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My interest in access to higher education began at a young age growing up on a dairy farm in a small rural town 100 miles north of UC Davis. I became interested in research related to higher education as an undergraduate at UC Davis during my education minor where courses highlighted so many of my personal experiences as a first-generation college student. As shown through my research, student preparation and information quality related to accessing higher education remains limited for students from rural communities, particularly students from Hispanic/Latinx and low-income backgrounds.

My research focuses on higher education and the importance of non-academic preparation, such as information-seeking, self-efficacy, and other career development related behaviors. Right now, I am completing a formative evaluation of a multisite college outreach program serving Title I schools enrolling predominantly Latinx students across the California central coast. Recent analyses using latent profile analysis revealed three distinct profiles of students related to their higher education & financial aid preparation and information quality. For seniors graduating in 2025, one profile included 42% of students and had above average preparation and information quality. One class had slightly below average preparation and information quality (49% of students), while one class had below average preparation and information quality (8%).

Senior transitions were analyzed using latent transition analysis of student attitudes at the beginning of senior year and during a three month follow-up. The analysis revealed that a large portion (90% of students) who reported starting senior year feeling unprepared and uninformed remained under these conditions. Further, 38% of students who started as the most prepared and informed reported feeling the least prepared and informed during the follow-up survey. 57% of students participating in both surveys remained in the most prepared and informed classes throughout the first semester of their senior year.

These findings from the evaluation are important to creating more equitable outcomes in CCCs because they reflect students' non-academic preparation to pursue higher education. Understanding how changes in students' non-academic preparation for higher education can be informative to community college leaders because they can

better support students in providing appropriate and targeted information. Future analyses aim to link survey measures to administrative data to better discern which observable characteristics may predict latent profile membership and transition patterns. By linking students' experiences and administrative data, community college leaders can also identify subgroups of students based on current needs and potential outcomes.

Practitioners might think about how advanced statistical methods such as latent profile analysis might help uncover important insights from survey data. For example, knowing how informed students about financial aid eligibility requirements and application deadlines are, as well as what percentage of the student population have these needs, can help leaders make data- and equity-driven decisions. By leveraging these methods to develop subgroups of students based on observed survey measures, institutional leaders can gain direct insight into how to best support students with targeted information. Altogether, access to higher education remains a deeply personal experience that is not fully captured by traditional metrics. To better understand postsecondary success in community college and beyond, measures must incorporate authentic indicators of students' lived experiences.