There are few instances on campus when you can say that a faculty member is *familia*. Especially within a research community that is predominantly white, privileged, and male. However, Dr. Enrique Lopez has proven to be more than a mentor, he is a friend and truly *familia*. Dr. Lopez introduced us to Participatory Action Research (PAR), which is meaningful to us as burgeoning natural and social scientists. PAR stands out as a research methodology that enables public intellectuals (e.g., young people, community members) whose knowledges and agency are often excluded in scholarship to participate in research and action that directly affects their communities. It was important for us to learn of scholarly efforts that include people who tend to have little voice or influence as participants, as opposed to non-agentic subjects from someone who is present in academia. From our initial meetings, he appreciated and valued our experiences and epistemologies as a point of departure for our research, professional, and personal development.

Dr. Lopez as faculty advisor went beyond his call of duty and provided us with mentorship through trainings, evaluation, feedback, professional development, and ongoing support. This in turn made significant impacts in our learning and development. Throughout our months working together, Dr. Lopez always kept our interests in mind and allowed us to incorporate our ideas in the development and purpose of our research. We also had the agency to dictate the direction of our research while simultaneously receiving training from Dr. Lopez that allowed us to understand frameworks of research, such as PAR, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), Qualtrics, and methods of data interpretation.

On a weekly basis, Dr. Lopez provided us with feedback and evaluation to realign our thoughts, questions, and research. More importantly, he would provide feedback that would push us to critique and problematize our approaches to research. This demanded that we explore and engage forms of research that spoke to our identities and the identities of our subjects. An excellent example of this was our decision to stray away from conducting interviews toward incorporating *platicas*, a means of acquiring knowledge in a space that deconstructs traditional approaches of research and that values subjective experiences.

As fourth and fifth year seniors, Dr. Lopez acknowledged the importance of developing our academic careers by incorporating professional development. The Diversity and Inclusion Summit, hosted by ODECE, served as a professional setting to develop our skills as researchers, speakers, and community members interested in advancing the dialogue around Latin@ students in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM), at CU Boulder. Specifically, we have learned that in order to address STEM education, it is necessary to think about systems of power and privilege that contribute to the academic, social, and emotional well-being of Latin@ students. After working with Dr. Lopez for a full year, we can undoubtedly say that he has prepared us to critically engage in the STEM community with confidence.
While we were new to research, Dr. Lopez never saw this as a deficiency, but rather as an opportunity to grow and learn. He supported us every step of the way by encouraging us to have confidence in our skills and our ideas. Aside from our research he made sure to create a space within our team where we felt comfortable enough to ask questions and have open dialogue with him about our struggles on campus and in our personal life.

Dr. Lopez provided us with academic materials that allowed us to further our knowledge on research frameworks. At the same time, he fostered and allowed for space to critique and problematize these frameworks. By problematizing these traditional, hegemonic approaches to STEM research and fieldwork, Dr. Lopez allowed us to use our experiences as first generation and women of color to recreate the ways in which we associate with STEM. In experiencing all of this, Dr. Lopez encouraged us to pursue graduate school, a necessity to further advance our communities. With the knowledge we’ve gained in our research and in having Dr. Lopez as a mentor, we hope we can have the same impact on others by creating a sense of familia that is vital to the retention and persistence of students of color on this campus.