Being a first-generation college student can be challenging, however the diversity of the campus and the programs offered have helped current latino students.

Michelle Machuca, Leslie Velez and Ricardo Pinon-Garcia described their experience being latino students at highline as well as being members of Highline’s club, L@che, for last week’s Honors Colloquy.

L@che’s purpose is to offer students a place to have fun, make friends, learn about culture and heritage, as well as gain leadership skills.

“It feels great to be a first generation college student and be a model for your siblings,” Velez said.

“I want to admire the privilege I have to be here,” Pinon-Garcia said.”It’s a blessing, but it’s difficult at the same time.”

Machuca originally did not want to go to college and said her first quarter here, she did not work to pass her classes. After taking a quarter off, she is back and ready to work.

“Whenever I get a lack of motivation, I think of my siblings. I think of 10 years from now, do I still want [us] to be struggling?” Machuca asked.

Stereotypes have played a part in the college experience for these three students.

“People already have this idea of you before you even say anything,” said Velez. “We’re proving them wrong by being in college.”

“As a male, a lot of people see me as in a gang or doing drugs,” Pinon-Garcia said. “[But] I am so proud of my heritage and what I represent.”

“We just need to see we are all the same. Anyone can get pregnant. Anyone can graduate,” Machuca said. “None of us deserve to be categorized.”

Machuca, Velez, and Pinon-Garcia all said their parents were supportive of their efforts in college.

However, it is difficult being a first-generation student because they do not have direct mentors, Pinon-Garcia said. Parents who have not attended college don't understand how hard it is and do not know how to help with things such as financial aid or FAFSA.

“I come to school for me. I've seen my parents struggling and I don't want to be in their same position,” Velez said. “[They are] working hard for us so we can get a better education and have a good life.”

Other obstacles for these students are home life and how it affects their schooling. The time they are taking for school is less time they can work or help the family, Pinon-Garcia said.

“What’s helped me is making college a comfortable place to go,” Pinon-Garcia said. “I feel really empowered being a part of L@che.”

“It’s hard, but you can do it. It’s not impossible,” Velez said. “What has helped me is having a group of friends that are trying to do the same thing as you.”

“L@che is for everyone to come in and be a family,” Machuca said.

“It is important to have space,” Velez said. “L@che is there for you.”

One does not need to be a part of the Latino community to be a part of the L@che club, they said. Anyone is welcome in the club and they said they would love more members.

For more information on L@che, visit their Facebook, L@che Gathering, or add them on Snapchat, Lache1102.

Honors Colloquy is open to the public and held weekly. It is based on Honors in Action and is a class students can get credit for. Each week a new speaker comes, speaking with the general theme of a contemporary world issues.

The next Honors Colloquy will be May 25 at 12:15 to 1:20 p.m. in Building 10, room 103. Highline alumn and software engineer at Google, Joseph Burnett, will speak on cloud computing.