As Latin@ instructors in rhetoric and composition, it is important for the two of us to share our experiences with language and education in order to disrupt some of the dominant narratives about language and language practices. This disruption is important because it allows for an alternative rhetoric that informs a dominant group about a marginalized group, and gives the marginalized group a voice. It is our hope that this is beneficial for students and instructors to (\_\_\_\_\_\_\_)

for Latin@ students to know that there are instructors in higher education that they might be able to relate to.

**Jennifer:**

Attending a four-year university was not presented as an option to me when I was a child. There were no discussions about if I would go to college. There were only expectations. I was told from a young age that after high school I would attend a university and earn my BA. My parents attended college, but never graduated. They were insistent upon their children graduating because they recognized that career advancement would be difficult without a degree, and I often heard that their legacy would be the success of their children. Success was to be measured by education and financial security. This was, of course, not something I understood fully at a young age, but it was as present in my life as the sunshine of Southern California. During my senior year of high school I applied to many schools, but one visit to The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio and I knew where I would be spending my undergraduate years. However, earning acceptance to OSU, and learning to adjust and transition to living in the Midwest were two completely different battles. OSU is one of the largest universities in the country. It boasts close to 50, 000 students on the main campus. That’s about 44,000 undergraduates and roughly 13,000 graduate students. Flyers and recruitment videos mention the academic programs, the campus lifestyle, and the university’s commitment to diversity.

During my time at OSU the university did what they could to fulfill this promise building a more diverse experience for its students. I was encouraged by the talk of diversity. Arriving in the Midwest from the cultural melting pot that is Los Angele led to my feeling out of place. For the first time in my life I truly felt like a minority, and I was hopeful that I would meet people like me when I attended programs put on by the office of First Year Experience (FYE). The programs and events sponsored by FYE geared towards helping students’ transition successfully from high school to college. During my freshman year FYE brought authors to campus, and held lectures at night that addressed such topics as time-management, study skills, and various other programs aimed at helping students. There was a short summer reading list passed out during orientation, and some of these programs revolved around the short summer reading list given to incoming freshman.

One of the books on the summer reading list was Julia Alvarez’s “In the Time of the Butterflies.” I eagerly read it, and looked forward to her visit to the university. I genuinely hoped that discussing her book in class would make me feel at home in a place so different from where I was born and raised. Unfortunately, this book was never discussed in any of my composition class. I was able to attend a talk and book signing with Julia Alvarez, but there weren’t any other programs put on that year that were obviously catered to the Latino student population. This could be due to the fact that on average, from 2002 to 2014, 2.5 to 2.9% (“Highlights”) overall undergraduate population are Latino students. Also during this time there was an attempt to recruit students so that the student body would be more diverse, and there are numerous student groups that receive support from the university. The Alpha chapter of Alpha Psi Lambda, the nation’s first co-ed Latino fraternity, often co-hosts events with the university, so the support is there for the students, but in my experience the talk of diversity only includes programs that bring minority authors, scholars, and activists to campus. The trouble with some of the diversity initiatives and diversity programming during this time stems from the fact that they don’t address language. Outside of a Spanish language class, the issue of bilingualism, or multilingualism does not come up. The programs that FYE hosted focused on helping students succeed at OSU, but these programs never veered outside the world pushing students to develop good study habits, and making positive lifestyle choices. The percentage of international students, and Latino students suggest that these discussions should take place, and that many of the students enrolled at OSU possess language practices that aren’t often recognized as valuable in Standard Edited American English (SEAE).

Despite the focus of FYE programs on students making a successful transition from high school to college, I was able to adapt to life in Ohio quickly thanks to their programs despite the extreme culture shock I experienced moving from Los Angeles to Columbus, Ohio. However, what I learned early on was that my peers expectations of me were based on what they saw in mainstream media. When they would ask to practice their Spanish with me I couldn’t help them. When my classmates were surprised at how well I spoke English, or about the quality of my papers I understood that the common narrative of Latino students was that we struggle with language. This was embarrassing to me, because I felt as though I had to fulfill specific expectations they had of me. I had to explain that I only knew how to speak, read, and wrote in English.

That dominant image of Latino students struggling with the English language was troubling to me for numerous reasons. At the time I didn’t understand how my peers that were required to attend FYE events focused on diversity could not shake their preconceived notions of the struggles of bilingual students. The idea that bilingual students struggle with writing and oral communication will hinder us at the university level unless we find ways to demonstrate the value and advantages of bilingual speakers in the composition classroom. I believe that discussing the book from the summer reading that contained short passages and words in Spanish could have provided an opportunity to discuss how language played out in the novel. Did its presence add or take anything away from the narrative? Perhaps then my classmates and I would have discussed language, and what, if any, advantages there were to being bilingual or multilingual. Simply addressing it might have clued in some of my peers as to why it would be offensive to me for them to assume I would struggle with writing.

My experiences at OSU, and with the FYE programs demonstrated the lack of discussion, or inclusion, of language practices outside of SEAE. If FYE, or similar programs at other universities, could incorporate some of these ideas into their programming, then perhaps there could be a shift in the ways in which the next generation of scholars, and professionals that graduate from OSU, or other universities will be part of the dismantling of these standard language ideologies.