

**RQ1: In what ways are community college students making decisions about their academic majors and/or potential careers?**

- **In what ways are students' intersecting identities relevant to their academic majors/ careers decision-making process?**
- **What is the role of family, friends, and institutional agents (primarily faculty) in this process?**

## **Iliana Hernandez**

Iliana Hernandez is a second-generation Mexican American student, in her second semester at PCC. Iliana is currently pursuing a degree as Assistant Speech Language Pathologist with the aims of transferring and eventually completing a graduate degree. Iliana owes much of the success she has had at PCC to the guidance and support of her family. Her brother, mom, and dad have been very instrumental to her navigating college, in particular what classes she should take, and how to receive priority registration. Iliana continues to explore/consider potential career options besides becoming a speech language pathologist. She envisions potentially pursuing law or even politics after PCC.

Iliana describes being a Mexican woman as a very big aspect of her identity and acknowledges that her ethnic and gender identity might negatively impact her career one day. Iliana says **"I think me being a Mexican and me being a woman are very important to me only because they are considered the majority-minority, so at times it does feel like, I want to say an uphill battle but also I have grown up around a lot of Mexicans, so it wasn't like I was a different person. It's just that in the grand scheme of things, it will affect my professional career, I think maybe, possibly."** In spite of any potential discrimination that Iliana might face when becoming a professional, Maria has been inspired by her own mother's educational and occupational journey and plans to follow in her footsteps. When I asked Maria to talk about someone whose career she admired, Maria said **"my mother. I admired her patience and her drive for helping others...So growing up, at the elementary school that she worked at, she would help do Dr. Seuss Day in which the kids would make slime and they would read books on Dr. Seuss. They would bring in the guest reader and have them read aloud to children, and I saw her putting in the effort for these kids where in... I was younger, I was like oh, she's my mother but she's helping all these other kids. Yeah"**.

Iliana chose to attend PCC because her brother was already a student at this institution. Iliana cites learning from her brother's experience to learn what not to do. Iliana explains **"I have a brother who's one year older than me, and that's really helped me in college because I learn from all of his mistakes... Coming into community college, I did not know how the classes worked. I didn't know about priority registration with the Pathways program. So when he joined and he did not get priority registration, then I learned what to do and what not to do for it. As well as taking classes that, I did not know how the number system worked where if the class is over 100, for example Math 103, it's not counted for college credit for universities to transfer to. And he ended up taking a class that did not count for his transfer, so I learned from that mistake as well."**

It is important to note that, Iliana has worked to avoid all of the pitfalls her brother made with little assistance from the institution. Iliana has met with advisors, coaches, but she says conversations have been largely very narrow and short. Iliana explains, **“I've been looking at the transfer courses that I need for San Diego State as well as the curriculum that I need for the AA, and I've been seeing which ones match and I've been doing those classes first...[but not met with a counselor] You have to get here as soon as they open, but they already have a line kind of wrapped around the building. So there's very limited availability for counseling appointments”**. In terms of her relationship with her pathways coach, Iliana has had brief conversations about her major but wishes she could have received more concrete help. Iliana says **“I think she offered her support, but I think it would have been better if it had more technical or yes, that's a good major for you, you should look into this and this and that and make sure you enjoy that.”** When I asked Iliana to specify what she meant by technical support she said **“Classes and courses that I need to transfer, as well as how long it's actually going to take me to obtain my associate's degree here in this program. Just more information on the program.”**

Iliana is excited to continue to take classes and see where her studies take her. Iliana says **“I think PCC has a lot of opportunities to explore a major only because it offers so many classes. So for example, if I was interested in music, I'm already taking a music class to see if I would be interested in that. It also helps because I look at my teachers and see oh, for example, Mr. Allison, he pursued speech or he went this way and then he's doing all this stuff and it's very interesting to see what their focuses are.”** Besides being a speech language pathologist and lawyer, Iliana could see herself becoming a community college counselor. Iliana says **“ I think that I would like to be a counselor at a community college if I stayed in the community college system as a professional because I feel like I have learned a lot through my one year of trying to map out my courses, and I think helping other students kind of take the responsibility into their hands instead of just relying on a counselor as a counselor would be helpful.”**