



**Title of Project:**

Hard to Place: Multilingual Immigrant  
Youth in Community Colleges

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**Abstract:**

In community colleges, high-stakes assessments open or close the door to higher education, yet placement into ESL, remedial or credit-bearing English relies primarily on standardized tests that may not be valid for multilingual, immigrant-origin youth (Llosa & Bunch, 2011). Students' perceptions of their proficiencies has been shown to be an important factor in engagement; for example, research suggests that students who do not identify as ESL may experience discomfort when placed in stigmatized ESL spaces (Marshall, 2010). Additionally, students may feel frustrated if test results do not align with class performance (Mott-Smith, 2009) or resist interventions that are not perceived as necessary (Conway, 2009; Nora & García, 2001). Yet most research assumes the correctness of placements without systematically examining students' perceptions, the institutional tests that ascribe readiness and English nativity, and experiences in community college courses as part of a dynamic process. Using frameworks of critical language testing (McNanamara, 2006; Shohamy, 1998) and dynamic bilingualism (García, 2009), I propose to explore how (mis)placement is constructed and how the students' experiences of testing and placement practices intersect with their bilingual proficiencies and identities. Since this study does not assume ESL status, I created a measure of students' perceptions of their bilingual proficiencies as well as their identification with their home language and the 'ESL' label. Cluster analysis will reveal if and how students group along these measures. Qualitative interviews will explore immigrant-origin students' experiences of and responses to testing and placement. Investigating testing and placement is crucial for understanding the academic pathways of immigrant youth and has important implications for equity and integration in globalized spaces.