future students (the Latinx scholars coming up behind us), it is also the product of the mentorship we received from those who paved the way before us. We want to thank our students, who have shared with us their lives and academic journeys as well as their dreams and struggles. We were motivated to write this book because we believe in you so deeply.

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Introduction

YOU THOUGHT YOU WERE BUYING A HOW-TO BOOK BUT ENDED UP GETTING A LOVE LETTER, MANIFESTO, AND FLASHLIGHT

Perhaps you are picking up this book because you are considering the possibility of graduate school. Maybe you feel a bit panicked because you think you should have read this a couple of years ago, before you started your program or when you were deciding to go to graduate school. Maybe you are a mentor or professor or advisor to students who are attending or considering graduate school, and you are reading this book because you plan to assign it to them so that they can have their feet on the ground as they navigate the academy. The intention of this book is not to lay out a blueprint for success or a cheat sheet of how-tos but rather to document some of the unwritten rules about graduate education that are relevant to Latinx students because they fundamentally shape our experience.[1] One of the ways that educational privilege is preserved, replicated, and transferred from one generation to the next is that those who know *know*, and those who don't know don't know what it is that they don't know. The academy thrives on this dynamic of unwritten rules and carefully guarded information. One of our main goals in writing this book is to demystify and clarify elements that are a part of the process of navigating graduate school that Latinx students often do not know because, for most of us, we are the first in our families to walk this path.

Moreover, we are often made to feel less than, undeserving, and like we are impostors in a place where everyone belongs except us. That dynamic

can make it difficult to ask questions, to seek clarification, or to find mentorship—because needing to ask for help further intensifies the feeling that we do not belong or do not deserve to be here (something we discuss at much greater length in chapter 2). The university was not meant for people like us; the history of higher education is steeped in legacies of slavery, white supremacy, sexism, and elitism. Undoing that legacy is much bigger than this book, but our hope is that by using our foothold as two people who have been able to squeak through the slight crack in that door and push it open more widely, we are able to help shape how Latinx graduate students navigate the academy so that more of us can get in, get through, and get out, using our education for the betterment of our communities. The charge is grandiose, but as Latinx academics we know that everything we do is political and race-laden. This book, then, is simultaneously our love letter to Latinx graduate students, our manifesto, and an indictment of the academy that pushes us out and pushes us by. It is also a flashlight you can keep in your pocket to pull out when the road ahead is dark and the path is uncharted.

Equal parts how-to, personal reflection, and academic musing, this book is for Latinx/a/o people who are considering going to graduate school, about to start graduate school, or in graduate school. We were inspired by Kerry Anne Rockquemore and Tracey Laszloffy's *The Black Academic's Guide to Winning Tenure—without Losing Your Soul*, which served as an anchor for both of us in our early years on the tenure track. While our book was written with one particular community in mind—the Latina/o/x community, particularly those who are first-generation college students—we believe it likely has resonance for others as well, particularly those who occupy other marginalized positions in our society, including women, queer, and trans students, Latinx students who are not first-generation, and so on.[2]

Through years of working with students in both formal and informal capacities as professors, advisors, and mentors, we have identified common challenges and key questions shared by many Latinx and first-generation students. These experiences have inspired us to adopt more helpful techniques and refine our approaches to working with students in a way that pushes them forward in their work in a humane, culturally cognizant manner. This book that you hold in your hands was born of those experiences and our hope that the skills we have developed in supporting Latinx graduate students over the past decade can be useful to a broader

set of students. We also see this work in the tradition of other critical books in the tradition we come from, such as *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios*, which maps the navigations of Latina feminist scholars and their journeys through higher education for the purpose of imagining a new way of being.[3] We draw on this tradition, and the scholars and thinkers and activists and organizers who not only came before us but cleared the path for us. We, very humbly, see ourselves as a part of this long history of Latinas, women of color, and other oppressed groups who tell our stories, look out for each other, and work each day to bring about a new reality.

This book came about because a mutual friend and colleague, Kathy Coll, asked each of us if we knew of any books or materials to pass on to a soon-to-be Latinx master's student who was just about to start in the Migration Studies Program at the University of San Francisco and needed some grounding and preparation. Kathy, in an offhanded way, said to each of us, "I knew that if there was such a book, that you would know about it. And if there's not, you should really write it." And now we have.

El Comienzo: How This Book Came About

Given that less than 3 percent of the professoriate is Latina, we tend to see each other, find each other, and know each other when we are on the same campus. When the authors of this book met at San José State University (SJSU) in 2011, one was a tenure-track assistant professor in Mexican American studies and the other, in the last stages of her PhD program, was teaching classes in the same department as an adjunct professor. Through this connection, we began what would become a now decade-long conversation about teaching, supporting, and mentoring first-generation Latinx graduate students. On virtually every campus, professors of color become de facto mentors to students of color, especially on campuses where the number of faculty of color is small. As junior scholars finding our footing in the academy with our graduate experiences still pretty fresh in our memories, we felt a profound responsibility to our students—those who were in our classes, those whom we advised in the graduate program, and those who found their way to our offices because they were looking for mentorship or just a point of connection. We began to talk about how to engage with intention and purpose. Our commitment was rooted in our own experiences as first-generation Latinas in the academy, and we continually wrestled—both on

our own and together—with how to do this work. We were the products of elite graduate programs that had shaped us in positive ways but had also broken us down. We had both considered walking away at various points along our graduate journeys. Both of us had the kind of professors, advisors, and mentors whom we wanted to emulate and also those whom we vowed never to become. We grappled with the need to balance the structural and institutional inequalities that shaped the educational lives of our students before they ever stepped foot on a college campus alongside the demands of institutions of higher education that were never meant to be accessed by people like us (much, much more on how the academy is an institution steeped in white supremacy in chapters 2, 3, 4, and, well, you know, the whole damn book).

In this process, we struggled to articulate—for ourselves and for our students—the idea that we had the potential to try to remake the university by remaking ourselves through it; we did not need to replicate the racist, classist, heterosexist, and elitist ways of academia as a rite of passage or collective penance that others should suffer because we had to suffer. Painful graduate school experiences that break students down are often seen as the process necessary to produce rigorous scholars and skilled practitioners. We were committed to rigor and solid training, yet unconvinced that trauma was a necessary part of that equation. We began to consider—on our own, in conversations with each other, and in our broader professional and personal networks—how to be the kinds of professors who could both have the hard conversations with students that hold them accountable to a higher standard and also be the professors who always have an open door and a willing ear. We saw it as our responsibility and privilege to model a kind of cariño which insists that these politics of care are not something superfluous but rather lie at the heart of our pedagogical practice as teachers and mentors, as well as at the heart of our intellectual identities as researchers and professors. It is also about ánimo, not simply a blanket encouragement to go to graduate school but a thoughtful encouragement that you can do the hard things your heart calls you to do.

Over the years, Magdalena Barrera (or Barrera, as her students often call her) earned tenure and promotion to associate professor at SJSU in the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies and then was promoted again to full professor, the highest faculty rank possible. In the midst of writing this book, she was appointed to serve as inaugural vice provost for faculty success at SJSU. Genevieve Negrón-Gonzales (or Profa, as her students often call her, even though yes, technically not correct Spanish because

Profe can be both masculine and feminine, but you know how nicknames stick) secured a tenure-track position at the University of San Francisco in the School of Education and was awarded early tenure and promotion to associate professor. Through these years and transitions, the conversations continued as we taught cohort after cohort of students, learning from our mistakes, piloting new ideas, seeing what worked well, and honing our mentorship, teaching, and professional practice.

In this work, over the years, we have seen Latinx graduate students struggle. There are numerous structural and institutional barriers that cause this to be so. We work with students who struggle in graduate school because they never learned the proper mechanics of a research paper or how to formulate a thesis statement. We have watched as students struggle to remain true to themselves and their roots, wondering if the only way they can succeed in the academy is to put their heads down, tame their accents, and abandon their radical ideas in service of something less controversial and more palatable to mainstream academic audiences. We have counseled students through the moments they considered leaving their programs because of the racist comments of classmates and when feelings of isolation and **impostor syndrome** became too much to bear. As we continued to see Latinx students struggle through graduate school, it was also clear that to truly understand what was happening, the experiences of our students had to be contextualized by the broader educational apparatus through which they were positioned as learners. In other words, we cannot talk meaningfully about the struggles Latinx graduate students have within the structure of graduate education if we do not analyze these in light of their experiences as students of color in an educational system that spans from preschool through college in which they are pushed out, pushed back, and pushed on by a system that was not set up for their success.

Through these years of mentoring and teaching, we also have seen students who thrived in their graduate programs, producing scholarship that has moved their field of study as well as the grassroots work on the ground. We have worked with students who graduated with a stronger sense of self, propelled by a responsibility to do good in the world and the knowledge that they were situated to do so. We watch our students go on to work with other students as professors, graduate instructors, mentors, and teachers, noticing how they formulate new ways of being in the university that are based on principles of collaboration rather than competition. We know that this is, indeed, the way that we make a new university for the generations of scholars that come after us.

Our Journeys to Graduate School

Genevieve Negrón-Gonzales: Una Herida Abierta, Affirmative Action, and the Path to the Professoriate

When I started college, I planned to be an elementary school teacher. I spent most of my childhood imagining myself as a kindergarten teacher (well, when I was really small, I wanted to be a nun, but that is a story for another time), but landing on a college campus in the midst of a racial justice fight recalibrated that plan, my educational trajectory, and my life in general.

I grew up on the US-Mexico border in southern San Diego County in a city called Chula Vista. Gloria Anzaldúa famously wrote that the "U.S.-Mexico border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds."[4] I grew up on this "open wound" that is the U.S.-Mexico border at a moment in which the wound was quite raw. I was in high school when Proposition 187, which sought to prohibit undocumented immigrants from accessing public goods and services, including health care and public education, was put on the ballot in California, passed by voters, and later thrown out by the courts. Proposition 187 was part of a legacy of racial propositions put on the state ballot in the 1990s, in an expression of racial anxiety over the "browning" of California.[5] This was also the era of Operation Gatekeeper at the US-Mexico border, a Clinton-era policy that sought to further militarize the border and criminalize migrants. As a teenager who grew up in the context of a pro-poor, pro-migrant ethos rooted in our identity as a Mexican Catholic family, I was politicized through this dark moment in California's history. I got involved in political activism in my teenage years, and followed my older sister to UC Berkeley.

I graduated from high school in the spring of 1996. Months earlier, the UC Regents (the governing body of the University of California system) had passed SB1 and SB2, which dismantled affirmative action in the UC system. A couple months after I stepped onto the UC Berkeley campus as a first-year student, California voters approved Proposition 209, which dismantled affirmative action in all sectors statewide. Coinciding with the start of my college career, this confluence of events meant that I was the last class admitted under affirmative action policies to UC Berkeley (making me a proud beneficiary of affirmative action), and I was entering a campus that was enmeshed in a racial justice fight. I had been in school for only a couple of months when activists occupied the clock tower at UC Berkeley on election

night. When I got home that night (I did not get arrested), there was a voice mail from my mom that went something along the lines of, "Mija! I saw the kids chaining themselves to that clock on the news and I know you are out there! You better call me back!" If there was a graphic novel recap of my undergraduate years, it would be that scene: me listening to messages from my worried mom wondering why I had not picked up and whether I had chained myself to something or if I was just in class.

The fight to save affirmative action and the subsequent and related fight to preserve Ethnic Studies at UC Berkeley shaped my undergraduate years, crystallized my political analysis, and helped me realize that while I was not sure what profession I would choose, it would be work done in the service of racial justice and attempting to address the oppressive structures in our society. I was fundamentally shaped by the experience of being on the UC Berkeley campus as affirmative action was being dismantled; I was there during this infamous year that the law school (then called Boalt, now called Berkeley Law) admitted one Black student. By the time those four years were up, I had had enough of the campus, enough of academia, enough of privileged white people, and I was sure that my graduation would signal the last degree I would earn. The idea of returning for an advanced degree was not anywhere in my consciousness. Graduate school was not something that people in my social/political circle talked about; continuing my education was nowhere on my radar. I had gotten a college degree, made good on my promise to make my parents' sacrifice worth it, and was done.

After graduation, I went to work full-time at the nonprofit organization where I had worked part-time for the last two years of undergraduate school (I had a job through my entire undergraduate career). I was doing work that was meaningful to me, developing curriculum and conducting political education workshops with young people, when I began to think about returning to school two years after graduating with my bachelor of arts. I decided to apply to graduate school not because I was after the degree but because the work I was doing surfaced questions that my eighty-hour-a-week struggling nonprofit worker schedule did not afford me the mental space or the analytical tools to really grapple with. I began to think about graduate school as a way to push pause on this work, have some space to think about the questions that were coming up around the development of political consciousness and the building of social movements, which I would then use to come back to the organization to do the work better and smarter. I had spent the previous seven years building community in the Bay Area—my life and my partner and my political community were here—so I did

not consider relocating for graduate school. I looked at programs around the Bay Area and decided there was only one that really interested me. I applied and waited for a decision. For me, the decision would not be which graduate program to attend. The decision would be made for me: if I got in, I would attend; if I did not, I would keep on with my nonprofit work and figure out how to prioritize the reflective and analytical space I was hoping graduate school would provide. I got in, with a fully funded fellowship. As my dad says, "If it's free, give me three!" I am my father's daughter and am never one to pass up a deal, which meant that my acceptance, with a fully funded fellowship, cemented my decision to enroll in the MA/PhD program at UC Berkeley in Social and Cultural Studies in Education.

At the time, I did not know anyone with an advanced degree aside from professors I had as an undergrad. To be honest, I did not understand that a PhD was a research degree. I did not imagine I would ever be able to be a professor. The MA/PhD sounded good to me because I figured if I couldn't handle it—if I wasn't smart enough or couldn't put up with the white people any longer or felt like it was not useful to my broader political aims—then I could leave after two years with an MA in hand and go back to the work I had been doing before, having lost nothing. The details of those years will come out throughout the book, but a few things happened along the way that are probably useful to know at the outset. I walked across the stage on graduation day with a six-month-old baby in my arms and her four-year-old brother's hand in mine. My son was born a couple of weeks after I finished the MA (I did not even attend the ceremony). Getting pregnant with my daughter is what gave me the ganas to finish my dissertation. She was due on November 15, so I told myself I would have a full draft done by October 31. Because she was my second baby, I knew what it meant to have a newborn; I did not think I would be able to come up with any original insight or analysis while sleep-deprived and caring for a newborn (thus the writing needed to be done), but I also knew that I would spend long hours sitting, nursing, and holding a baby (and therefore revising a complete dissertation would be possible). I was mistaken for janitorial staff at UC Berkeley when I was a few weeks away from completing my PhD. Very pregnant when I was assembling my dissertation committee, I was told by a faculty member that she only works with students who are "really serious" as she showed me the door; the implication that a pregnant Chicana could never be a serious student was thinly veiled. I thought about quitting many, many times. The urgency I felt around the issues I was researching and writing about, as well as my love for my students, made me stay the course, and I

secured a position at the University of San Francisco's School of Education in 2013. I earned early tenure in the spring of 2018 and currently serve as associate professor in the School of Education, affiliate faculty in the Migration Studies program, as well as the chair and founder of the University Task Force to Support Undocumented Students.

Magdalena L. Barrera: A Journey to and through Elite Institutions

I am a third-generation Mexican American from suburban Chicago; my grandparents migrated from central Mexico in the 1910s, finding work in the railroad industry and factories of the US Midwest. My parents were born and raised in Chicago's richly multiethnic Italian, Chinese, and Mexican neighborhoods and, through my dad's military service, lived for a time in Germany. By the time I came along, our family had settled in a predominantly white suburb, where I was often the only Latina in my K–12 classes. Though at times my family was only tenuously middle class, my parents made sure that school was my only job. Having inherited my mother's love of reading, I aspired to become a famous novelist like my idol Sandra Cisneros. Her novel *The House on Mango Street* changed my life when I stumbled upon it at my local bookstore during my senior year of high school, because it was the first time I had ever read a story told from the perspective of a midwestern Mexican girl like me.

I became aware of college at a young age, having seen my mother take courses at a local community college through the years. Though my older sister was accepted to a four-year institution, she chose not to attend, so from age twelve I began to feel even more acutely my mother's desire to see one of her daughters earn a college degree. My mom worked as a support administrator at a research laboratory and observed how people with advanced degrees were accorded more respect. As a result, she often intoned, "Because you're a woman and a minority, you need a master's degree!" It sounded like good advice, but everything I knew about college came from *Class of '96*, a TV show about six friends in their freshman year.

I was accepted into the University of Chicago in 1993 with a full-tuition scholarship. Unprepared for the rarefied academic world I was entering, I soon found myself struggling with impostor syndrome. UChicago prides itself on being a "great books" school, and the professors' pedagogical style was more suited to teaching advanced graduate students than novice undergraduates. I enrolled in courses like Classics of Social and Political Thought mainly because the titles sounded grand and promised to impart

things that an educated person should know. I was quickly lost, struggling to plow through Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* without falling asleep. Meanwhile, my peers seemed to know how to take reading notes, talk to faculty, manage their time, and attend office hours. Though I eventually found my footing, I developed the terrible and persistent habit of procrastinating on my writing out of fear of failure.

I double-majored in English, pursuing my passion for literature, and Latin American studies, which enabled me to learn about the legacies of race and colonization that shaped my family history. Ultimately, two support systems helped me attain my bachelor's degree in 1997: First were the close friends I made in our Latinx student group, who were my primary social circle and source of emotional support. Second were my mentors, Curtis Marez, the only Chicano faculty member in English, and Yolanda Padilla, a doctoral student in the department. With their support, I applied for a Summer Research Opportunity Program and completed my first independent research project, and then was awarded a Mellon Minority Undergraduate Fellowship (now known as the Mellon Mays), which prepared me for the graduate school application process.

After graduation, I traveled with my then boyfriend to Mexico City, where I dreamed of writing the Great Chicano Novel. Instead, all that happened was that I ran out of money, broke up with the guy, and returned home to apply to graduate school. Thanks to my research opportunities and friendships with grad students, I thought I understood what grad school entailed. Yet just as with my college applications, I had no idea what kinds of questions I should ask about doctoral programs; all I knew was that I wanted to study the writings of women activists within the Chicano Movement. To my surprise, I was accepted with five years of funding into the highly competitive PhD program in Modern Thought and Literature (MTL) at Stanford University.

When I arrived at Stanford in 1998, I learned that MTL had an informal peer mentor system. My assigned buddy was, like me, a first-generation Chicano student. He invited me to coffee and started the conversation by asking, "So, what's your background?" I was about to tell him about growing up amid the cornfields of suburban Chicago when he completed his question by rattling off a list of theoretical lineages: "Do you consider yourself post-structuralist, postmodernist, postcolonial . . . ?" Panicked, I gulped, "Um, I'm not sure yet." His question was my first indication that graduate school meant not just learning specialized knowledge and the research and writing skills required for a PhD but also adjusting to the

significant class, language, and identity shifts that are inextricably bound up with the process.

My undergrad research skills and successes quickly faded once classes began. I found that faculty often gave assignments ("write a reading response") without providing any specific instructions. My voice was drowned out by the droning of the self-appointed superstars, students who tried to impress everyone by brutally critiquing each reading. Meanwhile, I was struggling to complete the densely theoretical readings and figure out the author's argument, not to mention clarifying my own response to it. With time, I began to see through the posturing of others and to develop a system of reading, note taking, and preparing for class—a system I developed through trial and error because those skills, while absolutely essential, were never explicitly discussed in any class. Rather, it was through my peers in the program that I learned to navigate the hidden curriculum of graduate school.

With time, I found success in my classes because the assignments and readings came with clear deadlines. However, I became unmoored while writing my dissertation, as I had no idea how to harness my self-discipline and create accountability structures to make progress on my research. My faculty were encouraging but hands-off, assuming that I knew what I was doing. Looking back, I should have asked for more direction, but I was loath to admit that I needed help. Three of the four years I spent working on my dissertation consisted of struggling with writer's block and avoiding my faculty advisors. I was so burned out by this journey that I lost interest in pursuing a faculty career; my limited experience as a teaching assistant was nothing great, and I feared that I would wither under the pressure to publish. I entered an existential crisis, wondering what the past seven years meant now that I no longer wanted to be a professor.

I applied for a postdoctoral teaching fellowship at Stanford because it was renewable for up to three years and thus afforded me a window of time to find an alternative career path. I will forever be thankful for that experience for two reasons. First, I learned that if I did not file my dissertation by December 2005, I would have to reapply for the fellowship—and truly, that was the only reason I was able to break through my writer's block. I couldn't afford to lose that opportunity. So in the week between the end of our training and the start of full-time teaching, I completed one and a half remaining chapters of my dissertation and drafted the conclusion. It was finally done! I had a *Shawshank Redemption*–like moment of holding aloft the completed draft, still warm from the printer, and sinking to my

knees, crying with relief. Second, the fellowship's training and pedagogical practice helped me see that I had a passion for teaching and that perhaps I would enjoy a faculty career if it were at a teaching-centered institution.

All these years later, I am the first woman to be promoted to full professor and to have served as department chair of Chicana and Chicano Studies at SJSU, a **Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI)**. As we completed the first draft of this book, I entered a new phase of my career, stepping into a senior leadership role supporting faculty success and working to recruit and retain teacher-scholars who reflect the diversity of our students. I have found incredible meaning working with and learning alongside SJSU students, many of whom are first-generation students from working-class and immigrant backgrounds. They inspired me to take on a new area of research centered on the mentoring and retention of historically underrepresented students and faculty in higher education—and that is what drives me to contribute to this book you hold in your hands.

Latinx/a/os and Higher Education: ¡¿Pa' Qué?!

Every semester, we teach, mentor, and become academic "ninas" to first-generation Latinx students who are passionately invested in their education—students who likely share many similarities with you who are reading this book.[6] Like them, perhaps you have been galvanized by scholarship that enables you to analyze your lived experiences and connect your family and community histories with a larger socioeconomic context. Perhaps you are deeply committed to developing projects that enable you to apply that knowledge in ways that matter to you. To be clear, you have overcome tremendous odds: You may be part of the 9 percent of Latinx students who enrolled in a four-year institution directly after high school. Or you may be part of the 42 percent of Latinx high school graduates who start off at community colleges, only 5 percent of whom make the jump to a four-year university. Upon graduation, you will have joined the 13 percent of Latinxs with a bachelor's degree.[7]

Yet even that figure elides notable differences within our communities. For instance, since 1980, Latinas have earned degrees at higher rates than their male counterparts.[8] In another example, educational outcomes tend to be better for Cubans and Puerto Ricans than for Mexicans and Central Americans.[9] Not surprisingly, class and citizenship status have tremendous impact on educational attainment among Latinxs; one study finds

that among Chicana/o/x students, 51 percent of those in the highest income range earn at least one degree (associate's or higher) versus only 7 percent among those in the lowest income range.[10] Sixty percent of Latinxs in higher education are enrolled at Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and 63 percent are clustered in just four states: California, Florida, New York, and Texas. Undocumented students face serious and significant barriers in most states, hindering their access to higher education. These figures demonstrate that Latinx students face massive underrepresentation across many institutions and regions.[11] Further still, Latinxs in higher education tend to be concentrated in the social sciences and education, with significantly fewer going into science, technology, engineering, and math fields.[12]

Making your way through this educational pipeline, you may find that while you are hungry for more, you are feeling exhausted by the overall journey—and no wonder. Perhaps you have felt the financial strain of paying for your education while also contributing to your family's household income. Maybe you have faced a longer time to complete your degree and have accumulated more debt along the way. Indeed, maybe even as you aspire to an advanced degree, you are having a hard time envisioning yourself continuing along the path because you see so few faculty who share your ethnic background and cultural values—after all, Latinxs make up just 5 percent of the professoriate nationwide.[13] Perhaps most significant is the much broader challenge we all face in bridging our home/cultural values with those of our academic institutions. Most universities are ill prepared to draw upon Latinx students' many strengths, causing you to wonder, as we did multiple times throughout our own journeys, "¿Qué estoy haciendo aquí?"[14] As a Latinx student, you may find yourself exerting great intercultural effort, a term that describes the additional energy that you feel like you have to put into making yourself fit in with your campus culture.[15]

In short, the academy was not created for people like us. As numerous scholars before us have elaborated, the modern-day university was built for the sons of the wealthy elite, and the institution itself was built with the wealth accumulated by dispossession through the violence of colonialism, slavery, and wage exploitation.[16] This fundamental truth about the institution is one that we have to be comfortable talking about explicitly and plainly if we are to join its ranks. It does us no favors if we forget that the history of the university is steeped in elitism and exploitation. The question, then, is what does it mean to permeate this institution as a literal and subjective outsider—one whose identity and subjectivity are historically crafted through otherness? Why make the decision to willingly enter

an institution that is historically crafted to exclude us—and continues to perpetuate this dynamic through both formal and informal processes of marginalization?

There are the easy and prescriptive answers, of course. There are certain jobs for which an advanced degree is required. There are some fields in which how far you can climb is constrained by the degree that you have. Some sectors require a skill specialization that can only be accessed and obtained through graduate education. Thus, there may be concrete reasons for seeking an advanced degree that have to do with professional aspirations and the necessary credentials. These are valid reasons that drive many to graduate education.

There are also other answers to the question of why we willingly submit to graduate education, despite knowing that it is often a hostile environment for people like us. What does it mean to claim as our own a site we have been told could never be ours? I (Genevieve) was talking to my mentor once, a woman of color slightly older than myself, who had been hired at her **R1** university job as a spousal hire. A spousal hire is, in short, when a job candidate who has been made an offer of employment negotiates an employment offer for their spouse as a condition of their acceptance. This mentor, who was nothing short of an academic superstar in her field, told me about the experience of being the "trailing spouse," meaning she was not the targeted hire but rather the spouse who was negotiated in. I asked her whether that experience made her feel like she was less than, under a microscope, unwanted but tolerated. She laughed, and said, "I loved how they underestimated me because you can't imagine how shocked they were when I excelled." I have held onto that statement for years. This attitude sums up what it means to claim space that we were never intended to inhabit: to look the powerful in the eye and say, "We will not apologize for being here, and we rightfully claim our place at the table." The power in doing so is tremendous.

¿A Dónde Vamos? A Road Map of the Book

What is in store for you as you read this book? It is organized into seven thematic chapters that address aspects of the hidden curriculum of higher education and graduate school that are most critical for first-generation Latinx student success. Thus, rather than a chronological step-by-step organization ("in year one, you should . . . in year two, your focus should

be . . ."), we highlight the key navigational areas we find critical for development in graduate school. The chapters build on each other yet also can be read individually in whatever order is best for you. Also, because of its thematic approach, this guide provides essential insights that apply to scholars who are interested in or already enrolled in a master's or doctoral program. It needs to be explicitly stated that this book has an inherent humanities and social sciences bias. This is not to say that those in other areas, including the hard sciences (biology, physics, etc.) and engineering, cannot learn something from this book or that they do not experience the same obstacles that students in the humanities and social sciences do; it is simply to acknowledge the background of the authors and how that creates an inherent bias in how we have written this book and what advice we give. Magdalena Barrera has a PhD in Modern Thought and Literature from Stanford University and taught in Chicana and Chicano Studies; Genevieve Negrón-Gonzales has a PhD in Social and Cultural Studies in Education from UC Berkeley and currently teaches in a School of Education. Thus, while we hope (and believe) that Latinx students of all disciplines can find helpful information in this book, the disciplines we were trained in and that we teach in shape the way we come to this topic and have also shaped the kinds of students we have worked with.

On a practical note, you can read this book from front to back, you can flip to the sections that feel most relevant, or you can read it in pieces. As you read, don't skip the sections you assume do not apply to you or that you think you do not need. We have done our best to highlight the principal areas of navigating graduate school that we think all Latinx graduate students need to be thinking about, improving on, and considering in terms of their development and practice. We include what we do because these are the areas we have seen students struggle through, a struggle that sometimes is exacerbated by their own inability to realize the need for improvement or skill development. Our invitation is to read, reflect, and act in each of these areas.

Chapter 1 lays the foundation for readers who are considering graduate school by posing the important question, "To Grad School or Not to Grad School?" We explain the primary differences between master's and doctoral programs in the humanities and social sciences, and how each degree functions as a different kind of tool for your career. As part of that discussion, we encourage those who are thinking about applying to truly reflect, before committing the effort, time, and money to these programs, on whether research is the tool you need to accomplish the things that you hope to do. We

go on to discuss the relationship between theory and practice, dispelling the notion that real work takes place in the community rather than in the classroom while also holding onto a critical approach that reifies advanced degrees as the only way to get ahead. We provide an overview of financing a graduate education, sharing concrete warnings while still providing a non-fear-based orientation to making it work. The decision to pursue a graduate education is different for people who are racialized in the way Latinxs are and who are first in our families to attend college; we attempt to tease out these nuances in the discussion of how to think about the decision to enroll in a graduate program. We end by covering the nuts and bolts of the application process, particularly the importance of crafting a strong statement of purpose that helps first-generation scholars envision their educational narrative in a way that powerfully sets the tone for the work that lies ahead of them.

Chapter 2, "Learning to Be a Grad Student," builds on chapter 1 by providing a framework by which students can develop a graduate student identity. As a first-generation student, you are not a blank slate; you arrived at this point precisely because you honed concrete skills for academic success, in and out of the classroom, that enabled you to earn your bachelor's degree. There are also many things that you likely did not learn as an undergraduate that will be essential to your success as a graduate student. This chapter helps you understand the different expectations faculty have of undergraduate and graduate students so that you can identify new skills that you may need to purposefully cultivate. We also explore the relationship between graduate school and the political and social justice–driven commitments that often motivate us to pursue an advanced academic degree. We discuss impostor syndrome and share strategies for combating the feeling that you are not good enough or out of place in your program. One of the most critical tools to regain your sense of confidence is to identify your mission, the vision you have for yourself, your family, and your community that you would strive for no matter what kind of degree program or career path you found yourself in.

Whereas chapter 2 takes a theoretical or broader view of developing a graduate student identity, chapter 3, "Essential Skills in Graduate School," addresses best practices for undertaking the day-to-day work of an emerging professional writer and researcher. This chapter provides techniques for reading at the graduate level, enabling you to move past the summary-driven work that often happens at the undergraduate level to a deeper level of scholarly engagement that is expected of graduate students. It also

explores what it means to write at the graduate level and how to embrace your identity as a scholarly writer. Part of that journey is learning to manage and work around the writing anxieties that not only first-generation Latinx students but in fact all writers must confront. An important part of the writing process is the ability to distinguish between critique from faculty advisors and other interlocutors that may be hard to take yet necessary for strengthening your writing and argumentation versus that which is only meant to tear you down—and, as a flip side, becoming wary of empty praise. At the core of these advanced reading and writing skills is cultivating effective time management and structures of accountability. We share strategies to help students who work part- or full-time while in their degree programs and address the critical difference between being in your courses (meeting deadlines set by others) and working independently on your theses/dissertations (meeting deadlines largely set by you). Finally, we suggest some guidelines for managing your social media use, with an eye toward your overall mental health and well-being, and overall presence, thinking strategically about your professional future.

Now that you understand the essential skills of advancing your research, chapter 4, "Unwritten Rules of the Academy: Navigating the Gray Area," delves more deeply into some of the intricacies of academic life that may be a bit less obvious to the naked eye. This chapter begins by laying out the unwritten rules of the academy, particularly modes of communicating, interacting, and carrying oneself that can feel elusive, confusing, or surprising for first-generation academics. In this way, this chapter acts as a translator of academese. These insights are especially helpful when it comes to attending conferences and developing your professional networks, as we help you understand the purpose of conferences, how to make them work within your finances, and how to maximize your time. We also discuss social media as it relates to how we present ourselves in the world, and in academia.

Chapter 5, "Navigating Professional Relationships in Graduate School," prepares you to think about and manage the professional relationships that are critical to your success in graduate school. For many of us, the interpersonal aspect of navigating higher education can prove to be especially challenging, as the norms and mores of academic culture can differ radically from the cultural and familial values with which we were raised. In this chapter, we share best practices for communicating with faculty advisors. Building on the advice of experts like Kerry Rockquemore, we emphasize the importance of cultivating a network of mentors who, taken

as a whole, provide you insights into every aspect of your graduate journey and beyond. At the same time, and given the lack of Latinx representation among university faculty, we share advice regarding the possible need to mentor your mentors, particularly when they have not worked closely with historically underrepresented students. To that end, we encourage you to think about mentorship broadly, considering not just faculty but also your graduate student peers who may also have pointed advice and strategies for success. Cultivating positive connections among the others in your program is critical.

Chapter 6 focuses on a different kind of essential relationship, the intimate and personal relationships with people you love. "Navigating Personal Relationships in Graduate School" focuses on the personal and family connections with people you are dating, long-term partners, extended family, and even your children. A conversation about how we navigate these personal and intimate relationships in the context of graduate school is particularly critical for first-generation scholars and is often skipped over when we talk about graduate education because the de facto assumption is that graduate students are single and unattached. This chapter makes space for those conversations and also strategizes how to navigate the terrain when it feels that family culture and grad school culture come into conflict with one another.

Chapter 7, "Life after Graduate School," explores what happens after you complete your degree. While this may feel very far away, it is important to understand the intricacies of the academic job search both for those who are pursuing work in the academy and for those who are interested in pursuing a career outside of the academy and have questions about how to use their degree, whether it be a master's or a doctoral degree. We emphasize the need to thoughtfully prepare for the next stage of your journey and to identify the concrete skills gained in your graduate program so that you can demonstrate your potential for success in multiple career fields.

While we believe it is important to openly describe the very real challenges Latinx students face as they pursue advanced degrees, we also feel that it is critical that we never lose sight of our collective power to positively transform the academy by undertaking the work that we passionately pursue. Thus, we conclude on a more hopeful note, encouraging you not to feel overwhelmed by the information. Rather, empower yourself with it by approaching the academy with a clear-eyed sense that it is only one of many tools that can enable you to do meaningful, socially responsive work. We emphasize that there is no blueprint, no single way to "do" graduate school

that applies uniformly to all Latinxs. Getting into graduate school is not an end in and of itself; we must work toward our degrees always with an eye to charting a path for what comes after and work to find meaning both inside and outside academic institutions. We firmly believe that in doing so we have the power to transform higher education and make it more attuned to the needs of Latinx communities. We can only achieve that end if we accept our collective responsibility to mentor others along the way. Ultimately, there is tremendous power in reflecting not only on what we do as Latinx academics but also on how and why we do it. This book aims to prepare you for academic success and to envision an academy that is of and for Latinx and other marginalized communities.

A Note on Voice and Narration

All of the chapters in this book were collaboratively written by the two authors, resulting in "four hands on the keyboard"—borrowing from Alejandra Marchevsky and Jeanne Theoharis's vision of coauthorship as collaborative practice—working to deepen ideas through dual voices that represent the interdependency that is valued by our community and enables us to thrive academically.[17] However, each chapter was spearheaded by one author, and therefore is written in that author's voice. At the start of each chapter, you will see a note that says, "Though collaboratively written, this chapter was principally drafted by [author name], thus the use of *I* in this chapter refers to her." We chose this approach because we drew heavily on our own experiences as graduate students and faculty members, and we wanted to write in a way that was collaborative but also clear on who was speaking. Chapters 1, 7, and the conclusion were written by both authors, so the use of *I* shifts and is noted in the text accordingly.

Similarly, you will see sidebars throughout the book with little pieces of advice, called "Consejos." These are short pieces of advice from Latinx scholars in the field that we solicited for this book. We asked these scholars, who are experienced in mentoring, teaching, and supporting Latinx graduate students, what advice they would offer to you all. We are excited to include their consejos throughout the text and feel confident that hearing the reflections and advice of this broader group of Latinx scholars will be helpful regardless of where you are in your graduate school journey. In addition, at the end of this book, you will find an appendix of resources for undocumented students, authored by a colleague with a background in

that experience. Thus, this is "A Note on Voice and Narration," but it is also a reminder of the collectivist ethos that lies at the heart of this book. None of us would have gotten here without the support of others, and we take that seriously. It is who we are as a community, and it is what we inherit as our responsibility. We hope you read each chapter, and every consejo, with an understanding that there is a whole crew of us Latinx professors who are cheering you on.

One last note on the writing: at times, we intersperse Spanish into the text. Some of us grew up speaking Spanish and some of us did not. Speaking Spanish is not a marker of Latinidad, both because Spanish itself is a colonial language and also because one of the main reasons many of us do not speak Spanish, or do not speak it fluently, is because it is so debased and devalued in our society. This debasing also means that for many of us, speaking Spanish in an English-dominant society is an act of resistance. It is with that spirit that there is Spanish sprinkled throughout the text.

One Final Note: "Se Hace Camino Al Andar"

One last note on our approach, both as writers of this book and as professors and mentors to Latinx graduate students. There is a famous line from a poem by Spanish poet Antonio Machado: "Caminante, no hay camino / se hace camino al andar."[18] This is a road we have made by walking, a path that was forged by the sister scholars who preceded us and that will continue to be (re)made by those who come after us. Like many other societal institutions—housing, health care, finance, the criminal justice system, you name it—universities are steeped in an elitism that was not made for us and is not set up to foster our success as Latinx people; this is not something we will debate. It is also not something that we will belabor; this is the pond we are swimming in, the context we are operating in, and the sector we have chosen to fight from. Operating in this environment requires us to walk a fine line: complaining about how unjust the academy is can trap us in a place in which we feel disempowered and believe that the mountain is unclimbable. At the same time, failing to acknowledge the inherent bias in the institution can make us feel like we are flattened under the weight of it all, which we often are told must be the result of our own shortcomings and deficiencies. We walk a line between these two, acknowledging this undeniable context yet also claiming our power within it. We are honest and clear-eyed. We do not believe that you need to play the white guy's game to

get ahead, but we also know that because we work twice as hard to get half as far, exceeding expectations is our only choice.

This book is written with that idea in mind. We face an impossible conundrum: little is expected of us because of who we are and where we come from, but the expectations by which we are measured are increasingly elevated, requiring us to prove our worth over and over again. We are blamed when we stumble on this booby-trapped path. The only way out of that is to have our eyes wide open, to prepare for the path ahead, and to support one another in that journey. What that means in terms of our approach in writing this book is that we endeavor to tell it like it is, to be pragmatic, and not to make excuses. We take this approach not out of some sort of aim to make you all suffer because we have suffered but rather to rewrite the script on what we can expect of our Latinx students. We can be great. We can move mountains. We can write cutting-edge theory, conduct critical empirical studies, and move our disciplines. We can and we will.

Notes

Introduction

1 We use the term *Latinx* to follow the lead of scholars and thinkers who have encouraged its use to challenge the gender-binary system that assumes everyone is either man or woman. At the same time, there is not universal consensus around the use of *Latinx*, and at times we use it as an accompaniment to the terms *Latina* and *Latino*. We are uninterested in the critiques of the term that emerge from a homophobic or transphobic analysis, although we do understand the critiques that are concerned with the fact that *Latinx* is difficult to pronounce in Spanish and is largely used in U.S.-centric higher education circles at this time. We use the term freely through the text, also alongside the more conventional *Latina* and *Latino*, in solidarity with the transgender and nonbinary community and also in acknowledgment that as a community we are still grappling with the best way forward.

2 A short note on the term *first generation* to avoid any confusion: you can talk about first generation both in the context of immigration (the first generation to be born in this country) and in the context of higher education (the first generation to go to college). Members of our Latinx community may be first generation in one sense but not the other, first generation in both contexts, or neither. Because this book focuses on higher education, when we use the terms *first generation* or *first-gen students*, we are using the second definition: the first generation to go to college, meaning a student's parents did not attain a college degree. Some parents earned college degrees in their home countries, yet, for the most part, their children are also considered first-generation college students. This is because of both the specificity of the US higher ed context and the difficulty associated with having one's degrees recognized in the United States, which often means that trained professionals in other countries migrate to the United States and work in service-sector or low-wage work, therefore rendering their children functionally first-generation college students.

3 Latina Feminist Group, *Telling to Live*.

4 Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*.

5 HoSang, *Racial Propositions*.

6 For *ninas*, see Garcia and Barrera, "Supporting Latinx Scholars."

7 Yosso and Solórzano, "Leaks in the Chicana and Chicano Educational Pipeline"; Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, "2019 Fact

Sheet"; Rivas et al., *Latina/o Transfer Students*; Snyder, de Brey, and Dillow, *Digest of Education Statistics*.

8 Hurtado, Ramirez, and Cho, "The Current Latinx/a/o Landscape."

9 Perez Huber et al., *Still Falling through the Cracks*.

10 Covarrubias, "Quantitative Intersectionality."

11 Hurtado, Ramirez, and Cho, "The Current Latinx/a/o Landscape."

12 Contreras and Gandara, "The Latina/o Ph.D. Pipeline"; Snyder, de Brey, and Dillow, *Digest of Education Statistics*.

13 Hurtado, Ramirez, and Cho, "Current Latinx/a/o Landscape"; Snyder, de Brey, and Dillow, *Digest of Education Statistics*.

14 Yosso, "Whose Culture Has Capital?"; Rendón, Nora, and Kanagala, *Ventajas/Assets y Conocimientos/Knowledge*; Ramirez, "'¿Qué Estoy Haciendo Aquí?'"

15 Dowd, Sawatzky, and Korn, "Theoretical Foundations."

16 Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., *Presumed Incompetent*; Karabel, *The Chosen*.

17 Marchevsky and Theoharis, *Not Working*, vii.

18 Machado, "Caminante, No Hay Camino."

Chapter 1. To Grad School or Not to Grad School?

1 Though collaboratively written, this chapter was principally drafted by Magdalena Barrera; thus the use of *I* in this chapter refers to her.

2 Kelsky, "The Tenure-Track Job Search," 16; Nelson, "Contingency," 285.

3 Cottom, *Lower Ed*.

4 One other caveat here is that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a recalibration of how standardized tests like the GRE are regarded in the higher ed world. Many campuses suspended the requirements for standardized tests during the 2020–22 shutdowns simply because of logistical reasons, but some of those suspensions may be causing lasting changes in policy. At the time of publication (2022), the future of standardized tests remains to be seen.

5 Anthony Ocampo, "Typical Statement of Purpose Template," email to author, September 12, 2017.

6 Hernández, *La Virgen de Guadalupe*.

7 Adapted from Luck and Oakes, "Why and How to Email Faculty."

Chapter 2. Learning to Be a Grad Student

1 Though collaboratively written, this chapter was principally drafted by Magdalena Barrera; thus the use of *I* in this chapter refers to her.

2 Clance and Imes, "The Impostor Phenomenon in High Achieving Women."