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TEACHING LINGUISTICS

Learning through community-centered collaborative linguistics research at a Minority-Serving Institution

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Abstract

In light of the growing number of undergraduates from racially minoritized backgrounds at newly emergent Minority-Serving Institutions and other colleges and universities, linguists have a special responsibility to engage such students, particularly through projects that connect to students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This article describes undergraduates' learning experiences in a research collective committed to community-centered collaborative work to advance sociolinguistic justice for the Mexican Indigenous diasporic community in California. The discussion centers the voices of undergraduate team members to demonstrate the benefits of students' learning with respect to the research process, linguistics as a discipline, and understanding of self, family, and community.

1. Introduction

In response to demographic shifts in the United States, a growing number of Historically White Institutions (HWIs) have gained official recognition from the federal government and other entities as Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs), a category that includes Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), and Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander–Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs).[1] By contrast with HWIs that were recently designated MSIs on the basis of demographic changes in their enrollments, mission-based MSIs were historically established with the explicit goal of creating pathways through higher education for racialized students (Nguyen et al. 2023), over half of whom are also first-generation college students (RTI International 2023; see also Mantenuto et al. 2024).[2] Because enrollment-based

[1] This article was written before federal recognition and funding of such institutions came under threat (Mangan & Charles 2025, Weissman 2025).

[2] We use the term *racialized* (*students*) rather than available alternatives such as *students of color* or *students from the global majority* (Campbell-Stephens 2021; cf. Mantenuto et al. 2024) in order to highlight the histories of racial oppression within the United States that have resulted in structural inequities for such students, including barriers to access to higher education.

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MSIs achieved their status by happenstance rather than design, their administrators and faculty are often poorly equipped to support racialized students (Contreras et al. 2008, Jones & Kunkle 2022). In the present moment, developing teaching strategies and learning opportunities that engage such undergraduates and support their success continues to be an important task facing all US colleges and universities, whether mission-based MSIs, enrollment-based MSIs, or Predominantly White Institutions (e.g. Garcia 2019, Marx et al. 2019, Nuñez et al. 2010).

A key component of this process is participation in research, one of the high-impact practices identified by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (2023) as promoting student success (see also Lopatto 2010), especially for undergraduates from groups that have been structurally excluded from higher education. Undergraduate research experiences have been shown to be important tools not only for disciplinary learning and preparation for graduate school and academic careers, but also for advancing educational justice and creating a scholarly space of belonging within the academy (e.g. Giuliano et al. 2019, Hernandez et al. 2018, Martinez et al. 2018, Peifer 2019, Posselt & Black 2012). A variety of benefits have been found specifically for Latinx students at MSIs who engage in research (Caraballo-Cueto et al. 2023, Collins et al. 2017, Haeger et al. 2015, Martinez & Garcia 2020). Regardless of the form undergraduate research takes, whether providing assistance on faculty projects or carrying out original research of the student's own, mentoring is always a crucial element (Fox et al. 2017). In addition to direct mentoring by faculty in projects at research universities, graduate student mentors play an essential role in undergraduate research experiences (Dolan & Johnson 2010), especially those that prioritize inclusion and belonging (Franz et al. 2022); meanwhile, at predominantly undergraduate institutions, more experienced peers may serve as mentors (Detweiler-Bedell & Detweiler-Bedell 2019).

In this article, we document the educational benefits of one such undergraduate research experience, a community-centered collaborative project involving a team of student researchers from diverse linguistic, ethnoracial, and academic backgrounds, and we call for linguists to engage in similar projects both to strengthen research and to advance racial justice within our discipline. This goal has particular urgency in linguistics, where the number of racialized students and scholars remains disturbingly low (e.g. Bucholtz 2020, Rickford 1997). For example, in its most recent publicly available report, the Linguistic Society of America (2021) states that in 2020, of a total of 2,177 undergraduates who received bachelor's degrees in linguistics, 15.8% were Hispanic/Latino, 9.9% were Asian, 5.2% were Black or African American, 3.7% were American Indian or Alaska Native, and 2.8% were Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, while 58.1% were white. (The remaining percentages involved mixed or other identities.) The problems are of two main kinds: (i) given the discipline's small size, linguistics has a low profile among most racialized undergraduates, who may instead pursue an interest in language through larger adjacent fields such as communication, English, modern languages, or psychology; and (ii) the way linguistics is taught and practiced is often alienating to racialized students, due both to its hegemonic focus on an abstract, decontextualized approach to language and to its tendency either to ignore or to exoticize the languages or varieties of students' communities (Bucholtz 2020, Charity Hudley et al. 2020, 2022, Davis 2017, Leonard 2018, Meek 2011, Rickford 1997). Responding to the discipline's long history of racial exclusion and exploitation, recent efforts have aimed to reimagine linguistic pedagogy and practice in order to foster a sense of belonging for racialized students and other minoritized groups, with the goal of transforming who gets to do linguistics, how, and why (e.g. Calhoun et al. 2021, Charity Hudley, Mallinson, & Bucholtz 2024a,b, Tsikewa 2021). For such students, meaningful learning and research experiences are not those framed by a simplistic institutional understanding of 'diversity' and 'inclusion', but those that recognize their 'rightful presence' in higher education (Calabrese-Barton & Tan 2020) as well as research (Amaresh et al. 2022:111; cf. Charity Hudley 2018) and their distinctive insights due to their lived experience and positionality (Bucholtz et al. 2023).

Our pedagogical approach, community-centered collaborative research, has similarities with as well as differences from service learning, which also plays an important role in linguistics teaching (e.g. Fitzgerald 2010). Where service learning is framed around students' education in the context of community-engaged work that may not involve research, community-centered collaborative research—like similar approaches discussed by linguists, such as community-based research (Bischoff & Jany 2018)

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and community-engaged research (Charity Hudley, Mallinson, & Clemons 2024)—focuses on knowledge production, with an emphasis on the goals, leadership, and self-determination of community members throughout the research process. Community-centered collaborative research is well suited to engage undergraduates from structurally marginalized groups for several reasons. First, as research, such projects facilitate students' hands-on exploration and application of linguistic tools and concepts, thus allowing them to consolidate and extend their understanding of ideas that are often first encountered in the classroom, an opportunity that may be particularly beneficial for first-generation college students (Ishiyama 2002). Second, community-focused projects enable students to see the direct real-world impact of the work they do, thereby demonstrating that research can help effect positive social change (Zou et al. 2022). Third, collaborative research of this kind often relies on the linguistic and cultural expertise, or funds of knowledge (González et al. 2005), that undergraduate team members bring from their homes and communities, highlighting the importance of students' lived experiences in knowledge production (Diaz Solodukhin & Orphan 2022). In all these ways, community-centered collaborative research can help re-envision linguistics as a discipline that recognizes the 'rightful presence' of historically excluded students.

These issues are of great significance to the department and institution involved in the work discussed in this article. In 2015, the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) was designated both an HSI and an AANAPISI, making it the first member of the Association of American Universities to receive MSI status. In addition, an estimated 37 percent of UCSB's undergraduates are also first-generation college students. In order to support the academic and career goals of this diverse student body, the UCSB Department of Linguistics, which has a strong commitment to linguistic diversity and social justice, has developed sixteen different major and minor degree options (UCSB General Catalog 2024–25); among the most popular of these have been the Language, Culture, and Society major and the major and minor in Speech-Language Sciences and Disorders, both of which attract large numbers of racialized students. The department's faculty and graduate students also regularly involve undergraduates in their research projects, whether through the Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities program, which provides modest funding for undergraduate involvement in faculty research, or through the department's labs and other research assistance opportunities, which provide research training and experience for undergraduates who work with faculty and graduate students on their research projects. These activities provide a valuable introduction to research, preparing undergraduates to carry out their own original research through a capstone project with structured faculty mentoring and support if they choose (see also Napoli et al. 2022); students who successfully complete such a project are conferred distinction in the major upon graduation. However, most UCSB linguistics undergraduates have professional goals beyond the academy and do not aspire to conduct their own research. Participation in collaborative projects is therefore the primary way that such students gain insight into the research process as they garner hands-on experience in preparation for other career paths.

In the next section, we describe the learning context that is the focus of our discussion. We discuss our positionalities in Section 3, and we center the perspectives of the project's undergraduate team members by directly quoting their reflections on their experiences of learning through research in Section 4. In Section 5, we reflect on the challenges we faced in carrying out the project and the pitfalls that we navigated. We conclude by calling upon linguists to use the example of this project to develop similar learning opportunities at their own institutions as part of the intertwined goals of strengthening research and advancing equity and social justice within the discipline.

2. The MILPA collective as a learning context

The learning site that is the focus of this article is a research, education, and community action collective: Mexican Indigenous Languages Promotion and Advocacy (MILPA), a partnership between faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates from the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) and members of the diasporic Mexican Indigenous (henceforth Indígena) community in Santa Barbara and

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Ventura counties on the Central Coast of California, near UCSB (Hernández Martínez et al. 2021). Most Indígena team members are affiliated with a nonprofit organization, the Mixteco/Indígena Community Organizing Project (MICOP), which has collaborated with UCSB faculty and graduate students since 2015. MICOP primarily serves the Indígena community on the Central Coast with ties to La Mixteca, a region of Mexico that comprises parts of the states of Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Puebla. Community members use one or more different Tu'un Savi (Mixtec language) varieties belonging to the Otomanguean language family, which are often not mutually intelligible; among the other diasporic languages of the community are Zapotec and Otomí (both also Otomanguean) and P'urhépecha (a language isolate from the Mexican state of Michoacán). In its partnership with MICOP, MILPA's primary goal is advancing sociolinguistic justice (Bucholtz et al. 2014) for Indígena communities; its activities include the documentation of diasporic Indígena languages through a community-centered approach (Campbell et al. 2021); the promotion of Indígena language literacy through the collaborative creation of orthographies for community languages in classes and workshops (Campbell & Reyes Basurto 2023), based on earlier work on Tu'un Savi (e.g. Julián Caballero 1999); a class for Indígena youth that focuses on linguistic research and activism (Bucholtz et al. 2019); the creation of pedagogical language and literacy materials for use by community members (Salazar et al. 2021, Ventayol-Boada et al. 2024); and a sociolinguistic community survey, which is the focus of this article. (For a more detailed description of MILPA's activities, see Bax et al. 2024, Campbell & Reyes Basurto 2023, Colectivo MILPA 2024, and Hernández Martínez et al. 2021.)

The community survey was collaboratively designed by Mary, Eric, Griselda, Inî, Simon, and another MILPA collective member, Anna Bax, who at the time was a graduate student at UCSB but was not involved in the aspect of the project reported on here. The survey was conducted between 2018 and 2020, primarily by Griselda and secondarily by Inî, who are both members of the Central Coast's Na Ñuu Savi (Mixtec people) community; surveys were administered orally in Spanish and/or Tu'un Savi, with occasional English. A total of 499 surveys were administered; fifteen of these were unusable due to equipment malfunction or missing oral confirmation of the participant's informed consent at the beginning of the recording. The resulting 484 usable audio recordings, which are between fifteen and sixty minutes in length and are primarily in Spanish, contain detailed quantitative and qualitative data about community language use and attitudes as well as an elicited word list in the participant's variety.

2.1. The role of undergraduate researchers in MILPA

Undergraduate interns became involved in the survey project by responding to calls for participation that were distributed on the Department of Linguistics undergraduate email list, in Linguistics classes, and on a university-wide directory for research opportunities; in a few cases, students were personally encouraged to apply because of their background and interests. Successful applicants met one or more of the following qualifications: (i) an academic background in linguistics, (ii) knowledge of Spanish and/or a Latin American Indigenous language, (iii) a Latin American Indigenous background, and/or (iv) an interest in language and social justice issues. A total of twenty-four undergraduate research interns were recruited for this phase of the project over three years, with majors ranging from the humanities (where Linguistics is housed at UCSB) to the social sciences to the sciences. Inî, a founding member of MILPA, also participated in the research team as an undergraduate.

Graduate student members Alexia and Simon alternated responsibilities of training and supervising interns throughout the project. Between 2018 and 2021, teams of undergraduate research interns (an average of five per academic quarter), led by either Alexia or Simon, processed, coded, and carried out initial analysis of the survey data; more detailed analysis is ongoing. Interns' participation in the survey project ranged from a single quarter to up to three years. Students received course credit for their work either as an internship or as a research assistantship, depending on their preference; for linguistics majors and minors, both forms of credit counted toward their degree.

Undergraduate researchers' tasks for the survey project are represented in the work flowchart shown in Figure 1; the original flowchart used by the undergraduate researchers contained hyperlinks to project

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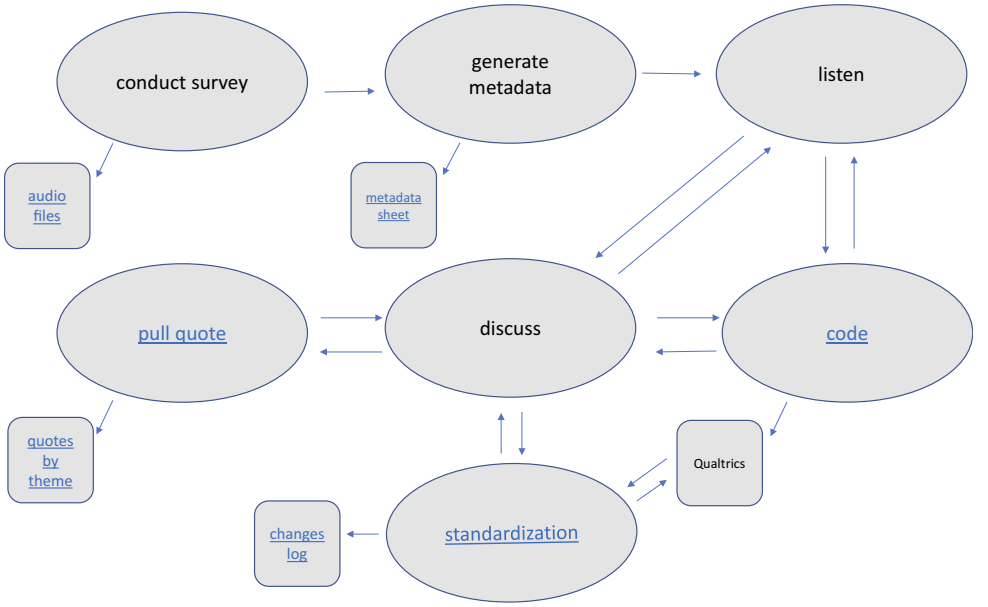


Figure 1. *Work flowchart of interns' activities in the survey project. (Image created by Alexia Fawcett.)*

materials and instructions. Interns' activities in processing both the pilot and the final versions of the survey included the following (task type labels from the figure are noted in parentheses).

- Uploading the audio file of each survey from the digital recorder's memory card and standardizing the file name (Standardization)
- Creating the metadata for each recording and tracking team progress in the reviewing and coding of recordings (Generate metadata)
- Reviewing each audio recording (Listen)
- Providing feedback on the pilot version of the survey based on the previous steps (Discuss)
- Improving survey administration by analyzing responses through the lens of the research agenda (Discuss, Standardization)
- Developing a coding scheme based on the pilot survey data using the annotation program ELAN (Discuss, Standardization)
- Coding the recordings using Qualtrics statistical software (Code)
- Reviewing the Qualtrics data entry to confirm accuracy (Discuss, Standardization)
- Identifying and transcribing noteworthy or illustrative examples of coded phenomena for discussion and preliminary analysis (Pull quote, Discuss)

Interns also created instructional videos and tutorials about these activities for the training of future team members. Although they were recruited to carry out specific tasks, interns had an understanding of the overall project goals and activities; roles often changed or expanded as the research progressed, informed by students' interests and skills as well as project needs. Training was determined by the individual intern's project role. Ethics training was provided to all interns, with an emphasis on confidentiality. Students working on data management were trained in the use of Box cloud storage and Excel, while those doing data coding and analysis were trained in ELAN and Qualtrics. Methodological training during the data analysis phase included discourse transcription, coding, thematic analysis, and citation of data excerpts. (See Appendix A for a detailed description of the project timeline and activities.)

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Throughout the project, an important part of intern training and activities was the convening of weekly team meetings to facilitate ongoing dialogue among students working on different tasks to ensure consistency and quality in the design and use of the coding scheme as well as to share information and knowledge. These meetings were not structured as formal classes, but rather as collaborative sessions in which interns both learned from and shared their expertise with other undergraduates as well as with the graduate student mentor. One of the faculty team members, Eric, also occasionally attended the meetings; however, the faculty did not want to overshadow the graduate mentors' leadership and therefore typically met separately with the graduate team members.

To evaluate this learning experience, three different methods were used to collect formal feedback from students. First, because they received course credit for their participation, all interns were asked to complete an anonymous electronic student evaluation sent by the university at the end of each academic quarter in which they were involved in the survey project. However, response rates were low, as is typical with informal courses of this kind; moreover, because the evaluations were anonymous it was impossible to tell which respondents had worked on which aspects of the project (or instead on other projects under the same faculty supervisor). This source of feedback is therefore not discussed here. The second source of feedback came about serendipitously in Spring 2021, when Alexia, Simon, and the interns working on the survey project at the time—Bethany, Katie, Teresa, and Veronica—presented a talk on their collaboration at UCSB's annual Hispanic and Lusophone Conference (Cevallos et al. 2021). Responding to the conference theme '(Re)framing knowledge: Critical approaches to scholarly literacy', the coauthors discussed the experiences and contributions of undergraduates in the project; that presentation served as the foundation for this article as well as a related publication on researcher positionality (Bucholtz et al. 2023); we also included undergraduate coauthors' comments in earlier drafts of the present article as a source of feedback. A third form of feedback was collected in Summer 2022 in order to gather additional information about interns' experiences as part of the development of this article. All previous and current interns involved in the survey project for whom we had contact information received a request from Alexia or Simon to complete an online questionnaire about their experiences (see Appendix B); this questionnaire was not anonymized because the specificity of the questions made the respondents identifiable. We received a total of eight responses out of twenty-three interns contacted. The low response rate may have been due to the fact that undergraduates typically do not check their university email accounts during the summer; moreover, when we began planning this article many interns had already graduated and no longer had access to their UCSB email accounts, our only means to contact them.

These different forms of feedback revealed that, as expected, interns gained a deeper understanding of linguistic concepts they had first encountered in the classroom while also receiving hands-on training in the research process, which they found valuable in preparation for graduate school and their chosen career paths. Students also learned about the issues facing the local diasporic Indígena community. In addition, multilingual undergraduates developed a greater appreciation of their own linguistic abilities as well as insights into issues of language maintenance and shift in their families and home communities. Creating opportunities for students to connect their classroom learning both to scholarly discovery and to their own and others' lived experience is a crucial part of building an inclusive linguistics (see also Arnold 2019, Charity Hudley 2018, Charity Hudley et al. 2008, Charity Hudley et al. 2022, Thomas 2024).

3. Our positionalities

Given the importance of positionality in research as well as in teaching and learning (Johnson-Bailey 2012), before turning to the heart of this article we provide some background about who we are, how and why each of us joined the MILPA collective, and our roles within the survey project. Some of these perspectives are integrated into the analysis that follows. In this way, we seek to respond to the call by Clemons and Lawrence (2020) to 'incorporate a variety of perspectives (i.e. research subjectivities) and

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real-life experiences (i.e. responsive methodologies) in academic research in order to redress the theoretical gaps surrounding race in linguistics, and to resist the state of affairs present in the academy'.

Mary: During this project, I was a professor of sociocultural linguistics in the Department of Linguistics at UCSB. I am a white cis woman without family ties to any Indígena community. I became involved with MILPA because of my research on language, race, and youth as well as my efforts to advance social justice in and through linguistics. I took the lead in developing the first draft of the survey and offered guidance and input throughout the process. I have a long-standing commitment to undergraduate education and mentoring, and I have collaborated with undergraduates in research projects throughout my career.

Eric: I was an assistant professor of linguistics at UCSB at the time when this research was carried out. I am a cis man with a Western European background from the US Midwest, and I have no Indígena ancestry. For over fifteen years, I have collaborated with Indígena community members in Mexico and the United States in documentary and descriptive linguistic research as well as teaching and training Indígena students. I founded MILPA in 2015 with members of MICOP. For the survey project, I contributed to the development of the survey and advised students and community members in data collection, processing, and analysis. Before this project, most of my advising of undergraduate research was with individual students; this was my first experience in collaborative research with groups of undergraduates.

Teresa: I was involved with MILPA during my third and fourth years as an undergraduate Global Studies major; I graduated from UCSB in 2021. I am a Latinx cis woman of Mexican and Ecuadorian heritage. As an intern, I coded, transcribed, and translated surveys.

Veronica: I was involved with MILPA for three of my four years at UCSB, where I double-majored in Sociology and in Language, Culture, and Society and minored in both Applied Psychology and Educational Studies. I graduated in 2021. I am a cis woman of Zapotec background, and my family immigrated from San Juan Luvina, Oaxaca, Mexico. I became part of MILPA in order to strengthen my ties to my culture and community. My work for MILPA included coding, transcribing, and translating surveys and providing checks on Qualtrics data entry.

Alexia: At the time of this research, I was a linguistics graduate student at UCSB. I am a white cis woman who was born and raised in the Northeastern United States; I do not have family ties to the Indigenous communities with whom I collaborate. I became involved with the Central Coast Indígena community by participating in Tu'un Savi literacy workshops at MICOP and taking a field methods course from Eric where I worked with a community language expert on Tù'un Na Ñuu Sá Matxí Ntxè'è (San Martín Duraznos Mixtec). I've been part of the survey project since 2018, offering feedback on multiple drafts of the survey guide and providing mentoring and supervision of the undergraduate interns. Before MILPA, I had recruited a few undergraduate research assistants to work on an unrelated language documentation project.

Bethany: I joined MILPA in my fourth year as an undergraduate at UCSB, where I majored in Psychological and Brain Sciences and minored in Linguistics with an emphasis in Speech-Hearing Sciences and Disorders; I graduated in 2021. I am a mixed (Mexican and white) cis woman. During my time as an intern, I coded, transcribed, and translated surveys, extracted relevant quotes, and identified and analyzed linguistic and cultural ideologies.

Katie: I participated in MILPA during the last three years of my undergraduate studies in Political Science at UCSB, where I graduated in 2021. I am a white cis woman without Indígena ancestry, and I grew up on the West Coast. My involvement with MILPA began after I took a linguistics class in my first year of college. As an intern, I checked the survey data for quality by reviewing the coded survey responses in Qualtrics and conferring with my colleagues on any issues that arose.

Inî: I have been involved with MILPA since it was founded, when I was a community college student at Ventura College as well as a member of MICOP. I continued my involvement after I transferred to UCSB, where I majored in linguistics so I could support my community and advance my research goals as an undergraduate student. I graduated in 2020. I am a Na Ñuu Savi cis man and a member of the Na Ñuu Savi community on California's Central Coast. As part of MILPA, I have led Tu'un Savi literacy workshops at MICOP and conducted survey interviews as well as many other activities.

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Simon: I joined MILPA as a graduate student in linguistics at UCSB. I am a white cis person who grew up in the Mountain West region of the United States; I do not have a Native or Indígena background. Since 2015, I have participated in MILPA's community literacy and documentation workshops, I have taken two year-long field methods courses with Eric, and I have co-taught a college-level linguistics class for MICOP's youth group twice. As an undergraduate in Oregon, I made friends from the Na Ñuu Savi diaspora who helped me connect my study of applied linguistics to issues of language justice in their communities. For the survey project, I helped with the initial development of the survey guide and with the coordination of survey administration. I mentored interns in data processing and management, survey coding, and transcription of word lists. Prior to this project, I had been collaborating with Inî on documentation and linguistics research since 2016. I have also provided research mentorship on two undergraduate projects in different areas of linguistics and have co-taught college-level research-based linguistics courses in a local high school.

Griselda: I have been involved with MILPA since its beginnings, including through my roles as Laboratory Assistant at UCSB and as Program Coordinator for the Maintaining Indigenous Languages project at MICOP. I am an Indigenous Mexican cis woman who is a speaker of Tu'un Savi (Mixtec). As a member of the survey team, I worked on all aspects of survey development and administration, including helping to revise the initial draft questions, carrying out the pilot testing, recruiting participants, conducting most of the survey interviews, and providing the recordings and metadata to the interns for processing. As the primary MILPA liaison to MICOP, I also provided progress reports on MILPA's activities at MICOP's monthly leadership meetings.

As these statements illustrate, the undergraduate interns were part of a larger team with varied academic, professional, and personal backgrounds, whose members each brought complementary forms of expertise to the project. This diversity of experience is intentional: a key aspect of MILPA's collaborative research model is an approach that challenges traditional academic binaries such as expert–novice (Auderset et al. 2021). For this reason, participation was not limited to undergraduates majoring in linguistics, those who planned to pursue a research career, or those who shared aspects of the linguistic, cultural, and/or immigrant background of the diasporic Na Ñuu Savi community or otherwise belonged to one of the groups for which UCSB was designated an MSI. Undergraduate team members learned about the research process directly from the graduate student mentors and indirectly from the input of the faculty and community members on the team. Through their work in MILPA, however, the interns quickly became deeply knowledgeable both about the details of data management and processing and about the content of the surveys. Combined with their funds of knowledge and the multidisciplinary training they brought to the project, these kinds of expertise strengthened the research process and findings in important ways. Moreover, as we demonstrate below, research opportunities like MILPA are beneficial to all students.

4. Learning through collaborative research

In this section, we draw on undergraduate interns' reflections on their experiences with MILPA to argue that the multidirectional teaching and learning that takes place in community-centered collaborative research is a rich context for students' academic and personal development. The research experience was also a learning experience that integrated multiple aspects of interns' lives, backgrounds, skills, interests, and goals. We consider three kinds of learning that arose through undergraduates' participation in collaborative research: learning about the research process, learning about linguistics, and learning about language use in their own lives, in their families, and/or in the Indígena community.

4.1. Learning about the research process

As noted above, most of the interns did not plan to pursue research careers, and their participation in MILPA was often their only firsthand experience with original research beyond classroom projects.

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Nevertheless, such students reported that they benefited from gaining research experience. In their reflections, some undergraduates highlighted the value of the MILPA project in preparing them for their professions. For example, Steven Shi, a Communication major who entered law school post-UCSB, highlights several aspects of his experience in MILPA that have served him well as a law student:

> **Steven Shi:** My time as [an intern] made me appreciate the time that goes in towards qualitative research. As a grad student now, it influences how I read data and data sections of reports. I also got the opportunity to more deeply appreciate language and culture. Prior to the research experience, I wasn't very familiar with Indigenous cultures. I am very glad I had this experience because during law school, I've had the opportunity to learn about such subjects. (Questionnaire response)

Other students also found it beneficial to learn about qualitative research as a way of broadening their education from what they had experienced up to that point. This was an issue that Katie, a Political Science major, discussed in the coauthored conference presentation. Notably, she focuses on her intellectual engagement while making corrections to data entry and coding of survey responses in Qualtrics, a task that could have been viewed as merely rote or tedious:

> **Katie:** Going through corrections allowed me to see the survey process through respondent and coder perspectives: Answers that I originally did not understand now make sense to me, and I really enjoyed learning how to interpret questions and responses outside of a typical logical framework. I also think I can now recognize who has coded a survey without looking at the [intern's] name because everyone has a slightly different style of coding—which I think is really interesting. (Cevallos et al. 2021)

The team structure described in Section 2 above enabled undergraduates to gain an understanding of the overall project by seeing how their own efforts simultaneously built on and provided the foundation for others' roles. Moreover, throughout this process, undergraduates were both teachers and learners in relation to their undergraduate and graduate colleagues. Some forms of teaching and learning were indirect, as interns working on a task at a later stage in the work flow gained insight into how they and others had handled a task at an earlier stage; this situation is illustrated by Katie's comment above. In other cases, this exchange of knowledge and skill took place directly, through team meetings and discussions of decision making on tasks such as coding and transcription. Below, Veronica points to a situation where collectively revisiting the original data helped the interns to make sense of seemingly contradictory coding decisions:

> **Veronica:** … one of the [survey] questions asked is about varying age groups, from the older generations to small children, and if their linguistic abilities help them and/or hurt them. There would be instances where the participant would say that being able to speak Mixtec as adults was both helpful and harmful. Helpful because it means they can communicate with the older generation, but harmful because the use of their Indigenous language in the United States hindered them from learning/improving their English/Spanish. When coded, it appears confusing as to why someone may think their linguistic abilities are both [helpful and harmful], but through hearing their explanations, we could better understand how their responses weren't an error in coding, but a multifaceted reality where a language is neither solely good or bad. (Cevallos et al. 2021)

The collaborative structure of the project thus enabled undergraduates to understand the research activities at a deeper level by providing, receiving, and incorporating direct and indirect feedback and discussion on their work on specific tasks. Furthermore, this structure positioned the interns as the teams' experts, both on the content of the survey data and on the work they were doing for the project. In this way, the undergraduate researchers came to experience themselves and one another as experts rather than as novices, their usual institutional position in the university.

Moreover, the non-undergraduate team members also recognized and respected the interns' expertise: as the researchers who spent the most time working with the audio recordings, they were the most

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equipped to answer many questions regarding the data. Undergraduates' insights about the research process led to improvements in the survey design and the processing of the data. For example, because the survey was designed to reveal demographic trends as well as complex and possibly unanticipated sociolinguistic phenomena, it included closed-answer questions that could be analyzed statistically along with open-answer questions that required qualitative analysis. But even in seemingly straightforward questions, responses to the pilot survey did not always fit neatly into the options provided. Drawing on their own lived experiences, early cohorts of interns gave feedback on the wording and order of survey questions to improve the depth of responses, calling attention to patterns in the interviewers' approach that should be adjusted to yield more informative answers to the project's larger research questions. This feedback also helped shape the building of the Qualtrics interface for use by later cohorts of interns in coding the rest of the survey data.

Likewise, later cohorts had an important influence on the coding and interpretation of data by working to develop consistent practices for how to code responses that could be interpreted in multiple ways. For instance, based on their experiences with entering information about respondent occupation into Qualtrics, interns decided to create a 'homemaker' option in the Qualtrics interface to account for respondents who reported that they were raising their children, in order to make clear that these respondents were not unemployed but rather working in the home. These insights enabled the research team to capture more fully the range and specificity of identities and experiences within the Central Coast's Indígena community. In such situations, interns' growing expertise enabled them to have a direct impact on the research process.

4.2. Learning about linguistics

In addition to learning about and contributing to the research process, undergraduate interns also gained a deeper understanding of linguistics through their work on the survey project. For students with some linguistics background, a number of the concepts that the survey explored—such as language ideologies, language brokering, and language maintenance and shift—were ideas they had first encountered in introductory courses like Language and Linguistics; Language in Society; and Language, Power, and Learning. Thus, they were able to reinforce and further develop their linguistics learning by analyzing real-world examples of these concepts. Meanwhile, for students who did not have a linguistics background, being introduced to these ideas in the context of MILPA helped them to see the relationship between linguistics and their own fields. For example, after Alexia gave the interns a brief tutorial on language ideologies in order to help them identify this phenomenon in the survey data, Teresa, a Global Studies major, was able to connect the concept to other types of ideologies often discussed in her classes.

Both linguistics majors and nonmajors found the focus on data an illuminating learning experience. Below, Antón de la Fuente, a Linguistics and Philosophy double major and English minor who entered graduate school in Linguistics after UCSB, notes that his work as an intern expanded his understanding of linguistics beyond what he had learned in the classroom. Steven Castro, another linguistics major who pursued graduate studies in the field, reports that he found the experience valuable both in developing skills he needed for his own research and in opening up an entirely new research direction for him. Similarly, Katie, whose only previous exposure to linguistics was a general education course in language, gender, and sexuality, remarks that as a nonmajor she enjoyed applying her research skills in a new field while learning more about linguistics in a hands-on way with the support of her colleagues:

> **Antón de la Fuente:** I knew nothing about the topic, or Indigenous Mexican languages. I learned a lot about the interaction between language, lived experience, and language ideologies by listening to people's differing perspectives on their language heritage. (Questionnaire response)

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> **Steven Castro:** This project taught me a lot about how to work with people but primarily what kinds of questions to ask. It really showed me how important language was to people in constructing an identity … Working on this project shifted my whole research goal from phonetics/phonology to consider more sociolinguistic questions and look at language change and documentation. (Questionnaire response)

> **Katie:** This project allowed me to merge my interests in research and data analysis while challenging me to develop my understanding of linguistics and the surrounding Indigenous communities in Ventura County. Being able to learn about the complexity of language ideologies from the survey data as well as from my [intern] peers was invaluable, and an experience I am deeply appreciative of. … Being able to participate on this project was a defining highlight of my time at UCSB. (Comments from early article draft)

Thus, regardless of their previous background in linguistics or what they aimed to do after earning their degree, students found their work within MILPA intellectually rewarding and, in some cases, even transformative.

4.3. Learning about self, family, and community

The interns' participation in linguistic research benefited them not only academically, by training them in new skills and (sub)fields and offering new scholarly knowledge, but also personally, by illuminating their own previous experiences and giving them a deeper understanding of the experiences of others. Working on the project was especially meaningful for undergraduates whose families were part of a diasporic Indígena community in the United States. Some of these students whose families were undergoing language shift took the opportunity to reclaim their family language and connect to their community. This was the case for Xenia Escalante-Lopez, a major in Linguistics with an emphasis in Speech-Language Sciences and Disorders and a minor in Applied Psychology who planned to work and then attend graduate school in speech-language pathology or audiology after graduation. Xenia is of Mixtec heritage, and thus the project was of personal significance to her:

> **Xenia Escalante-Lopez:** I wanted to learn San Juan Mixtepec Mixtec so that I could speak it with my mom, who missed having friends she could speak it with. … Before starting this project, the only issues that I had learned about these communities came from my mom or from online sources, where there still is not much information. Being able to listen to people that come from different Mixtec communities and the linguistic problems they face is something that helped me gain further insight on not only the similarities within these communities, but also their differences. The survey work has further encouraged me to learn more Mixtepec Mixtec with my family, as well as hopefully make more connections with others back in my hometown. (Questionnaire response)

Likewise, Luis Carranza, an Economics and Accounting major who took up an accounting position after graduation from UCSB, reported that as a member of the Zapotec diasporic community, learning about language shift through the project inspired him to use his family language and to encourage others to do the same:

> **Luis Carranza:** I was very interested in participating because I speak Zapoteco and I wanted to meet others who spoke an Indigenous language as well. I became more aware of how quickly my language was being lost, so I have committed to preserving it in my community. I always speak the language around people from the same community as me. They expect me to speak Spanish and even English, since I am the first to go to a university. However, as I speak the language to them, it has encouraged them to also teach it to their kids. Before, they had the misconception that if their children spoke the language they would not be able to learn English and go to college. The survey work also gave me a great sense of pride because I realized how important language was and how

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> important it is to preserve it. It's a code, a secret code that only you and your loved ones know. (Questionnaire response)

The sense of familial and cultural connection that Xenia and Luis mention was also discussed by other multilingual undergraduate researchers. Both Veronica, who is Zapotec, and Bethany, who is Mexican and white, noted that participating in the project helped them to feel connected to their family and community:

> **Veronica:** I don't have much connection with my Zapotec community in [Los Angeles] (though I know there is one there specifically from my village), but I can still see (or technically hear) my family/community in these interviews. … The research project also led me to try and be even more involved in my community and pay attention to Indigenous communities and the struggles they face. (Cevallos et al. 2021)

> **Bethany:** I loved contributing to this lab; using my bilingual skills in an academic environment was so rewarding, and I felt like I was learning and connecting with my roots by studying the Mixtec-speaking community. I would bring home conversations about Mixtec culture to my dad, who is a first-generation immigrant from Mexico City, and all of this caused a never-ending feedback loop of empowerment and passion for the work. The experience I gained from the lab I will carry forever. (Comment from early article draft)

In addition, many students found that their work as interns provided validation of their multilingualism, as Veronica and Bethany jointly discussed in the conference presentation:

> **Veronica:** Using our multilingual abilities [was a benefit]; for me I think this research has helped keep me from 'losing' my Spanish while being away from home, where I mainly speak Spanish.
>
> **Bethany:** Yes, the multilingual practice is a priceless experience from this lab! Not many labs in UCSB offer this unique type of experience; it is truly a mutually beneficial relationship. We get to transcribe and translate surveys to help Indigenous people in Ventura County, while also receiving valuable practice and perspective in our culture, language use, family life, and professional skills. (Cevallos et al. 2021)

Working on the survey data also prompted many Latinx interns to reflect on their own Spanish linguistic abilities and the language ideologies they had confronted throughout their lives. Several student coauthors of the conference presentation commented that they noticed a parallel between their own relationship to Spanish and the linguistic experiences of the survey respondents. Teresa, whose family is from Mexico and Ecuador, was struck by the linguistic insecurity about Spanish expressed by many of the Indígena survey respondents and her own linguistic insecurity about the language:

> **Teresa:** I resonated with the way in which some of the participants perceived language ideology as it relates to fluency. Some [Tu'un Savi] speakers, when asked if they speak Spanish, would say, 'No, not really', then conduct a full interview [in Spanish]. This timidness and insecurity with their language fluency is something that resonates with me in my own relationship with Spanish as a heritage speaker. (Cevallos et al. 2021)

For Bethany, a similar recognition led her to rethink her feelings of inadequacy about her Spanish language abilities:

> **Bethany:** I had always felt a sense of shame and like an outsider in not being able to speak perfect Spanish with my family growing up, but after listening to many of these speakers' interviews, I realized language is much more dynamic, and it is okay to have different levels of each language you speak. Through these surveys I learned that it is more than just your language use that binds you to your heritage, but your family, your values, your traditions, and your culture. (Cevallos et al. 2021)

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These reflections from interns indicate that the personal benefits of learning through community-centered research can have potentially far-reaching consequences for students' lives beyond their undergraduate education, particularly for those students who share some of the lived experiences of the community whose language is the focus of the research. In fact, students' positionalities and perspectives have greatly enriched the research. As we have argued elsewhere (Bucholtz et al. 2023), while 'objectivity' is often fetishized in linguistics, an 'objective', depersonalized stance toward community-based research would yield far fewer insights.

5. Challenges and next steps

In this section, we speak from the perspective of the two faculty team members, Eric and Mary, because of our role in planning and managing MILPA activities. Based on the previous discussion, we consider our experience of community-centered collaborative undergraduate research successful in many ways. At the same time, however, we recognize a number of challenges that, if addressed, could enhance the benefits of this project for racialized students. First, we did not have funding to pay the undergraduate interns. (The graduate students were funded through individual research fellowships.) Despite the lack of funding, many students, particularly those who were themselves from Latin American Indigenous backgrounds, were highly motivated to participate due to the nature of the research; nevertheless, this situation no doubt prevented some interested undergraduates from joining the project. In the current period of uncertain funding for projects of this kind, we do not foresee a clear solution to this problem, and we continue to look for ways to support MILPA's work that will create more equitable and inclusive undergraduate participation.

A second challenge concerns the lack of formal training of faculty and graduate student team members for mentoring undergraduates, which is especially important in contexts such as the one described here, in which mentors are white and most mentees are from racialized groups. Fortunately, all of the MILPA faculty and graduate student mentors in this collaboration had extensive experience as educators and mentors of UCSB's diverse undergraduate students as well as some scholarly background in racial equity issues, but formal training would help ensure that our mentoring practices are both evidence-based and as effective as possible. Anticipated next steps include building mentoring workshops and discussions into graduate training (see also Dewaele 2020, Franz et al. 2022) and departmental events and taking advantage of campus training and mentorship for faculty mentors.

Third, we both would have liked to have more regular direct interaction with the undergraduate interns. We are currently beginning to address this issue by leading separate undergraduate labs and research classes and by encouraging interested students to pursue individual or team-based MILPA-related senior capstone projects under our mentorship that advance their career and/or personal goals. The structure allows each student to create their own team of mentors and to engage with MILPA in various ways and across multiple years, including potentially as a peer mentor to newer student researchers.

Finally, because MILPA did not originally plan to study undergraduate research experiences as part of its research program, we did not anticipate the need for feedback from previous interns or the need to stay in touch with them after they left the university. For future research cohorts, we will build formative as well as summative feedback opportunities into the mentoring process, and we will administer feedback surveys and discussions as a final project activity at the end of each term, with modest incentives for participation.

These challenges notwithstanding, we are pleased that we succeeded in avoiding a number of pitfalls related to undergraduate research by following the pedagogical and scholarly commitments that emerge from and guide all our work: (1) *Research is for everybody*, (2) *Research is discovery*, and (3) *All researchers are both experts and learners in different ways and at different times.*

In line with the first commitment, we took an inclusive rather than gatekeeping approach—intentionally recruiting students of varied backgrounds, experiences, and goals, and welcoming students with training in linguistics as well as those with relevant interdisciplinary background and lived experience,

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recognizing that these complementary perspectives would strengthen the project. In addition, rather than imposing a rigid research structure that students were expected to mechanically pursue, we embraced undergraduate researchers' expertise in shaping the data analysis, guided by the graduate mentors and informed by the Indígena team members' goals for their community. In this way, we enacted the second and third commitments. Researchers at various kinds of institutions interested in undertaking their own collaborative projects may find it useful to be attuned to these commitments and alert to the challenges we faced. At the same time, however, we acknowledge that undergraduate research experiences will look different at different institutions based on factors such as public versus private, college versus university, MSI versus HWI, Global North versus Global South, and so on, and we encourage faculty at such institutions to be responsive to their local contexts and to the goals of local community and student partners—in short, to adhere to our fourth commitment, and the fundamental principle of collaboration: *Follow, don't lead* (Bucholtz et al. 2016:40).

6. Conclusion

In this article, we have argued that undergraduate involvement in linguistic research that is both collaborative and community-centered, such as that carried out by the MILPA collective, supports student learning at multiple levels. Through their participation in collaborative research, students gain knowledge from their undergraduate colleagues as well as other team members both about the research process and about the discipline of linguistics in a hands-on way that deepens the impact of this learning experience. Further, in using a community-centered lens to learn about the impacts of phenomena such as language ideologies and language shift in the lives of research participants, undergraduate researchers often gain greater perspective on their own and others' lived experiences as language users. The benefits of participation in research collaborations are especially significant for students from racialized groups. As we have discussed, such students' funds of knowledge, or linguistic and cultural expertise, are an additional source of insight that can be used to facilitate their own and others' learning as well as to strengthen the quality of the research, in addition to making the research experience meaningful on a personal level. Although we have framed our discussion in the context of UCSB, which gained MSI status a decade ago, the learning impacts we have discussed here also apply to students in other kinds of colleges and universities, and we urge other linguists to involve undergraduates in similar learning experiences at their own institutions.

While conducting independent research in linguistics is a valuable part of undergraduate education for many students, we have shown that mentored participation in collaborative research has specific benefits, such as creating opportunities for nonmajors to learn about linguistic research, providing research experience for majors who may not be able to take on the time commitment required for an individual research project, and exchanging ideas and expertise as part of a team. Our experience suggests that such experiences may be especially important for racialized undergraduates. Because such students face structural barriers that may make them less likely to major in linguistics or to pursue original research, collaborative research opportunities can help advance social justice in the discipline and in higher education more generally by recognizing the 'rightful presence' of historically excluded students in linguistics, regardless of whether they aspire to graduate school or research careers in the field.

We also note that this article is not only a contribution to the growing scholarship on teaching and learning within linguistics but is also in itself part of students' learning experiences. In contributing to this article as coauthors, the undergraduate team members participated for the first time in the process of scholarly publication from start to finish, gaining skills in professional communication genres such as conference presentations and journal articles and building their résumés in preparation for graduate school and the job market. Although many scholars, including linguists, regularly coauthor with undergraduate researchers, it is still rare to involve undergraduates in academic presentations and publications in which they reflect on and do not simply report on the results of their research experiences (but see e.g. Matthews & Rosa 2018). This practice merits widespread adoption by researchers both as a way for undergraduates

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to gain valuable professional skills and as a demonstration of students' agency and expertise regarding their own education.

Focusing on students' voices and characterizations of their experiences is likewise essential in evaluating the impact of research-based learning of the kind described in this article. We do not measure the success of undergraduates' participation in the MILPA collaboration according to how many students persist in linguistics beyond graduation, but rather according to whether students feel that the experience has benefited them and has enabled them to advance their academic, career, and/or personal goals. Given the large number of MILPA interns from non-linguistics majors, we emphasize the importance of interdisciplinary research experiences as opportunities for academic and personal growth (Roberts & Louis 2018). Many of MILPA's interns from other majors were recruited into the project when they took a general education class in linguistics. In this way, the collaboration leverages the ongoing outreach and recruitment efforts of UCSB's Department of Linguistics, which despite its small size annually educates large numbers of undergraduates from many majors and colleges across campus, many of them racialized, thanks to its development of a wide range of general education classes that strategically satisfy various degree requirements throughout the university and prioritize topics of great interest to students.

Today's undergraduates are learning about linguistics in an intellectual and sociopolitical context where equity and social justice are still-pressing and increasingly contested issues, often in institutions where student demographics are changing to reflect the racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity of the larger society. In light of the discipline's persistently poor record of engaging and supporting racialized students, as discussed at the outset of this article, linguists, especially but not only at HWIs, have a moral imperative to include such students in research that is not alienating, colonizing, or dehumanizing, that does not essentialize their identities, and that does not require that they exploit their home communities or efface their lived experience in order to participate. In short, creating new, more equitable ways of conceptualizing and doing linguistics is an obligation that we as linguists have to the communities who are the sine qua non of linguistic research and for the students who are the sine qua non of linguistic teaching.

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Appendix A: Undergraduate interns' project activities and timeline

February 2018. The first cohort of interns started work with Alexia. The team began by using ELAN to review the pilot survey recordings and devising an inductively arrived-at coding scheme based on the types and range of responses received. Anna used this scheme to create an initial Qualtrics interface for survey coding, adapting the questions to a multiple-choice format where necessary to enable later quantitative analysis. Alexia and the interns also provided the larger MILPA team with feedback on the structure and phrasing of the survey in order to elicit richer responses targeting the desired information when the original question proved ineffective.

Summer 2018. Working with Simon, the interns continued coding the pilot surveys. They provided suggestions for how to structure the Qualtrics coding interface and how to revise some pilot survey questions for the full survey.

Fall 2018. Simon recruited interns to take on specialized duties, including overseeing metadata and data management workflow and transcribing specific sections of the survey, beginning with the word lists. The intern team also began coding survey responses in Qualtrics.

Winter 2019–Spring 2019. One group of interns, supervised by Alexia, continued coding the survey responses in Qualtrics; a second group, supervised by Simon, continued transcribing the word-list data.

Fall 2019–Winter 2020. The interns, supervised by Simon, continued coding the survey responses in Qualtrics.

Spring 2020. The survey data collection was completed.

Spring 2020–Spring 2021. The interns, supervised by Alexia, completed the coding of the Spanish-medium surveys and began initial analysis. The Spring 2021 intern cohort, together with Alexia and Simon, developed, coauthored, and copresented the conference presentation that this article is based on.

Appendix B: MILPA Community Language Survey: RA experience questionnaire

1. *How did you find out about this research project? And why were you interested in participating?* [open-ended]
2. *In what way were you involved in the survey?*

   Listening to survey audio
   Coding survey responses in ELAN
   Coding survey responses in Qualtrics
   Maintaining metadata
   Standardizing responses in Qualtrics
   Pulling and transcribing quotes
   Transcribing word lists
   Other

3. *What did you gain and/or learn from working on the survey data?* [open-ended]
4. *How has the survey work influenced your current situation/future goals, both professional and personal?* [open-ended]
5. *Are/were you a transfer student?* [yes/no]
5. *During what years of your time at UCSB did you participate in this survey work?*

   First/Freshman
   Second/Sophomore
   Third/Junior (including transfer students)
   Fourth/Senior (including transfer students)

7. *Check all quarters you were an RA* [research assistant].

   [List of all academic terms in which survey was active]

8. *What were your major(s) and/or minor(s) at UCSB?* [open-ended]
9. *Choose all ethnoracial labels below that you would use to describe yourself (adding others if necessary).*

   Mixtec/x/que/o/a
   Zapotec/x/que/o/a

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Latinx/Latine/Latino/Latina
Indigenous/Indígena
Mexican American
Mexican
American
white
Black
Hispanic
Asian American
Other

10. *What is your gender identity?*

Non-binary
Man
Woman
Other

11. *We hope to include reflections from some of you in your own words in this article. If we would like to include a quote from your writing above, would you like us to attribute it to you? No matter what you choose here, you will be able to review how it is incorporated into the article and let us know if you'd rather change your choice here. You'll also have a chance to edit your comments or withdraw them from the article.*

You can quote any of my comments above, with my name.
You can quote any of my comments above, without my name.
Please don't quote any of my comments above.

12. *Please enter your name as you'd like it to appear in the Acknowledgments or with any quoted material (please note this can include special characters and diacritics).* [open-ended]

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