



## **PATHWAYS TO THE PROFESSION: THE UNCG CAMPAMENTO HISPANO ABRIENDO NUESTRO CAMINO A LA EDUCACIÓN (CHANCE) PROGRAM**

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### **— ABSTRACT —**

This article highlights the UNCG CHANCE program, which is a unique experience that provides Latinx high school students with the opportunity to engage in an intensive five-day college preparation, exposure to academic majors such as communication sciences and disorders, and leadership skills development experience. The program targets rising senior and junior high school students, encouraging them to attend a creative mix of days in the life of typical college students. These experiences include but are not limited to attending mini-classes, course registration, leadership development, team building activities, campus organizations, cultural experiences, college preparation, and civic responsibility. UNCG CHANCE participants engage with university professors, students, staff to develop a peer/professional network forging positive, healthy mentorship connections focused on academic success and personal growth. The ability to easily replicate a program of this nature makes the UNCG CHANCE program an investment that many universities can start with high institutional buy-in and reasonably low cost to the institution, Latinx students, and their families.

**KEY WORDS:** Latinx student recruitment, communication sciences and disorders, pipeline, pathway programs, college access, leadership, community

## Background

Communication sciences and disorders (speech-language pathology and audiology) are consistently listed among those health professions with tremendous employment opportunities. It is anticipated that between 2020 and 2029 the number of jobs available for those persons trained as either speech-language pathologists or audiologists will increase by 25 percent and 13 percent, respectively (U.S. Bureau of Labor, 2020). Moreover, individuals with graduate degrees in speech-language pathology or audiology will be able to choose from a wide variety of employment settings, including schools, healthcare facilities, private practice, industry, universities, and corporate venues to name a few.

A major requirement on the pathway to this bright future is the attainment of a graduate degree---a master's degree in the case of those desiring to become a speech-language pathologist and a doctor of audiology degree (AuD) for those pursuing a career in hearing healthcare. Admission to graduate school in communication sciences and disorders (CSD) is a highly competitive process and is generally based on an applicant's grades, scores on the Graduate Record Examination, letter of interest/statement of purpose, and letters of recommendation. There are to be sure, other factors which graduate programs consider when reviewing a student's application. These might include extracurricular activities, research experiences, community service participation, etc. Thus, the body of work that a student has produced during their undergraduate education is displayed before the critical eyes of members of the graduate admissions committee for their review and evaluation. It is no exaggeration to say that how a graduate admissions committee views an applicant's dossier and the decisions it makes based on this information can have life-changing implications.

For many Latinx students, the pathway to the CSD professions involves the traditional route of undergraduate university study where the percentage of racial/ethnic minority students enrolled in bachelor's degree-level CSD programs in the United States averaged 23.7% over the eight-year period between 2011 and 2019 (ASHA, 2019). Latinx students frequently face the challenges of being first-generation collegians; learning the culture of the classroom (e.g., interacting with professors and seeking their assistance, engaging in classroom discussions); identifying and accessing support systems; and last but not least as explained by Ellis and Kendall (2020), overcoming systemic racism. In our experience, a successful approach to increasing the number of Latinx students who are made aware of and guided into

the CSD disciplines is by active recruitment at the high school level paired with pre-college experiential activities designed to nurture their desire to attend college and place themselves on the pathway to the professions. The purpose of this paper is to describe a formalized program, UNCG CHANCE, a pipeline program developed to recruit Latinx students to college and introduce them to a variety of majors including CSD.

## UNCG CHANCE Program Inception

Developed in 2017 at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG), the UNCG CHANCE Program (Campamento Hispano Abriendo Nuestro Camino a la Educación) is a unique pipeline experience providing 160 Latinx high school students with the opportunity to engage in an intensive five-day college preparation and leadership skills development experience. Initially funded as part of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Frontier Set Grant and subsequently supported by the University, CHANCE recruits Latinx students across the State of North Carolina to attend a creative mix of days in typical college students' lives. These experiences include but are not limited to, attending mini-classes, course registration, college preparation, leadership development, team building, campus organizations, cultural backgrounds, and civic responsibility. CHANCE participants engage with university faculty, students, and staff to develop peer and professional networks forging positive and healthy mentorship connections focused on academic success and personal growth. The oversight of CHANCE is guided by the CHANCE Committee which consists of faculty, staff, graduate and undergraduate students who provide logistical operations and programmatic scheduling during the week of the camp.

Based on data from Bransberger & Michelau (2016), there are approximately 421,000 Latinx students in the k-12 educational pipeline in the state of North Carolina and 105,845 of them will graduate from high school over the next six years. The statewide collaborative network of high schools and universities we have established over the last four years in North Carolina indicates that many of these students are from families with no previous college experiences, which presents unique challenges. While 90% of our Latinx students participating in CHANCE are US citizens, their families originated in other countries (e.g., Mexico, South American countries, and Spain). The students and families often struggle due to a lack of knowledge about accessing and navigating the pipeline-to-college process (e.g., the college application process, financial aid application process, FAFSA and scholarships), as

well as applying for housing, or registering for classes once admitted. College pathway outreach initiatives create an opportunity for Latinx students and their families to gain valuable knowledge and insight on techniques and information needed to apply for the various aspects of matriculating to college upon high school graduation. According to Mwangi (2017), gaining access to higher education helps uplift communities. The CHANCE program not only provides a pathway for the students participating in the week-long camp; students take what they have learned back into their home communities and share the knowledge gained.

Although the CHANCE program is designed as a pipeline experience, the CHANCE Committee's primary goal has not been to ensure the students who participate eventually attend college at UNCG. Instead, the program operates from a developmental approach, understanding the overall benefits to North Carolina youth to attain their education regardless of the college they attend. UNCG serves as an active contributor to the statewide effort to have 60% of North Carolina's population earn a college education by 2025. The Latinx community is the fastest growing population in the state (at a growth rate of approximately 110% per year). Thus, establishing pipeline programs for this population is not only logical, it is a necessity

### **Institutional Buy-in/Engagement**

The program's overall success is due to the broad-based engagement of the university in this summer initiative. The CHANCE program has 97 faculty and staff members who volunteer their time during the week to teach mini-classes and provide cultural, organizational, team building, and civic engagement sessions for the student participants. These personnel design their mini-curriculums and create positive relationships through their interactions with these students by weaving culturally relevant content into their presentations. Faculty involved represent the School of Health and Human Sciences, Joint School of Nanoscience/ Nanotechnology, School of Education, School of Nursing, College of Visual and Performing Arts, College of Arts and Sciences, University Libraries, and School of Business. There are several main disciplines within each School or College that students gravitate to yearly. These are communication sciences and disorders, biology, nursing, chemistry, political science, psychology, business management, elementary education, and accounting. Staff members engaged with the CHANCE camp work in the following areas; Chancellor's Office, the Division of Student Affairs (Dean of Students, Intercultural Engagement, Leadership and Civic Engagement, and Recreation and Wellness), the Division of Student

Success, Division of Enrollment Management (Admissions & Financial Aid), University Police, Business Affairs, and Alumni Affairs.

### **CHANCE Program Description and Outcomes**

The CHANCE curriculum is not designed to convey cutting-edge theory, practice, or pedagogical approaches to a specific degree. Instead, it is intended to provide students with information about the disciplines of interest and broaden their understanding of employment and graduate/professional school possibilities upon their graduation from college. One example of how the program was designed to approach the curriculum is the banking industry. Faculty share information about the multiple disciplines needed in this industry, such as political science, communication, accounting, finance, policy, human resources, forensic computer science, and management, to name a few. In addition to the faculty and staff, 32 undergraduate and six Latinx graduate students are assigned as mentors and coordinators for the high school students. Mentors and coordinators stay in the residence hall with the students and provide 24/7 assistance with issues and advice as needed. Graduate student coordinators serve as advisors to the mentors when problems arise, requiring additional maturity and institutional policy knowledge. The mentors and coordinators also maintain direct contact with the Director of the CHANCE camp and other administrative camp staff to ensure federal, state, and institutional policies are adhered to at all times. The mentors also provide a valuable resource for aspiring high school students seeking to enroll at a university. These college students serve as the bridge between what the students are learning in their mini-classes and sessions and the practical experiences on campus and within the community or seeking advanced degrees. Through the UNCG students sharing their college experiences from social justice and political perspectives as well as their real world interactions with systemic, structural, implicit, and explicit biases, CHANCE participants gain valuable insight regarding what to expect and prepare for on a college campus.

In addition to the class sessions' academic/professional focus, students also attend core sessions specifically focused on the admission, housing, and financial aid application processes. These sessions facilitated by the Offices of Undergraduate Admission, Housing & Residential Life, and Financial Aid walk students through the actual process of applying using official applications for the FAFSA, housing, and admission to UNCG. Although program developers realize that there will be slight differences in admission applications between institutions, we have been informed by students (via surveys) and parents

(at each closing session) that having a basic understanding of how to respond to questions and provide the requested information helps reduce stress during the application process. There are also special sessions designed to address DACA issues and navigate working through the application and aid policies for undocumented students.

Tuesday afternoon and evening sessions are dedicated to the Amy Williamsen Speakers Symposium and focus on different aspects of college life and developing and becoming comfortable with who they are culturally and within their home communities. Nationally known speakers are invited to present to the students on a topic related to one of several areas (their culture, what's in their name, leadership, civic engagement, scholarship, or agency within the Latinx community). Over its three years of existence, 340 Latinx students have participated in CHANCE. Students from over 45 of the state's 100 counties have attended the CHANCE camp over its three years of operation. These counties span the state from the mountains to the coast (east and west) and from northern to the most southern counties. Since its inception in 2017, the visibility and work of the CHANCE program via word-of-mouth by student participants, high school teacher and counselor referrals, collaborators from other universities, and parents from the Latinx community has helped spur an uptick in UNCG's undergraduate student population by approximately 63% (from 1,308 in 2016 to 2,073 in 2020). From the 2017 cohort, 57.3% of participants have enrolled in college, with a retention rate of 92% for those enrolled at UNCG. These students have also achieved an average GPA of 3.3. Note that the CSD undergraduate program requires at least a GPA of 3.0 for admission.

The CHANCE program's growth rate of 162% from its initial year (2017) of 61 campers to the 2019 camp hosting 160 (over 300 applied to attend) participants is a testament to the perceived value of the UNCG CHANCE program to the Latinx community. Additionally, program evaluations have found that our best recruiters for this program are the students and their families upon returning to their respective homes. To further solidify the importance of a program of this nature, below are included several quotes from the students' assessments about the importance of the program. Additionally, personal anecdotes from parents of some CHANCE participants are provided about the program's impact on their lives. Pseudonyms are used for students.

### Student Comments:

#### Margarita:

"The experience was so eye-opening and inspiring. It truly changed my life and gave me the motivation to pursue my dreams. I am an undocumented student, and after DACA was canceled, I was sure I had lost all hope of going to college. This camp allowed me to understand the college process, a concept so foreign to me as a first-generation student. You took the time to explain to all the undocumented students (DACAmented students) different ways to apply to college. You and all the other staff and mentors gave me so much hope. I was selected as a finalist, and I matched to Wellesley College on a full ride. It was through one of the mentors that I found out about Golden Door Scholars. This year students without DACA could apply, and I was selected for this scholarship as well."

#### Ricardo:

"Thanks to CHANCE, I am going to be the first in my family to graduate from college."

#### Eric:

"I believe that we did a pretty good variety of things, which led to me opening my eyes to more things and opportunities."

#### Jessica:

"I want to thank everyone involved, and especially my parents for encouraging me to come. I did not want to because I never thought that college was me. I didn't think I ever could go; I had convinced myself I did not want to go. Now, thanks to CHANCE, I want to go, and I know I can make it. Thank you, CHANCE, for giving me my dream."

### Parent Comments:

"As a Latina, I fell into the trap of believing all those who told me, "You can't...You can't go to school, you can't get a better job...you can't build a better life." As a woman, I faced even more obstacles. I gave up. We face so many obstacles; we start to limit ourselves. Thank you, CHANCE, for showing our children they can, que Si se puede."

“Thanks to CHANCE, my daughter will be the first in her family to graduate with a university degree.”

One father broke down in tears as he thanked the CHANCE staff, lamenting that “his academically gifted older son, now a father of two children, never finished college, he earned a two-year degree from a community college.” He pleaded with us to help his son.

“Let’s make sure that Si se puede is more than just words we repeat. We must all work tirelessly so that each of our children know they can. That we are here to ensure they succeed.”

Based on survey results, 96.83% of the CHANCE participants (122 of 126 respondents, some students departed before participating in the survey) indicated that this program helped them feel more prepared/ready to go to college. The students’ satisfaction for the mini-classes for the 2019 camp was high, with 88.6%, indicating they were satisfied or extremely satisfied. Participants expressed a desire for showcasing a wider variety of academic disciplines; however, the program was limited due to lack of space and competition with other ongoing summer camps (e.g., speech and hearing center camp, band camp, etc.). Students commented that they wanted to learn more about non-traditional disciplines (typically majors that award degrees to a smaller cohort of students).

Significantly, 92.8% of the students stated the program helped them feel more prepared to apply for college and the financial aid process. Also, 67% thought the CHANCE program helped strengthen their leadership skills and enable them to return to their communities, and high schools prepared to engage in leadership roles and assist other students in their communities to apply for admission and financial aid to college. The reasons for being a strong leader included: finding their “voice” among their peers; forced to get out of their comfort zones by leading different segments within their groups; learning how to guide people in the right direction without taking full control of situations that arose during the week, and being inspired by the positive interactions with the mentors and camp staff.

The CHANCE camp has been recognized nationally, regionally, and locally in the news media and by awards of recognition by Excelencia in Education in 2019 as a Program to Watch for its commitment to creating educational opportunities for the Latinx community.

### Suggestions for Replicability at Other Institutions

It should be noted that the actual costs of a program of this nature are driven by the market prices for doing business on your campus and its surrounding community. Therefore, some institutions will be able to fund a program of this nature at a substantial saving. In contrast, others may experience higher costs due to the location, institutional policies, and buy-in from their faculty and staff. The program has been fortunate to encumber no fees associated with faculty and staff to work with this program. The incentive for faculty participating in the program is the opportunity to share their pedagogical and research interests with students, as well as the chance to collect data and publish their findings based upon their work. Some faculty members have become mentors to CHANCE students and maintained those relationships once a participant enters college. Working with the CHANCE camp for graduate and undergraduate students serves several purposes including resume builder, giving back to the Latinx community, building leadership skills, etc. Also, critical to the success of this program is engaging university student support staff to work with these students. These individuals are typically from the offices of Student Success; Student Affairs (multicultural, leadership and service learning, Dean of Students, and career services); Academic Affairs; and Advising.

As previously noted, buy-in and support (financial and non-financial resources) from upper university administration is important to the success and continuity of programs like CHANCE. Costs and resources for supporting a program such as CHANCE could be shared across university units and CSD academic programs can contribute through faculty and student volunteers and experiential activities (e.g., audiological assessment equipment and assessments, voice and speech instrumental examination techniques). As has been observed at the program home institution, a significant return on investment can be realized in the form of increased college student enrollment and tuition dollars when Latinx students bond with and ultimately attend a university that has demonstrated an interest and commitment to their futures. For example, in 2020, one-third of our CSD undergraduate majors at UNCG are Latinx and many of them (i.e., 23) are former CHANCE participants.

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### Conclusion

According to Schak, Bentley, Nichols, & Pilar, (2019), “if state leaders would commit to addressing

systemic racism and barriers throughout the educational pipeline, that might go a long way towards ensuring that public colleges and universities serve and support *all* state residents” (p. 29). Kiyama & Harris, (2015) also noted that students and their families’ opportunities to pursue a college education were limited due to how the educational structure fails to provide critical information needed to access higher education. UNCG CHANCE was designed to open the doors of higher education to the Latinx communities in North Carolina by providing timely information high school students need to navigate the transitional process from high school to college. As a college immersion program, CHANCE provides the experience of a typical residential college student navigating campus without the pressure or consequences associated with actually being enrolled. This pipeline program provides faculty with the opportunity to position their fields of study in unique ways that do not confine students to a homogenous approach by failing to provide culturally relevant subject matter that resonates with the students and their families.

CHANCE is intentionally focused on delivering a comprehensive experience of student life on campus from an academic and co-curricular perspective that is tailored to the needs of the students participating in the program. Also infused within the structure of this program are opportunities for participants to hear from Latinx alumni and other college graduates about their experiences, which impacts the students by helping them see their potential futures upon attending and graduating from college. Furthermore, by providing the space for participants to engage with faculty and staff as well as each other, this program strives to develop peer/professional networks that forge positive, healthy mentorship connections focused on academic success and personal growth. In summary, the CHANCE college access program is designed to encourage Latinx students to attend college by increasing their awareness of higher education through information and experiences which demonstrate that college is well within their reach.

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