Answering the Call: Hispanic-Serving Institutions as Leaders in the Quest for Access, Excellence, and Equity in American Higher Education

Guest Editors
Tracy Arámbula Ballysingh
University of Vermont
Caroline S. Turner
California State University, Sacramento
Desiree D. Zerquera
University of San Francisco
Victor B. Sáenz
The University of Texas at Austin

Editors
Patricia Sánchez
The University of Texas at San Antonio
Antonio J. Camacho
AMAE, Inc.

Associate Editors
Julie L. Figueroa
Sacramento State
Lucila D. Ek
The University of Texas at San Antonio
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Victor B. Sáenz, The University of Texas at Austin

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Editors’ Message

The 2017 invited issue, “Answering the Call: Hispanic-Serving Institutions as Leaders in the Quest for Access, Excellence, and Equity in American Higher Education,” was a true labor of love. The issue is nearly 300 pages long! The four co-guest editors, Drs. Tracy Arámbula Ballysingh, Desiree D. Zerquera, Caroline S. Turner, and Victor B. Sáenz, did an amazing job in assembling the 10 research articles and concluding essay as well as writing the detailed introduction to this groundbreaking volume. Scholars in the field of higher education will recognize prominent researchers and up-and-coming scholars in this special collection. The invited issue focuses on Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs)—from their faculty to their organizational structure to issues of access and equity.

The AMAE Journal is particularly proud of this invited issue as it addresses a critical aspect of the Latinx student educational pipeline that has burgeoned in the last two decades. Between 1994 and 2016, HSI’s have more than doubled, from 189 institutions to 472. In fact, in the United States, HSI’s enroll 62% of the Latinx population. Thus, the scholarship presented in this volume is timely and of tremendous utility.

We hope you are drawn to this invited issue as much as we were! And thank you for your readership.

Juntos logramos más,

Patricia Sánchez, AMAE Journal Co-Editor
Antonio J. Camacho, AMAE Journal Co-Editor
Answering the Call: Hispanic-Serving Institutions as Leaders in the Quest for Access, Excellence, and Equity in American Higher Education

Tracy Arámbula Ballysingh
University of Vermont
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California State University, Sacramento
Victor B. Sáenz
The University of Texas at Austin

Answering the Call

The body of scholarship focused upon Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) is steadily growing and advancing with key paradigmatic shifts supported by organizational theory (Garcia, 2017; Núñez, Crisp, & Elizondo, 2016). However, important gaps remain to be filled to achieve a more complete and nuanced understanding of the increasingly critical role HSIs provide in the American higher education landscape. While college admissions processes, matriculation, and completion remain socioeconomically stratified and class divisions in the U.S. become increasingly entrenched (Reeves, 2017), HSIs serve as key access points for a large number of low-income, first-generation Latinxs and other students of color. This reality underscores the need for continued study of these institutions as potential opportunity engines for a growing number of Americans. This special issue of the Association of Mexican American Educators (AMAE) Journal titled “Answering the Call: Hispanic-Serving Institutions as Leaders in the Quest for Access, Excellence, and Equity in American Higher Education” seeks to meet this need.

Although they are in a state of identity development as a diverse institutional cohort, HSIs offer great promise to ameliorate a variety of inequality measures vis-à-vis the successful cultivation of human capital for a growing segment of the American population. Demographic shifts in the U.S. portend a majority Latinx population in coming decades, thus necessitating changes to better meet the needs of increasingly diverse Latinx student bodies. Furthermore, as a growing number of two- and four-year institutions obtain the federal HSI designation, we
must consider whether these entities are provided and follow exemplary models of leadership through existing HSIs policies, practices, and theoretical premises. We must look to thought leaders who are expanding the way we frame discourse surrounding HSIs and to current institutional designates that are consciously evolving to meet the needs of their students in increasingly diverse contexts. Finally, we must critique existing practices that do not promote the excellence and cultural awareness our students deserve.

While it is important to recognize and honor the unique characteristics of individual institutions within this framework and more clearly defined typologies (Núñez et al., 2016), it is also essential to consider the shared challenges, pressures, and needs of HSIs as a collective body. Some common challenges include: limited resources for which institutions must increasingly compete, student affairs and leadership practices that have an impact on student retention and success, balancing the need for legitimacy, status, and prestige with the practical realities associated with serving the least privileged students of the college-going population, satisfying standard performance metrics in conjunction with understanding the holistic impact the college experience has on students as individuals (Núñez, Hurtado, & Galdeano, 2015), and engaging in misguided efforts to embrace missions that do not historically center the “racial and cultural ways of knowing of Raza students” (Garcia, 2017, p. 2). Through the diverse collection of manuscripts featured in this special issue, the co-editors encourage the reader to remain cognizant of the collective experiences of HSIs while striving to understand the complex dimensions of their organizational contexts that are most often functioning within the shadow of missions and histories rooted in a “coloniality of power” (Garcia, 2017, p. 2).

This volume seeks to provide insights from research and practice that advance our understanding of the significant promise HSIs offer or still must achieve if they are to lead the charge of upholding and redefining access, equity, and excellence in higher education in light of demographic shifts, persistent economic stratification, and misguided missions. The following introductory chapter begins with a discussion regarding how the co-editors of this volume made intentional choices surrounding language use, and what this says about the current state of our community. This is followed by a brief overview of the status and role of HSIs in higher education today. We then offer a short summary of each manuscript in this volume and highlight how they contribute to our larger focus on advancing research, policy, and practice to understand and support the work of HSIs with regards to access, equity, and excellence in
Answering the Call for Inclusiveness via Language: Editorial Choice to Employ *Latinx*

Throughout this issue, individual authors have made their own intentional decisions regarding how to employ terminology to describe and capture the diaspora of the Latinx community in the U.S. As co-editors, we chose to employ the term *Latinx* in our framing as a deliberate effort to be inclusive and considerate of the intersectional elements of diversity that comprise our community. This reflects what Zerquera, Haywood, and De Mucha Flores (in press) argue; that in defining an individual and group identity of Latinxs, a sociological rather than heritage-based definition should be employed. In doing so, the focus turns from the ethnic and cultural origins of Latinx identification, and instead centers within the social construction of racial and ethnic identity (Zerquera, Haywood, & De Mucha Flores, in press). This emphasis on the social construction of identity is an important framework that guides the work of this volume, and it draws from historical and sociological perspectives regarding how Latinxs are positioned within the U.S. and the U.S. system of higher education.

Latinx groups in the U.S. advocated for a unifying term to leverage collective political power during the civil rights movement (Acuña, 2014; Mora, 2014; Omi & Winant, 1994). The term *Hispanic* emerged within this context and was embraced as an alternative to others such as *Spanish-speaking* and *Spanish-origin*, which were being advanced by the Johnson administration (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011). *Latino*, and relatedly *Latina/o*, emerged more so from a need for interconnection within the Latinx community between those of varying ethnic subgroups embattled in conflict in Chicago and other major U.S. cities (Padilla, 1984, 1985). Both *Latina/o* and similarly *Latin@* have been used as derivations of *Latino* as efforts to be more gender inclusive and to reflect the implied masculine generalizability of the Spanish language. Thus, while *Hispanic* was a governmental term imposed upon the community and *Latino* emerged from political activism, both reflect collective efforts toward achieving solidarity within the broadly defined and diverse Latinx community (Caminero-Santangelo, 2007). Today, the terms imply different meanings for different people, with *Latino* being more widely used within the western geographical region of the U.S. and *Hispanic* being more widely used in the southwest and eastern regions (Office of Management and Budget, 1997).
This context provides an important and often presumptive rationale for how we use terminology and the impact of the words we employ. Latinx was an intentional choice made by the co-editors of this special issue and Latinx-identified scholars of higher education in an effort to more broadly encompass and reflect the demands of our current socio-political context. Although Latinx emerged in the early 2000s within queer activist spaces, it has more recently appeared within higher education (Salinas & Lozano, 2017). The term was introduced as an effort to encompass the fluidity of gender identity and to help move our community forward by providing space—even as a modest beginning through language—in which trans* and gender non-conforming Latinxs might identify (Pastrana, Battle, & Harris, 2017; Reichard, 2015). The use of an x instead of an o or an a can be used to connote a feminine or masculine identification without privileging one over the other. Furthermore, it is inclusive of people whose gender expression exists outside the gender binary of wo/man. Despite these intentions, employment of the term Latinx met criticism for its failure to address and for perpetuating key issues of racism, ethnocentrism, homophobia, and transphobia (Alamo, 2015; Marín González, 2017). Further, as Salinas and Lozano (2017) argue, “using the term Latinx does not necessarily create inclusivity to all communities of people, as many people still have not seen or heard, agree with, or understand the term Latinx” (p. 11). Regardless, its undeniable emergence has prompted critical reflection regarding the language scholars and practitioners use to refer to our comunidad and what the power of language to shape its direction.

Given that racial and ethnic identities are socially constructed and variable for different individuals and communities rather than fixed (Haney Lopez, 1994; Torres et al., 2012; Z. Valdez, 2013), it is our responsibility as scholars to listen to the diverse needs of our Latinx community and to advance the conversation. As we do, it is also important that we adjust our framing and language to more fully answer the call for access, excellence, and equity. As captured by Mijente website cofounder Marisa Franco in an interview with Latina Magazine, “[w]e can no longer afford to exile whole parts of our community and whole parts of ourselves” (as quoted in Reichard, 2015). Nonetheless, while the choices we make about language are our own, greater awareness regarding how these choices promote or impede inclusivity within and with respect to our communities is needed. Thus, our intentional use of the term Latinx was one that we felt was necessary to promote a justice-orientation towards the work and future direction of HSIs.
Inter-Generational Mentorship and Trans-Functional Collaboration in the Special Issue

Research on diverse students and faculty in academe invariably identifies mentoring as critical to their persistence and advancement (Turner & González, 2014; Turner, González, & Wood, 2008). Definitions of mentorship vary in concept and practice due to its complex and highly individualized nature. Blackwell (1989) defines mentorship as a process in which a person of superior rank, achievement, and prestige counsels, instructs, and guides the intellectual development of his or her mentee(s). This process can also guide the protégé’s social and career development. In essence, the mentorship relationship is one that is built upon trust and can result in lifelong, bidirectional benefits for both the mentor and the protégé. Delving into the nuances of the mentoring relationship, researchers conclude that “mentoring is not simply to teach the system, but also to change the system so that it becomes more flexible and responsive to the needs and pathways of its members—mentors and protégés” (Bernstein, Jacobson, & Russo, 2010, p. 58). Mentors can be peers as well as those holding higher positions in academe.

This special issue reflects our belief as co-editors in the importance of mentorship across generations and academic ranks. Our composition as co-editors represents collaboration between junior and senior faculty and we embraced the goal of providing opportunities for junior faculty to publish but also of encouraging senior faculty authors to collaborate across ranks. The articles included here reflect a commitment to the goal of mentorship that spans generations, student/faculty ranks, and academic/practitioner perspectives and experiences. For example, the Turner et al. contribution included co-authors who are full professors as well as sitting academic administrators within postsecondary Hispanic-Serving Institutions. Doran and Medina and Zerquera et al. represent collaboration between junior faculty and a graduate student, Cuellar et al. embodies collaboration between a junior faculty member and both doctoral and master’s level students, and Ponjuan et al. demonstrates senior faculty collaboration with graduate students.

As co-editors of this special issue, we intentionally strived to provide scholarly experiences that are critical to the development of all minoritized groups, including Latinxxs, to apply for and to attain faculty positions, and to advance in the faculty ranks toward full
professor and ultimately toward academic administrative positions. This is a critical issue, as Latinxs remain grossly underrepresented among the faculty and administrative ranks in higher education. For example, *Higher Education Alamanc* data (2016) show that among all full-time faculty in 4-year colleges, 74.9% are White. In contrast, the percentages for faculty of color are as follows: Asian (9.9 percent), Black (5 percent), Latinx (3.7 percent), Multiethnic (0.6 percent), Native American (0.4 percent), and Pacific Islander (0.1 percent). Beyond this, a small percentage of faculty are “unknown” (2.3 percent) and non-resident alien [sic] (3.2 percent). Recent data indicate that the portion of Latinx presidents stayed roughly steady—rising to 3.9 percent in 2016 from 3.8 percent in 2011 (Seltzer, 2017). Furthermore, it was also reported that fewer Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) were led by presidents from underrepresented groups in 2016, decreasing from 53% in 2011 to approximately 36% in 2016. With these data in mind, we assigned great import upon the value of support via mentorship. Thusly, as co-editors we present the work of knowledgeable and productive scholars who represent a spectrum of voices inclusive of graduate students, junior and senior professors, and HSI administrators who are conducting research on the increasingly critical role HSIs serve in American higher education.

**The Present and Future Relevance of HSIs**

For a great number of Latinx students, the pathway to higher education begins through an HSI. The U.S. Department of Education defines Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) as those serving large numbers of first-generation, low-income Hispanic students, i.e., a minimum of 25% total enrollment and a minimum of one-half of all students must qualify for need-based financial aid (Brennan & Lumina Foundation for Education, 2011). Initially, the significance of the federal designation was that it enabled eligible institutions to apply for federal monies under Title III in 1992 (P. Valdez, 2013). Just six years later, in 1998, and due to the rapid and projected growth of HSIs, Congress added Title V to the Higher Education Act of 1965 for the specific purpose of funding HSIs (Valdez, P., 2013). So why is the HSI designation important now and why will it remain such well into the future?

To begin, current trends in HSI data tell part of the story: there are over 370 HSIs, and they enroll more than half of all Latinx students enrolled in higher education; approximately one-half of HSIs (48%) are community colleges (178), and 4 percent (15) are private not-for-
profit two-year institutions (Santiago, Calderon Galdeano, & Taylor, 2015). Nearly half of all HSIs are located in Texas and California, and most of these are community colleges (Perrakis & Hagedorn, 2010). Currently, more than half of community colleges across the United States qualify as HSIs, yet most of these institutions do not engage their qualifying status for federal funding to directly contribute to Latinx student success (Nora & Crisp, 2009). Student enrollment and demographic trends suggest the number of HSIs will only increase in the future. Similarly, forecasts suggest that Latinx students will be disproportionately enrolled in them. Thus, HSIs as an institutional sector of higher education represent an essential conduit for Latinx college student success, and one that must be increasingly examined and understood. Herein lies the purpose of this special issue.

P. Valdez (2013) urges scholars to critically consider the past, present, and future trends of the HSI designation, but to likewise attempt to understand the contentious political strategies proponents of Hispanic higher education were required to employ to codify this into federal statute. If we as scholars of HSIs better understand the contentious past regarding how this designation came to exist, we will be more effectively position to understand its future. The HSI designation was codified into statute over twenty-five years ago, therefore the time for scholars to consider the significance and relevance of an arbitrary 25% threshold is overdue. At the very least, we must engage institutional leaders in critical dialogue surrounding the meaning and definition of HSI to include other factors beyond a 25% federal threshold and encourage them to consider the larger symbolic nature of this designation for Latinx student success. The authors in the special issue offer stimulating starting points for this critical dialogue from a variety of perspectives.

The Work Featured in this Special Issue

Collectively, the work presented in this volume seeks to deepen our understanding of the organizational mission and future of HSIs as this nation struggles with how to maintain an equity agenda and how to promote access to opportunity for all people, while redefining excellence in a way that promotes justice for Latinx communities. The following provides a brief overview of each unique contribution included in this special issue.
The Intentional and the Grassroots Hispanic-Serving Institutions: A Critical History of Two Universities

Dr. Erin Doran and Óscar Medina offer a robust analysis of transformational change through the archival investigation of two geographically distinct organizational contexts and histories. The authors demonstrate how local contexts shaped the paths of these institutions before and regardless of the 1992 federal designation of HSIs. Moreover, they show us the unique paths and individualized institutional struggles to meet student needs characterized by setbacks, persistence, and differential means to achieve success.

The institutional heterogeneity of HSIs as members of the MSI landscape reflect the distinct nature of HSIs as institutions not created to serve a given population. The notion of a “manufactured identity,” termed by Contreras in 2008 is offered in contrast to the demographic changes that demanded service to Latinx students rather than a particular organizational agenda. Doran and Medina inform us regarding how HSIs are often community-based organizations in which a key distinguishing feature is their commitment to community versus the racial or ethnic makeup of the student population.

The authors fill gaps in our understanding of HSI identities and their evolution over time by describing 1) an intentional organizational type, created to serve a particular region already inhabited by predominantly Latinx students, and 2) the grassroots, an organizational context in which demographic shifts evolved over time and changes were made in reaction to student and faculty activism. The authors remind us that the majority of HSIs do not overtly express a mission focused on serving Latinx students and that many are emerging in states that do not have historically significant Latinx populations.

Through the theoretical lens of transformational change, Doran and Medina teach us that institutional commitments and values embedded in the organizational fabric at multiple levels and over time, are indicative of their commitment to the surrounding community. Certain structural elements that reveal attitudinal change via transformational change in organizational structures are highlighted, including: curriculum, funding, space allocations, and policies. The authors simultaneously demonstrate that HSIs are not immune to struggle for access and representation by and for Latinx students in higher education. Support is not a given, and opportunities to bolster it are sometimes met with resistance and counter-resistance. Certain commonalities were identified through examination of transformational change: 1) the
development of HSIs are highly contextualized; 2) resistance is common when trying to reinforce HSI mission and identity; 3) access by and advocacy for Latinx students differs; 4) assignment of the HIS designation does not connote institutional progress; and 5) actualizing the embodiment of service to Latinx students is a gradual process of resistance and progress. The authors show us that HSIs represent a diverse set of institutions that are simultaneously embodied by the Latinx population and remind us that scholars must consider the history, context, and localized response by stakeholders in their discourse.

**The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley: Reframing HSIs through a Multi-Sited Ethnography**

Drs. Maritza De La Trinidad, Francisco Guajardo, Peter Kranz, and Miguel Guajardo employ methodological and theoretical frameworks that align inquiry, pedagogy, and meaning-making processes to provide us with a unique conceptual case study analysis that offers contrast between the curricular choices of a historical institution with those of a new institution in a state of genesis. Their multi-site ethnographic analysis evaluates the innovation employed at these two institutions in different geopolitical contexts and eras, thus revealing the lessons learned from history and applying them to curricular and pedagogical developments for a “new brand of HSIs.” Poignant and timely, their comparison underscores the myriad ways “race plays out in the fabric of American society and culture and its impact on higher education.”

One case study is derived from the University of North Florida (UNF), an institution that “developed at a cultural front and point of innovation that grappled with the contentious racial tensions that plagued Black-White relations rooted in race relations of the American south.” The second case study is drawn from the current day context at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) in the borderlands region of South Texas, whose birth represents a “different brand of activism defined by institution-building” that is guided by the purpose of reflecting the cultural and linguistic heritage of its students. The authors assert that UTRGV is “poised to reshape the social, cultural, and economic dynamics of the region as it seeks to integrate bilingualism, biculturalism, and biliteracy through curricular and programmatic innovations.” By way of example, De La Trinidad et al. argue that UTRGV is “leading efforts to create official bilingual zones, dual language programs across Rio Grande Valley public schools,
and stronger connections between the university and surrounding communities.”

The authors posit that because UNF placed race relations front and center of its curricular innovation, it therefore offers appropriate historical instruction through which to understand the social and institutional change taking place in South Texas. De La Trinidad et al. offer the work being done at UTRGV as an example of how HSIs might align curricular choices and their core identity with the population and regions they serve. Importantly, they remind us that curricula, teaching and research practices, and service must be reflective of and responsive to the institutions they serve. In other words, we must promote the development of HSIs within localized ecological contexts.

**Assessing Empowerment at HSIs: An Adapted Inputs-Environments-Outcomes Model**

In this contribution, Dr. Marcela Cuellar, Vanessa Segundo, and Yvonne Muñoz remind us that because HSIs play an important function in promoting postsecondary access and attainment for Latinx students, institutions must engage in intentional institutional change that empower Latinx students socioeconomically and politically, but also holistically. What’s more, the authors call upon institutions and researchers to challenge traditional measures of success to better serve Latinx students. Cuellar et al. offer a compelling expansion of the Inputs-Environments-Outcomes (IEO) model offered by Astin & Antonio (2012) by adding layers of critical race theory and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). For example, they underscore the reality that the IEO framework is often applied to traditional students who are enrolled on a full-time basis on residential campuses, when that often does not reflect the reality of students attending HSIs. They aptly remind us that the study of higher education is rife with “false claims of ‘objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, race neutrality and equal opportunity’” (Yosso, 2005, p. 74).

Cuellar et al. challenge the reader to consider the very mission and purpose of education for Latinx students. While traditional measures—including retention and graduation rates—are important, holistic measures such as: empowerment, student development, and human cultivation for positive influence and value-add to students’ lives must also be considered. They call on scholars to consider and name additional metrics that might be used to measure enhancement of student experience. In addition, they call upon researchers to
consider the myriad possibilities of nuanced student inputs before attempting to understand how college affects Latinx students. Adhering to certain principles that 1) Latinx students are racialized producers of knowledge; 2) HSIs have the potential to intentionally serve through empowering environments and experiences; and 3) Institutions and scholars must move beyond conventional measures of success toward more tailored notions of empowerment for Latinx students.

Cuellar et al.’s model provides a blueprint for HSIs to assess the definition of a transformative educational experience that considers Latinx student assets and their essential empowerment outcomes, including psycho-social, behavioral, and spiritual domains. They further call for a more nuanced account of background characteristics to be considered as input variables, including: the racial heterogeneity of Latinx students, gender differences, socioeconomic background, first-generation status, generational status, immigrant status, academic skills and self-efficacy, and community cultural wealth. In terms of environments, they encourage scholars to consider: campus climate, curriculum, and co-curricular considerations. Cuellar et al.’s contribution represents a call to action for researchers to develop studies that holistically consider Latinx empowerment using innovative methodologies and instruments, including participatory action research.

**What Does it Mean to be Latinx-Serving? Testing the Utility of the Typology of HSI Organizational Identities**

In this contribution, Dr. Gina Ann Garcia offers an expanded analysis of the multiple types of HSIs based upon academic and non-academic outcomes and enhanced racial/ethnic experiences. Using IPEDS data and analysis of institutional websites, Garcia examines how institutions serve Latinx students beyond superficial enrollment. Her analysis is contrasted with prior casting of organizational identities, including “institutionalized ways of knowing” and “legitimate” modes of measurement, institutional sagas and historical legacies to more fully consider the HSI organizational identity. Garcia posits that the HSI organizational identity might be viewed politically, i.e., based upon enrollment numbers and federal interest in Latinx college completion rates. Institutions may lack extensive histories or organizational identities because they function as Predominantly White Institutions. Their mission statements or curricula may not reflect commitment to the HSI designation, while their White faculty and administration
reflect dominant ways of knowing. Thusly, the author questions: How is the HSI identity to be measured?

Garcia suggests we move beyond the ontological understanding of a Latinx-serving identity to greater practical implications using a clearly defined typology that tells us what the Latinx-serving organization looks like in practice. She suggests that a more robust analysis considers positive academic and non-academic outcomes, campus culture, improved sense of belonging, culturally relevant pedagogy and advising, and validating support programs. Garcia generated four categories through her research: 1) *Latinx-enrolling*: an institution that enrolls 25% but does not produce equitable outcomes and may not embrace an organizational culture that supports Latinx students; 2) *Latinx-producing*: an institution which enrolls Latinx students and produces outcomes, but lacks a supportive culture; 3) *Latinx-enhancing*: an institution which enrolls 25% Latinx students and enhances educational and racial/ethnic experiences, but does not produce traditional outcomes of success define by the field; 4) *Latinx-serving*: an institution which enrolls 25% Latinx students, produces equitable outcomes, and enacts a culture that enhances the Latinx student experience. Garcia employed Museus’ (2014) model of the culturally engaging campus environment to consider student opportunities to engage with faculty, staff, and peers in meaningful and cross-racial/ethnic ways, as well as the existence of humanizing and validating educational environments.

Garcia evaluated six institutions using two major measurement areas, including: 1) graduation and completion rates, and 2) the number of programs and services deemed culturally engaging for Latinx, low-income, first-generation, and Students of Color. Garcia found a lower percentage of faculty and administrators that identify as Latinx and People of Color, as well as lower rates of Latinx and Students of Color graduate students in HSIs. While these measures are not deemed essential to the mission of HSIs by the federal government’s Title V grant competition, research on belongingness suggests they are key to student success. Similarly, institutions that are “Latinx-blind,”—i.e., they do not center the Latinx student experience institutionally and are not intentional in their efforts to enhance the Latinx student experience—can negatively influence campus climate while the existing body of research suggests that student perception of climate affects persistence. Thus, Garcia demonstrates, the Department of Education’s Title V valuation system, which merely considers expanded educational opportunities and enhanced academic offerings, is therefore limited. Garcia’s
contribution suggests that enhancing racial and ethnic ways of knowing should be an outcome of the work of HSIs. Moreover, these measures are useful for classifying institutions, measuring institutional effectiveness, basing funding decisions, and engaging in the practice of campus culture improvement.

**Modeling an Effective Program for Latina/o College Student Success**

This contribution to the special issue was written from the perspective of scholars who have also been in positions of HSI leadership. Drs. Kenneth Gonzalez and Vanessa Meling’s work reveals promising findings from their case study analysis of the design, implementation, and results of a localized intervention program created to increase Latinx student success at an HSI. The authors begin by sounding the alarm regarding the disparate achievement levels found in low- and high-Latinx enrolling institutions, with particular focus on California and Texas as high-Latinx enrolling states. Calling for improved practices that promote completion rates in light of decades of research that have pointed to gaps in Latinx student achievement, the authors describe in detail the group-process of institutional-level program design and evaluation. Specifically, the intervention sought to mediate lagging graduation rates that correlated with the critical first year of college at a small, private, religiously-affiliated HSI in a large, metropolitan city in Texas.

The manuscript offers a descriptive account of the process that a team of university faculty, staff, and administrator/researchers took to better understand Latinx student success and to design a locally-informed intervention response. Their assessment and evaluation process drew from four sources of evidence that shaped the re-design of an intervention program, including: 1) longitudinal institutional cohort data, 2) extant scholarly literature on Latinx student success, 3) student focus group data, and 4) syllabi content analysis data. The team conducted five focus groups with first-year, first-term students to achieve a contextualized understanding of the barriers to success they faced. First-term students were chosen for the focus groups because data suggested that only 55% of this cohort returned for the second year of college at the case study institutional site. Through their focus group interactions, the team found five common barriers within this group: 1) time management; 2) failure to submit written in-class assignments; 3) discomfort asking questions in class; 4) failure to complete online class assignments; and 5) difficulty managing the workload of multiple
The authors describe how the diverse interdisciplinary team noted the interconnected nature of the barriers students faced and that they were thusly prompted to answer a deeper question related to student workload. Gonzalez and Meling then describe the academic workload content analysis the team conducted which uncovered a stark and alarming contrast between the sheer volume of assignments that were expected of first-term students compared with third-year students. Through a contextualized and local team-based approach, the high-volume task-based assignments that were intended to scaffold student learning were exposed as a potential barrier to success. The authors reveal how the data-driven assessment and evaluation approach used in this case study led to options that would address the unintended consequences of course design at this HSI. The authors present post-redesign assessment data that suggest changes to the intervention program led increased mid-term grade point average (GPA), end of first-term GPA, and fall-to-fall persistence. In this piece, Gonzalez and Meling offer a tangible example of a case study that demonstrates the great promise HSIs hold to go beyond being merely Hispanic-enrolling. Rather, HSIs can to be conduits for Latinx student success when locally informed policy and practice decisions are made and implemented.

**Becoming an Hispanic-Serving Research Institution: Involving Graduate Students in Organizational Change**

Dr. Patricia Marin and Priscilla Pereschica make a unique contribution by examining the graduate student experience at an emerging HSI that is also a R1, or institution of “highest research activity.” The authors bring into sharp focus the ways in which the shifting institutional identity institution as it approaches the federal HSI designation might have an impact on the significant proportion of students who are pursuing graduate degrees. The authors advance the term HSRI (Hispanic-Serving Research Institutions) to distinguish this institutional cohort from other HSIs. They also highlight the diversity of identities carried by HSIs generally, and the diversity of the students served specifically. This approach provides a compelling rationale for focusing on graduate students within the context of a research institution that is actively seeking and on the threshold of achieving the HSI designation.

Marin and Pereschica integrate an organizational cultural framework to capture shifting change in the beliefs, values, symbols, communications, and other cultural elements of the HSRI
context. Through focus groups with 45 graduate students pursuing masters and doctoral degrees from a range of disciplines, the authors explored concepts related to the current institutional status and potential implications of the potential shift to an HSI status. Their focus group discussions with graduate students yielded four key findings. Among these findings and worthy of noting; students emphasized the need for their institution to demonstrate more pride in the HSI designation, thus highlighting a tension often associated with being given the HSI label. This finding also signals the need for clearer internal and external communication from the institution regarding institutional mission to serve Latinx students. Their findings also underscore graduate student perceptions that the institution should demonstrate an equal commitment to promoting student success as to Latinx student enrollment. Marin and Pereschica’s findings underscore the importance of the graduate student perspective within HSRIIs and institutions with emerging HSI identities. Their work highlights the need for focus on institutional climate and graduate student engagement in shifting organizational processes.

Presidential Leadership: Improving Completion Rates of Latino Male Students at Texas Community Colleges

Dr. Luis Ponjuan, Leticia Palomin, and Susana Hernandez utilize qualitative methods to consider Hispanic-Serving community colleges as key access points to higher education for Latino men. Ponjuan et al. examined the perspectives of six Texas community college presidents to assess their awareness and commitment to degree completion for Latino men at their respective institutions. Ponjuan et al. found that presidents are concerned with the low completion rates of this population, but better alignment of core values, mission, and campus culture is needed to improve their educational outcomes. The authors question how one might enhance degree completion when increased time in developmental courses leads to less favorable educational outcomes and community college faculty are often ill equipped to address diverse learning styles. The authors also draw attention to the reality of a community college culture that is enrollment-driven rather than degree completion-driven. The authors utilize Kezar’s (2001) social cognition and cultural models framework to make sense of their findings and to provide insight regarding how executive leaders might leverage their positional power to implement innovative practices, and thereby to improve outcomes. They argue that 1) organizational change is possible when leaders recognize the misalignment between
organizational functions and the entities they serve and 2) leaders have the ability to shape organizational culture and enact a critical function as agents of organizational change as they hold the power to shape the mission, vision, and rituals of their institutions through communication and symbolic action.

Ponjuan et al. elaborate upon three major themes from their data, including: 1) institutional awareness of institutional data, 2) institutional challenges, and 3) awareness of presidential leadership responsibility. More specifically, the authors assert that presidents possess the positional authority to 1) compel institutions to provide disaggregated data on key outcomes and varying levels of understanding of enrollment patterns, 2) to utilize data to garner support to advance leadership initiatives, and 3) to bear in mind that improved disaggregated data is important but meaningless if not backed by institutional action.

The authors findings highlight the need for institutional research offices that can coordinate with leadership and leadership that can leverage data for change. Given the finding that institutional agents were sometimes unaware of their HSI function and mission and in light of a cultural model of organizational change, the authors call on scholars to reframe how Hispanic-Serving community colleges change to meet their needs.

A Critical Look at Perspectives of Access and Mission at High Latinx-Enrolling Urban Universities

This manuscript examines perspectives of leaders at urban-serving HSIs and emerging HSIs related to embracing and fulfilling an access-centered mission. In it, Dr. Desiree D. Zerquera, Dr. Tracy Arámbula Ballysingh, and Emerald Templeton situate institutions charged with upholding an access-centered mission in light of external environmental pressures that impose expectations of excellence that promote or impede institutional mission. The authors develop a rich conceptual framework of leadership, organizations, and equity to capture the complexity of their topic. First, they discuss the type of leadership needed to effectively advance an equity agenda, focusing on transformational leadership for diversity that channels equity agendas into the different activities of an institution. The authors argue that emphasis on diversity can come in other ways that impede achievement of an equity agenda, and they posit two particular ways this can happen: through co-option and through professed color-blindness. The authors then center the perspectives of the 21 institutional leaders they interviewed.
through an organizational framework of sensemaking, which takes into account how organizational members collectively process external messages and use that to shape their identity.

This conceptual framing allows for a deep and critical analysis of their interview data, which reveals telling perspectives leaders hold regarding how to uphold their access missions. Zerquera et al.’s analysis highlights ways diversity was an assumed and integral identity for these institutions. Though leaders assumed their students would be diverse and expressed commitments to upholding this diversity, they also described perceptions of the ways this commitment simultaneously served as an opportunity and a challenge for the institution. Ability to enact this mission varied, with a tension emerging between students who are typically served by the institution and a newer cohort of more high-achieving students. The authors highlight ways the assumed identities of institutional leaders may impede the ongoing enactment of these important missions, and how colorblindness still dominates logics of diversity.

Recommendations center upon policymaker support for institutional leaders charged with upholding these types of missions, research to forge through with more complexity regarding how organizational fulfillment of equity agendas is captured, and consideration for the myriad ways pressure for excellence within the dominant policy frameworks may impede institutional success toward achieving equity.

**Latino Faculty in Hispanic-Serving Institutions: Where is the Diversity?**

Currently serving as Associate Vice Chancellor for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion at the University of California, San Diego, Dr. Frances Contreras’ contribution draws attention to the differences between student enrollment and faculty diversity by examining faculty makeup across California’s community college and state university systems. She highlights the significant role of Latinx faculty in contributing to the success of Latinx students and the challenges of Latinx faculty retention. Arguably, the California systems of higher education serve the majority of Latinx students in the United States and, as Contreras reminds us, the state is home to over 150 HSIs. The context of California state policy emphasizing accountability measures attached to student success rates is also highlighted in her extensive evaluation of the status of Latinx faculty diversity in these systems.

Contreras’ analysis of data trends across the two California systems over the past two
decades juxtaposes student enrollments and graduation rates with faculty appointments and demographic information. Key findings highlight the exponential expansion of Latinx student enrollment across the community college and state college systems; far exceeding that of students from other demographics. Both systems, however, demonstrate significant gaps between student enrollments and tenure-track faculty lines, with greater representation of Latinx faculty in temporary and short-term faculty positions (i.e., adjunct and lecturer positions). To achieve greater equity within California and other states with large Latinx student populations, Contreras recommends strengthening data systems to provide more accurate data to critically analyze enrollment and hiring trends. She also emphasizes further consideration of the contingent faculty role in supporting student success and support sources available to these contingent faculty. She closes with an argument that research and policy must take a systemic approach to promote the success of Latinx students and to strengthen the Latinx faculty pipeline.

**Hispanic-Serving Institution Scholars and Administrators¹ on Improving Latina/Latino/Latinx/Hispanic² Teacher Pipelines: Critical Junctures along Career Pathways**

Dr. Caroline S. Turner leads a cohort of select HSI deans and educators chosen by President Obama’s *White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics* to explore the practices, programs, and research relevant to the HSIs they lead as Latinx teacher-serving. Dr.

¹ The U.S. Department of Education’s Office of the Under Secretary, the Hispanic-Serving Institution Division, and the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics hosted a 2016 convening of education deans from Hispanic-Serving Institutions across the country to brainstorm ideas for getting more Latinos into the teaching profession. Addressing this topic, a committee of HSI administrators authored “On Improving Inclusive Teacher Pipelines with a Focus on Hispanics.” This paper emerges from that work and presents co-author perspectives only. We appreciated the opportunity to work with one another and support efforts to promote future such convenings.

² This article uses the terms Latina/Latino/Latinx/Hispanic. Latina/o encompasses both female and male individuals; Latinx is a gender inclusive term. Writing in 1991, Nieves-Squires used the designator “Hispanic” to refer to people of Cuban, Mexican, Mexican American, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish ancestry or descent. Hispanic is also the term used in several datasets referred to in this paper. Terminology used by researchers is not changed. Niemann (2002) notes that “like the term Hispanic, the label Latina/o is inclusive of all persons of Spanish-speaking descent” (p. xii). González and Gándara (2005) write that many call themselves Latinas to “acknowledge their non-European heritage while affirming their dignity and expressing confidence in their growing political importance” (p. 398). Niemann (2002) reminds us, however, that “a label does not define a woman or her ideology and that labels are fluid and, for many women, interchangeable” (p. xii).
Turner and her co-authors argue that Latinx teachers play a significant role in strengthening the educational pipeline for Latinx students. They likewise draw our collective attention to the need for enhanced consideration of the way these individuals are served within the HSI context and their potential to contribute to Latinx success nationally. Latinx teachers have the potential to combat deficit notions commonly held in traditional education spaces. Moreover, to attract these change-makers, it is important for institutions to emphasize the value- and culturally-based aspects of educating Latinx populations.

The team of esteemed authors seeks to address the critical issues of Latinx teacher representation by focusing on the significant role HSIs play in attracting potential teachers and in preparing them to serve Latinx students. The team draws from literature and provides examples of current effective programs that are working to address the critical Latinx teacher need. They call for “grow your own” partnership programs that integrate college students into the classroom while they are still in school to develop the pipeline from college to the classroom. Examples provided also include application of this model to high school students. They also note the need to address organizational and cultural issues throughout the institution related to stereotyping, implicit bias, and insufficient financial support to strengthen the Latinx teacher pipeline.

**Flipping the HSI Narrative: An HSI Positionality**

Finally, Dr. Anne-Marie Núñez provides a closing reflection essay featuring critical insights offered by this collective body of work. Dr. Núñez advances our understanding and framing regarding where HSIs stand within the higher education context and their role in society more broadly. She integrates the extant HSI research and the practice of research in education with her own experience in policy and academia to craft an argument for how researchers can better support the work of HSIs to answer the call. Núñez calls on researchers to challenge the epistemic injustice that has characterized HSIs through deficit perspectives and proposes a transformative paradigm to be employed through methodology and methods, researcher positionality, and partnerships and practices in the study of HSIs. Of utmost importance, she argues, is the need for researchers who examine HSIs from outside or inside these institutions to work with staff and personnel at these institutions to foster more reciprocal partnerships with them. She also calls upon researchers to work through the mental
models they employ as researchers and to better understand the models that guide practitioner efforts in these institutions.

**Conclusion**

In summary, impending demographic shifts in the U.S. portend a majority Latinx population in the coming decades, even as socioeconomic stratification and class divisions become increasingly entrenched. Achieving access, equity, and excellence for all Latinx Americans in higher education are not mutually exclusive goals, and they are the goals for which we must continually strive. HSIs offer great promise as key access points and potential opportunity engines for a growing number of low-income, first-generation Latinx students, and are therefore worthy of continual examination. This special issue seeks to offer a holistic complement to the growing body of research and scholarship focused on HSIs. We hope that the work within this issue will continue to advance key paradigmatic shifts that combat epistemic injustice and expand our understanding of the increasingly well-defined typologies of their institutional corpus as a growing number of two- and four-year institutions become federal designates.

We believe the scholarly community is obligated to provide practical and theoretical exemplars of best practice and policy to better support the work of HSIs and thereby to answer the call. We must also center the notion that institutions continue to function within colonized historical roots that have shaped their infrastructure, culture, and missions. Therefore, we must continue to strive to expand the limits of our own understanding and the way we frame discourse surrounding HSIs in critical and innovative ways. We must employ transformative paradigms through our methodologies, researcher positionalities, and stakeholder partnerships and practices.

The future history of HSIs remains to be written. This diverse collection of manuscripts seeks to provide new insights from research and practice to tell a story of the complex dimensions of their unique organizational contexts. As our nation engages in an internal battle over the adoption of an equity agenda, we must resist deficit characterizations of HSIs, and we must redefine excellence in a manner that seeks justice for Latinx communities through the achievement of curricular and cultural self-determination. Dr. Núñez’s concluding manuscript aptly reminds us that the research community can and must do better through our work on
and with HSIs. If we as a community of scholars truly desire to support HSI efforts to provide enhanced access to high-quality education to our nation’s Latinx population and thereby, to enhance equity across all domains of American higher education, it is the only path forward.

Acknowledgements: The authors wish to thank Dr. Claudia Sofia Garriga Lopez for comments on an earlier draft of sections of this introduction.
References


The Intentional and the Grassroots Hispanic-Serving Institutions: 
A Critical History of Two Universities

Erin Doran  
Iowa State University

Øscar Medina  
University of Missouri, Columbia

Abstract
This study examines the institutional histories of Loma Verde University and Azul City University and their development over time into Hispanic-Serving Institutions. Utilizing a theoretical framework of transformational change, we focus on various aspects of these institutions, including curriculum, the allocation of physical spaces, and the creation of programs that specifically serve Latinx students. The study makes use of archival documents that tell the story of the struggles at each institution to cultivate a campus that addressed the needs of Latinx students to promote their long-term academic success. The findings suggest that these institutions were on paths that were heavily influenced by their local contexts and student population; that the transformational process to serving Latinx students was long and faced setbacks; and that their successes came in different forms. These conclusions indicate that the histories of Hispanic-Serving Institutions may be as rich and diverse as the Latinx population itself, furthering the notion that these institutions are unique among other types of Minority-Serving Institutions.

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.24974/amae.11.3.360
There is a growing focus on Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) by policy makers and researchers considering that these institutions enroll approximately 60% of Latinx college students (Santiago, Taylor, & Calderón Galdeano, 2016). HSIs are defined as two-year and four-year institutions with at least 25 percent Latinx undergraduate students (Núñez, Hurtado, & Calderón Galdeano, 2015), and the number of HSIs has now reached over 400 across 21 states and Puerto Rico (Excelencia in Education, 2016). As a result, HSIs enroll notable numbers of Latinx students, but it is unclear to what degree or how they actually serve this student population (Contreras et al., 2008; García & Okhidoi, 2015). As such, the HSI designation has been called a “manufactured identity” (Contreras et al., 2008), suggesting that this designation is not authentic nor universally understood.

Previous research suggests that an HSI organizational identity may present itself through a commitment to its surrounding community rather than solely focusing on one racial/ethnic student population (Garcia, 2016). Given the present and unprecedented growth of this sector of MSIs, HSIs are often seen as a product of the current demographic changes in American postsecondary enrollment (Gasman, Nguyen, & Conrad, 2015; Núñez, Hurtado, & Calderón Galdeano, 2015). As such, few studies in the extant literature on HSIs have examined the histories of individual HSIs or incorporated a historical perspective to the analysis of the development of HSIs over time (for examples, see Doran, 2015; Gasman, Nguyen, & Conrad, 2015; Laden, 2001). This perspective of looking at change over time at HSIs may be key to showing whether or not the HSI designation is a “manufactured identity” or if it denotes a discernable organizational mission.

The purpose of this study is to fill these gaps in our understanding of the identity of HSIs and how they evolve. To do so, we compare the distinct histories of two four-year universities and their development of their identities over time into HSIs, drawing from institutional documents to trace the progression of these institutions as HSIs over time. The first institution, Loma Verde University (LVU, a pseudonym), was created in 1969 with the explicit intention of serving the South Texas region, an area that has historically been predominantly Latinx and continues to be so today. The second, Azul City University (ACU, a pseudonym), was established in an urban area in the Midwest in 1867. Its development as an HSI was far more gradual, resulting from changing demographics over decades in the area around its campus and subsequent social activism on the part of Latinx students and faculty.
This study focuses on the following research questions:

1. What were key moments in the histories of Loma Verde University and Azul City University that shaped their HSI identities over time?
2. How did these moments bring about transformative change to support Latinx students on these campuses?

To answer these questions, we examine the processes that these institutions underwent as they became HSIs, how they built their capacity to serve Latinx students and the challenges they faced in terms of academic programs, student services, funding, and so on. These universities were chosen for this study given their different routes to becoming HSIs; we thus term LVU and ACU as “intentional” and “grassroots” HSIs, respectively. The histories of these institutions are useful for researchers, practitioners, and administrators as they illustrate concrete examples of how campus agents (e.g., administrators, students, and faculty) responded to the challenges posed to expanding services to Latinx students in terms of programming, physical space, and curricula. These responses can inform the work of stakeholders in creating long-lasting change on their campuses in creating a Hispanic-Serving identity.

**Literature Review**

The geographical spread and institutional diversity of HSIs makes research on how HSIs serve Latinx students challenging and necessitates work that is contextually rich and includes local histories (Núñez & Elizondo, 2015). Hurtado and Ruiz Alvarado (2015) identify a number of factors that contribute to a dynamic and supportive campus climate for Latinx students, and at the organizational level, they specifically name student and faculty composition and links to the local communities. Notably, a study by Garcia (2012) concludes that institutional resources and selectivity influenced student success at four-year HSIs more than student body composition. Given that both institutions in this study have traditionally been regional universities that provide broad access to their communities, we focus on institutional programs and resources and how these have been invested in to serve Latinx students and promote a Hispanic-Serving identity on campuses.
Academic Programs

The literature suggests that various types of academic programs promote Latinx student success. First, Ethnic Studies programs in both K-12 and higher education provide Latinx students with spaces in which they can explore and negotiate issues related to their identity and culture (Cammarota, 2007; Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015). Despite the well-documented backlash against these programs, particularly in Arizona (Cabrera, Milem, Jaquette, & Marx, 2014), these programs form spaces for students to engage with material about their own culture while also learning how to critically engage with others who have different backgrounds and viewpoints than their own (Núñez, 2011). One concern about Ethnic Studies program is how pervasive their presence and content are within the whole institution rather than as an academic silo (Cabán, 2003; Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015).

HSIs in Texas have faced criticism for their overall focus on providing degrees in low-paying, service-oriented fields and prepare students for the workforce rather than professional schools (Satterfield & Rincones, 2008). There is a well-documented need to boost Latinx graduates in STEM programs, and HSIs have been identified as crucial participants in addressing the disparity in Latinx students in STEM fields (Núñez & Elizondo, 2015). However, a recent report finds that while thirteen of the top twenty-five institutions awarding STEM bachelor’s degrees to Latinx students were HSIs, these institutions are geographically isolated in California, Florida, Texas, and Puerto Rico and degrees awarded were concentrated at the bachelor’s level and below (Santiago, Taylor, and Calderón Galdeano, 2015).

Student Services and Programming

The diversity of Latinx students themselves also necessitates a wide array of student services. Latinx students are often treated as a monolithic group despite the diversity of subgroups (Ortiz, Valerio, & Lopez, 2012). These students are more likely to be first-generation students (Saunders & Serna, 2004), they may have wide variation in terms of bilingualism and ESL (Harklau, Siegel, & Losey, 1999), they are more likely to work for pay during their college experiences (Núñez & Sansone, 2016), among many other needs. Short-term programs and interventions to fix short-term challenges for these students often come and go and fade out because administrators fail to make these programs part of the permanent fabric of the institution.
The creation of dedicated spaces for multicultural student groups continues to be a struggle in institutions (McCoy, 2011). However, culture centers are important in providing student groups their own spaces to create support systems and to discuss issues relevant to their population (Lozano, 2010). For Latinx students, especially at Predominantly White Institutions, the creation of a culture center could be the only place where these students have to develop their own racial and ethnic identities and to build a cultural awareness about themselves (Lozano, 2010). In effect, academic programs and dedicated spaces for Latinx students are two ways HSIs and other institutional types can provide validating experiences to students by enabling them to see themselves reflected in the institution (Rendón, 2002).

**Theoretical Framework**

We examine the development of these HSIs through the lens of transformational change as a means of examining how certain values or commitments become embedded in the fabric of an organization. Transformational change is characterized by a deep and intentional change to an organization that permeates all levels of an institution and occurs over time (Kezar & Eckel, 2002). One marker for whether transformational change has occurred within an organization is through an examination of its structural elements, including curriculum, funding, space allocations, and policies related to the change (Kezar, 2014). In short, this type of change is “the attitudinal change that is simultaneously manifested in an organization’s structures” (Kezar, 2014, p. 63). Judging whether transformational change has occurred is complicated to ascertain, but we specifically looked for practices that were responsive to the needs of the Latinx community through programming, pedagogy, and curriculum. These types of structural changes were observable over time in institutional documents such as bulletins, student newspapers, and media coverage on the sites of this study. Through the analysis process, we focused on programs, spaces, and interventions that gained permanent status within the institutions.

**Methodology**

In order to examine LVU’s and ACU’s progression towards HSI status, this project utilizes historical methods. ACU was chosen because of its presence of Puerto Rican students outside of Puerto Rican, showing the diversity of Latinx subgroups on college campuses. We selected LVU as an example of an institution that was created to serve a majority-minority area
with a large concentration of Latinx residents. One perspective we adopted was that of critical history, a perspective drawing from critical theory and brings to the foreground power relations and how they influence schooling and education, especially equitable access to education (Alridge, 2015). To date, some historical pieces on HSIs (e.g., Calderón et al., 2012) tend to follow a straightforward narrative approach for informational purposes without assuming any specific theoretical frameworks. A historical approach, combined with a critical lens, enables the examination of two institutional histories and how efforts to support and serve Latinx students have been promoted or disrupted.

We use archival documents from each institution related to the development of a Hispanic-Serving identity and how these institutions responded to growing Latinx populations on their campus. We took into account academic programs, spaces dedicated to Latinx students, debates about Latinx student-focused services, and Latinx student organizations. We followed Humphrey’s (2008) steps for conducting archival research by identifying sources through online finding aids (e.g., Texas Archival Resources Online) in order to tailor our time in the archives to this study. Documents were gathered through visits to the archives of each institution, online searches through digital archives, and the use of online sources that are salient to the institutions (e.g., digital archives of local newspapers). Among the artifacts we gathered were institutional histories written by students who participated in activism and included in the campus history collections; institutional documents that provided some detail on historical enrollment trends; and university websites and public relations offices’ websites. Perhaps the most important sources for us were the student newspapers at LVU and ACU because they provided primary documents that represented the views of the student bodies at the time of certain incidents.

These documents were shared between the researchers and included artifacts such as university press releases, oral histories, pictures, and program records. Individually, timelines of institutional histories and preliminary institutional narratives that focused on the HSI identity were drawn up by the researchers and then shared with each other. The researchers analyzed these histories together to look for commonalities and differences in order to answer the research questions and develop conclusions collaboratively. We looked for specific institutional agents or places where a commitment (or lack of commitment) to Latinx students developed most prominently and how these moments or agents spoke to the development into an HSI
over time. The critical historical approach, combined with the transformative change framework, challenged us to look at policies and practices that changed the fabric of the institution and demonstrated a deep commitment to Latinx students that was sustained over time rather than changes that lost momentum and faded out.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. As an archival study, we are limited by the quality and nature of the documents we could locate despite our efforts to be as comprehensive as possible. For example, locating historical enrollment numbers proved difficult at LVU, and official enrollment tallies could only be found going back to 1990. Next, we acknowledge that our analysis could be strengthened with other types of data, particularly oral histories. Considering this is a starting point in contributing a historical dimension to the research on HSIs, we see this as a way to start the scholarly conversation on the history of HSIs and hope that this body of literature will grow out of this project.

Findings

Loma Verde University was authorized in the late 1960s to address the lack of public four-year institutions in the South Texas region. LVU was created to serve a region that was and remains predominantly Latinx. In explaining this Hispanic-Serving identity, the first LVU President stated that the university would place emphasis on the Spanish language and Latinx culture in the curriculum ("[LVU] emphasis," 1970, p. 18-A). Given these stated goals from early on in its history, we examine LVU as an “intentional” HSI, operationalized as an institution created with the specific mission of serving an area of South Texas with a large Latinx population.

Azul City University (ACU) is located in an urban area in the Midwest and boasts an enrollment of approximately 7,000 undergraduate students. While it was not founded as an HSI, it has had this designation for almost 20 years and publically displays this label in places such as its website. The Latinx population constituted about one-third of ACU’s student body in Fall 2016 (ACU Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, 2016). This diversity can be credited to the racial makeup of the city, as Mexicans and Puerto Ricans are well-represented in the city. In fact, Mexicans arrived in the Midwest as early as 1915, entering to not only avoid
the Mexican Revolution and Cristero Rebellion (Henderson, 2011), but to find work due to the lax immigration regulations in the United States that exempted Mexicans from quota laws between 1921 and 1924 (Innis-Jiménez, 2013). Similarly, Puerto Ricans went to the Midwest as early as 1946 (Fernández, 2012). By the 1970s, a small but visible Puerto Rican student population emerged at ACU. It was the Puerto Rican student population who would contribute to ACU’s development as a “grassroots HSI,” or an institution that came to serve Latinx students as a result of student-led resistance and activism.

Loma Verde University

At the time of its creation, the Legislature noted that the city in which LVU is located was “the largest metropolitan area in the state without a state supported four-year college within commuting distance” (HB 42, 1969). Though the university was created to serve the predominantly Latinx region, this intention almost immediately fell by the wayside. Early controversy emerged when the campus was placed in the northwest quadrant of the city, where college-going rates of high school graduates were higher compared to the rest of the city (San Antonio Light, 1970, June 4). Low enrollment of Latinx and other minoritized students was attributed to this distance (Walker, 1979).

Latinx students did not enroll in significant numbers until the mid-1980s with a 26.4 percent increase between Fall 1984 and Fall 1988 ([LVU] Enrollment by Ethnic Origin, Fall 1984 to Fall 1988, n.d.), and Latinx enrollment numbers doubled by 1992 (Scott, 1992). Despite this growth, criticisms of the lack of Latinx administrators persisted. A community group known as Juntos [Together], comprised of alumni, students, faculty, and other interested parties, drew up a Latinx education agenda for LVU that included changes to curriculum, recruitment practices, and the appointment of Latinx personnel to leadership positions at LVU, especially to the Office of Minority Affairs and International Students (Scott, 1992). A great irony of the early history of LVU is the extent to which it celebrated itself as an institution committed to Latinx students and culture. Its first Graduate Catalog in 1973 stated its commitment to the region and to the influence of Latinx culture across disciplines (Graduate Catalog, 1973), yet representation of Latinx people on campus remained elusive for most of the first ten years of its existence and took time to build.
The struggle to build Hispanic-Serving capacity. Though LVU began with a stated intention of serving Latinx students, it did so in name only. In 1982, a student newspaper article started, “Although a ‘For White’s [sic] Only’ sign has never graced [LVU’s] campus, statistically [LVU] has a predominantly white student population” (Hicks, 1982, p. 1). A prominent Latino mathematics professor accused university administrators of deliberately poor recruiting practices focused on Latinx students, stating: “This University has poor visibility in the community. Perhaps that is part of the deliberate plan to keep the University from becoming, in the eyes of certain administrators and some of the professors here, a ‘Mexicanized’ University” (Hicks, 1992, p. 1). Interestingly, the Latinx student enrollment at the time was 23 percent, just under what would later become the threshold number to qualify for the HSI designation.

A lengthy response to this article and the professor’s comments followed filled with point-by-point rebuttals. The author responded that LVU had a much higher percentage of Latinx tenure or tenure-track faculty at 11 percent versus the flagship institution in the state with 1.4 percent (O’Neal, 1983, p. 7). What is perhaps most significant about this letter is some of the casual racism hidden in some of the rebuttals. For instance, O’Neal wrote:

The question Prof. Berriozabal indirectly asks is: “How can we stop a traditionally Anglo school from discouraging minority enrollment?” A more fitting question would be: “What can be done in the minority communities to instill a greater belief in the value of a college (and, more importantly, a high school) education?”

Essentially the letter’s author repeats a discriminatory assumption that has been commonly made about Latinx students and families that they do not value education (Valencia, 2002).

This struggle to reinforce the campus as a university for Latinx students continued into the 1990s. The Hopwood decision resulted in the end of race-based admissions in Texas (Long & Tienda, 2008), and comments from a law professor at a nearby institution sparked heated debate at LVU. The professor publicly stated that Latinx students could not compete academically with their white counterparts on more selective campuses (College Press Service, 1997). One presumably Latinx student at LVU submitted a letter to the editor in the campus newspaper argued that the American education system was deeply racist and that he was “fearful that by removing affirmative action instead of modifying it will lead to higher education only being for the rich” (Garcia-Martinez, 1997, p. 10). Debates continued in the newspaper.
among White students and students of color, with one student who self-identified themselves as White writing, “Walking through the [LVU] hallways, I have counted dozens of posters advertising scholarships with the bottom line being, ‘non-Hispanic Whites need not apply.’ If 90 out of 100 scholarships apply only to ‘minorities’ do these things make all men equal?” (B.N., 1997, p. 10). This debate regarding the Hopwood decision and race-based decision-making in higher education in the 1990s mirrored the campus debates in the previous decade in that as Latinx faculty and students tried to affirm practices to boost access to higher education at LVU, a backlash occurred with accusations that Latinx students were demanding “to be granted special privileges over the rest of society” (B.N., 1997, p. 10).

**Serving Latinx students through academic programming.** One place of strength in LVU’s service to Latinx students is through its academic programs. The first graduate programs established at the university were in Bilingual-Bicultural Studies, Teaching English as a Second Language, and a Latinx literature program ([LVU] Graduate Catalog, 1973). Since 1979, LVU offered a Pre-Freshman Engineering Program to encourage the field to middle and high school students (Rodriguez, 2013). Started by a Latinx mathematics professor named Manuel Berriozábal, this program was specifically designed for underrepresented students and by 2013 served approximately 34,000 students (Rodriguez, 2013).

LVU’s first doctoral program, approved by the state in 1991, was in biology with an emphasis in neuroscience. A newspaper article covering the doctoral program just ahead of its approval pointed out that out of the 181 students who received doctorates in this field in 1989, only one was Latinx (Hall, 1991a). This program was hard won considering that at virtually the same time, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), a Latinx-focused civil rights organization, launched a lawsuit against the state of Texas alleging discrimination in higher education access and funding (Hall, 1991b). It was reported that the South Texas border region only held three of the estimated 600 doctoral programs in the state (Hall, 1991b). LULAC ultimately lost their legal case, but the state legislature approved the South Texas/Border Initiative that greatly increased the fiscal appropriations for colleges and universities in South Texas, including LVU (Flack, 2003). As a result, LVU added nineteen doctoral programs in computer science, physics and chemistry, among others, between 1993 and 2005 (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, n.d.). Despite its early intentions to embody a Hispanic-Serving identity, this identity took time to build, considering how long it took for Latinx students to
enroll in large numbers at LVU. One of LVU’s biggest successes in supporting this identity was
in its pursuit of specific academic programs, especially graduate programs in STEM fields.

Azul City University

ACU was established in the mid-nineteenth century as a teacher training institution. Due
to the fact that the makeup of the city was mainly White, and as the institution had a regional
focus, the university primarily enrolled White students. But as the city population became more
Latinx, the university did not recruit or provide the necessary tools and resources to support
the success of its increasingly Mexican and Puerto Rican demographic. It became evident that
the student body would have to mobilize in order to acquire the proper resources for success.

Student activism. As a student at ACU, Rosa Hernandez strived to help her
community by tutoring English around her home in local churches. Recognizing the need to
know English to succeed in the U.S. while working with her community, she asked the college’s
community service coordinator to help her create a language center. With the help of Rosa’s
fellow classmates, Rosa went on to secure funding from the U.S. Office of Education Funds. The
ACU President, in his memoir, stated that the center served two purposes. First, to make the
community aware of the university; and second, to “give university students firsthand
experiences in working with urban problems” (Sachs, 1987, p. 83). The name of the language
center, Aqui Estoy (Here I am) was also symbolic, as it recognized not only the new student
population that was increasingly entering the university but also the population that surrounded
the university. The name also reassured the Latinx students that they were part of the
community, just like their White counterparts, and are there to stay.

As well as having a physical place close to campus, Estoy Aqui served a critical role in
providing the foundation for future college students to the Latinx community. For example, the
center stressed the importance of finishing high school (Lienemann & Smith, 1974) by providing
high school equivalency classes, which began with ten students (Gaber, 1971). After passing
their equivalency exam, two of these students enrolled in their local college to become
teachers and gave back to their communities.

Additionally, Aqui Estoy made it their duty to develop leaders to take roles within their
communities. The majority of Latinx that the center helped were part of the community who
worked at factories around the city. After long hours, they would come to learn English for
several hours weekly. As a grassroots effort, *Aquí Estoy* was a first step towards the university taking responsibility for helping the surrounding Latinx community believe college was a possibility for them.

**Student mobilization and resistance.** Students also created organizations as a way to voice their needs and concerns. The Union for Puerto Rican Students (UPRS) was formed in the summer of 1971 with the intention “to check ourselves to see how we [as Latinx] can go about the business of not only surviving academically, and socially, but thriving and contributing as well” (Rosario & Rios, 1971, p. 4). The UPRS made three initial contributions that laid the foundation for Latinx students at ACU. First, they made an effort to increase the number of Latinx staff members at the university. Secondly, they recognized that the Latinx student body was small for a city that had such a large Latinx population. Therefore, the UPRS submitted a request for a Latinx student recruitment program. Lastly, to aid the students who were brought in through the recruitment program, the UPRS, along with several professors from various departments, created the English Language Program to aid in the success of college courses. These efforts made by UPRS clearly demonstrate the struggles that Latinx felt on ACU’s campus as an invisible, yet growing group. As a result, the group pushed for change as a way to bring the necessary resources for success.

With a predominantly White staff and student population at ACU, the UPRS made it their agenda to acquire a Latinx staff member by approaching the President and requesting a Latinx counselor (Torres, 1994). Consequently, the university President hired its first Latinx counselor in the fall of 1971 who made an impact on the student body at the university by providing guidance to the university’s Latinx students. However, the university was not completely committed to supporting this effort, as the counselor’s office space was dilapidated: the furniture that filled his room was broken, filthy, and unstable. According to Torres (1994), “It was full of holes, through which the cushion material was clearly visible (p. 8).” As a direct response to the provided office space to the counselor, the UPRS students took the broken furniture to the President’s Office and demanded that the furniture be replaced. Through their actions, the UPRS continued to advocate for Latinx students at the university.

The UPRS also developed a recruitment program titled, *Proyecto Pa’lante [Project Forward]*. When UPRS approached the President to ask for such a program, the President responded that the organization should talk to the professor in charge of the African American
recruitment program for help (Torres, 1994). The UPRS replied by saying that they respected and recognized that the African American program was born from its own struggle, and they did not want to take anything away from that program. Additionally, they reiterated their view that the Latinx student community at ACU had their “own specific need of self-determination” (Torres, 1994, p. 7). In the Fall of 1972 “in spirit” the President’s administration accepted the Latinx recruitment program proposal and accepted the first 80 Proyecto Pa’lante students. This was indeed a major victory for the organization and a step towards the university becoming an HSI.

Although Proyecto Pa’lante was initiated, there was still a dire need to support the Latinx students who were not prepared to succeed in higher education, so the UPRS created a retention program that focused on students’ writing skills. The English Language Program (ELP) was created with the help of several professors from different departments such as English, Linguistics, and Foreign Languages as an effort to support the incoming students who were struggling with basic writing. This program was critical in that it retained the students from Proyecto Pa’Lante, among others, beyond their first semester or year. Before the initial creation of the ELP, there was a lack of full support from the President and one of the leading professors who was helping spearhead this program was fired. Subsequently, 250 students occupied the Dean’s office of Arts and Sciences demanding to meet with the President to discuss the creation of the ELP and to rehire the professor that was fired (Torres, 1994). While meeting with the President the UPRS stressed that the ELP offered the opportunity to retain Latinx students on campus and as a result the President “agreed that the idea of an English Language Program was worthy” (Torres, 1994, p. 12).

University efforts to dismantle the UPRS. Although the UPRS had several successes, there were also efforts to dismantle their cause. The ACU administration’s attempt in dismantling the UPRS came in the form of hiring two different Latino males in positions of power who were ineffective in their roles and caused tension between members of UPRS. The first Latino was the director of an organization that catered to the needs of Latinx students and also served as a Special Assistant to the Vice President for Academic Affairs. The new director was not effective in setting up programs or meeting deadline dates that he promised; in fact, he exploited his position by campaigning as an aldermanic candidate as well as enrolled as a full-time law student at a university in the city (Kosinski, 1975a). He displayed a lack of dedication
to the Latinx student population at ACU he was hired to serve, and the UPRS responded by hosting a sit-in in the President’s office and called for the director’s removal.

The second Latino hired at ACU was the Vice President for Academic Affairs. According to the President of the UPRS, “the movements were underway among the administration with the help of faculty members once favorable to the Union to appoint a Puerto Rican administrator to pacify the militant Puerto Rican population of the university and avoid confrontations which have occurred in the past” (Kosinski, 1975b, p. 1). The tensions that arose between this Vice President and the UPRS came from the threats that the Vice President made. In addition to threatening to expel the UPRS student president, the Vice President allegedly told him, “I will not tolerate what the ACU administration has in the past from the [UPRS]. I am not bullshitting with you. If I can’t control the Union, I will destroy it” (Kosinski, 1975c, p.1 & 3). Despite these claims made by the president of the UPRS, the Vice President did indeed take actions to dismantle the UPRS, including taking away the facilities that the organization used. Again, the UPRS demonstrated their concern by occupying the ACU President’s office and demanding their space to be returned. After three hours of occupation by the UPRS, the President came up with a solution to temporarily provide the UPRS an area until the end of the semester. The president of UPRS claimed that their success was due to the joint efforts of the UPRS and the university arm of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party.

Next, the ACU administration also attempted to destroy the UPRS from within. UPRS President Gutierrez says “that Camacho [a former UPRS student who was expelled due to an infraction] is only a tool of a racist administration which sought to pit ‘students against students, Puerto Ricans against Puerto Ricans with regards to controversial matters such as the selection of an executive director for the CLASES Institute” (Kosinski, 1975d, p. 1). The President of the university strategically used the student Camacho as a way to split the UPRS. For example, after Camacho left UPRS, he attempted to create his own organization which would “deal with specific problems of the Latinos with regards to education and culture including financial aid. The new organization would be non-political and not in opposition to the union but an alternative” (Kosinski, 1975d, p. 2).

Historically looking at the way ACU has improved the services to its Latinx student population, the resources would have not been available if not for the grassroots efforts of the UPRS and other students (e.g., Rosa). Indeed, these resources have historically aided the Latinx
student population for several decades. More recently, ACU has taken up the task of helping the undocumented population by putting forth the undocumented student project, which provides help in applying for financial aid as well as hosting Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) application workshops. In addition to the continuation of these specific resources, other support systems have been created to cater not only to the Latinx student population but also to the undocumented, women, Asian, Black, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and ally student body.

The resources attained by the efforts of the Latinx students’ activism at ACU during the 60’s and 70’s are still present for current Latinx students at ACU, despite efforts by administration to dismantle the UPRS. Moreover, each of the gains made by the UPRS have improved the lives of the students who attend ACU. In fact, the center *Aqui Estoy* has expanded not only in size but in providing classes for students at ACU as well as the surrounding neighborhood as it has done in the past. After only seven years in service to the Latinx community, the storefront *Aqui Estoy* was quickly transformed—with a different name—as a satellite extension of ACU offering not only an academic program with college credits for the community and incoming students but also a full-time staff. Underscoring the lasting impact of *Aqui Estoy*, in the late 2000’s the center enrolled more than 1000 students. Because enrollment is critical to serving the Latinx community, *Proyecto Pa’lante* is still ongoing with the same efforts to recruit and admit students.

**Discussion**

As previous noted, the HSI designation has been criticized as a “manufactured identity” (Contreras et al., 2008). In both LVU and ACU, however, we observed an organic progression of the HSI identity into what we call “intentional” and “grassroots” HSIs. LVU was “intentional” in that its creation specifically centered on serving a predominantly Latinx-populated region. However, Latinx students did not enroll at LVU in larger numbers for a decade and a half, and despite its presence as an HSI, debates about Latinx access and representation on its campus raged on at various points in its history. ACU is a “grassroots HSI” in that the struggle for Latinx representation, especially in student services and space, was student-led. The resulting programs like *Aqui Estoy* impacted not only students on campus but the local Latinx community.

As noted by Núñez and Elizondo (2015), there is a large degree of variation in four-year HSIs
because of their individual local contexts. In considering the history and development of HSIs as a collective body, researchers should take note that HSIs are at once local and collective spaces. In challenging this notion of HSIs as a “manufactured identity,” researchers should look at ways that Hispanic-serving practices are absorbed into an institutional mission and identity and how the presence of Latinx students, faculty, and staff transform the space.

The key events of action and resistance in the history of these two HSIs reveals several common threads in observing transformational change in developing a HSI identity: Latinx students, faculty, and organized groups encountered resistance when trying to create or reinforce a Hispanic-Serving identity, and these two institutions have provided different types of access and advocacy for Latinx students. Among the highly contextualized factors of these universities are the students themselves: LVU serves a predominantly Mexican and Mexican-American population while the thrust of influence behind ACU’s development into an HSI came from its Puerto Rican population. The area of South Texas where LVU is located has historically had a large Latinx population since its establishment centuries ago, given its proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border. Therefore, English as a Second Language programs were not just about teaching non-native students to speak English but about preparing future teachers for the region.

ACU’s early history and location in the Midwest does not indicate it was meant to be an HSI. Since the 1970s, ACU students pushed for academic and social programs for Latinx students to promote their long-term retention and success. These efforts prompted the creation of physical spaces and dedicated staff positions to work with this specific student population that are still operating. When students’ efforts met resistance or deflection, the UPRS did not hesitate to take their concerns and grievances directly to the ACU President. The transformational change in their efforts to embed programs and practices that serve the Latinx student population, was largely the work of students and the handful of administrators who supported them.

In contrast, LVU’s main successes in serving Latinx students was in establishing academic programs, especially graduate programs, in areas where Latinx graduates have been historically underserved nationally including STEM fields. The Pre-Freshman Engineering Program, aimed at boosting minority students’ interests in these fields from a young age, began at LVU and later expanded to other institutions around the city, state, and beyond. What is also notable for LVU
is its role in providing access to Latinx students in times where diversity and affirmative action-based admissions policies prompted fierce debate about the capabilities of Latinx students and their representation in institutions of higher education, especially four-year universities. At LVU, it is worth noting that faculty played a key role in advocating for better access and representation of Latinx faculty and students, whereas at ACU the efforts were student-led.

There are two important points that should not be lost. First, the push to improve the access and quality of academic and student programs on both campuses began as early as the 1970s, demonstrating that at least two institutions strove for a Hispanic-Serving identity prior to the creation of a federal designation (though Calderón Galdeano et al., 2012 proves there were many more in addition to LVU and ACU). Second, they highlight the power of individuals and small groups to enact meaningful change on their campuses in service to Latinx students. One mathematics professor at LVU started a program in the 1980s to promote Latinx participation in engineering while Puerto Rican students at ACU in the 1970s fought for physical spaces; the fruits of these efforts persist today.

Conclusions and Implications

In trying to gauge how HSIs engage their HSI identity, a well-documented challenge within the HSI literature (Contreras et al., 2008), we argue that researchers should look at the local history and context of the respective institution’s location and how the institution and/or its students have responded. If HSI identity is in fact a “manufactured identity,” we would assume that responses to Latinx students would be quite generic and similar. However, in the case of these two HSI, the responses differed greatly. The change brought about at ACU in the 1970s was due to a small number of students, so perhaps having a large student population on a campus is not as important as the actions of the collective, regardless of size. As a result, a small group of students were able to push for spaces and programs that eventually became a permanent part of the school’s structure, which gave way to an increased enrollment of Latinx students and, eventually, the HSI designation.

As HSIs develop their capacity to serve Latinx students, it is also crucial to maintain awareness about how transformational change occurs in organizations. Hurtado and Alvarado Ruiz (2015) point out that short-term programs and interventions often come and go. The Pre-Freshman Engineering Program at LVU is a better example of a program that has made
meaningful impact given its longevity and the high number of students it has impacted over the last nearly four decades. A historical perspective of successes and failures offers a chance for researchers, policy makers, and administrators to see what has worked at other institutions with success and what programs may require further planning or funding prior to implementation that would boost long-term sustainability.

While the body of research on HSIs is still rapidly expanding, this historical perspective takes stock of the place of HSIs before 1992 when the federal category was created. This perspective does not generate a set of common denominators for the change processes that institutions undergo in becoming HSIs, at least not in the two institutions in this study. However, there are some similarities the development of LVU and ACU both demonstrate a need to look inward at the campus and outward at the community to determine what Latinx students need. It shows that resistance is likely, but sustained activism can lead to transformative change. These campuses also show that efforts to create a Hispanic-Serving identity cannot be done by one lone person; instead, it requires cooperation and collaboration.

The Latinx struggle for access, representation, and student support services in higher education is not limited to predominantly White institutions, and it is important to understand that HSIs are not immune to these struggles by virtue of this designation. As scholars and administrators engage in work that sets out to better define what it is meant to be an HSI, the histories of LVU and ACU indicate that this designation is one that is developed over time and is not without controversy, even in majority-minority contexts like the surrounding area of LVU. As such, this study offers a first look at these organizational processes at two HSIs with a historical perspective. Given the current political climate of the United States, the past challenges of LVU and ACU could be instructive to newer or aspiring HSIs who want to invest in the success of Latinx students.
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The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley:  
Reframing HSIs through a Multi-Sited Ethnography

Maritza De La Trinidad  
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Francisco Guajardo  
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Peter L. Kranz  
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Miguel Guajardo  
Texas State University

Abstract
This article contributes to the study of Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) through a narrative grounded on two points of innovation. It offers frameworks to decenter the conversation on HSIs from normative practices in higher education to focus on pedagogical, cultural, and political relational processes that find greater congruence between nominal HSIs and the Latina/o\(^1\) students, families, and the communities that populate those universities. It looks at points of innovation that emerged in two different parts of the country at different places, spaces, and time. One was initiated at the University of North Florida (UNF) in the early-to-mid-1970s, and the second is taking place at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley in South Texas (UTRGV). The UNF experience placed race relations front and center of its innovation, and offers an appropriate historical lens through which to understand the social and

\(^{1}\)This article uses several terms depending on context. Hispanic and Latino are pan-ethnic terms used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau to classify a diverse population with origins in Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic (and other parts of the Caribbean), Central America, South America, and Spain. The Latina/o population in the United States currently stands at 55 million. The Mexican-origin population includes Mexican nationals, U.S.-born citizens, naturalized citizens, undocumented immigrants, and the children of recent immigrants. Mexican American and Hispanic is used to be consistent with historical context or literature on Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs). Chicana/o is used in historical context for Mexican Americans who call themselves Chicanas//os. Ennis, S. R., Rios-Vargas, M., & Albert, N. G. (2011). *The Hispanic population: 2010: 2010 census briefs*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic and Statistics Administrations, U.S. Census Bureau.

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.24974/amae.11.3.361
institutional change taking place in South Texas. The UTRGV work provides an example of how an HSI can align its curricular and core identity to reflect the population and region it serves. This study employs a methodology and theoretical framework that aligns the inquiry, pedagogy, and meaning-making process in a generative and relational discourse.

**Introduction**

This article contributes to the discourse on the role of Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) by escorting the conversation into the uncomfortable place of situating race, culture, and language at the center of analysis and institution-building. The authors view race as a socio-cultural, political, and legal construct (Haney López, 1996; Omi & Winant; 2014; Wexler, 2010), and institution-building as a response to race, culture, language, and identity (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2017; Guajardo, Guajardo, Militello, & Janson, 2016; Kranz, Steele, & Lund, 2005). This work expands the conversation surrounding HSIs by focusing on race, agency, and historical consciousness through a comparative analysis. This examination juxtaposes The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley’s (UTRGV) purpose to become a bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate university with a specific racial project (Omie & Winant 2014) instituted at the University of North Florida (UNF). The analysis underscores the importance of how race plays out in the fabric of American society and culture and its impact on higher education. The UNF project provides a lens through which to examine leadership in institution-building and contributes to the study of HSIs by pushing the discourse toward new analytical and epistemological terrain.

This article further contributes to the study of HSIs by providing a theoretical framework that informs this analysis and expanded conversation. This framework draws from historical racial projects, identifies cultural fronts as points of tension and innovations, and encourages a dynamic critical pedagogy that privileges the student, faculty, and community as creators of knowledge and power. It adds another dimension to the growing body of literature by breaking the normative approach to the study of HSIs, which is necessary for developing hybrid responses to difficult and persistent questions. The authors believe that complex

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2 This article uses Black and White because the name of class at the University of North Florida was titled “Conflict in Black and White.” It uses White for consistency with the terminology of the U.S. Census Bureau. It uses African American when used in context of the research literature.
methods and strategies are required to learn more deeply about historical issues that have persisted in education, including access, quality, and innovation related to climate, curriculum, and knowledge.

The article explores historical and contemporary understandings of race through curriculum and institution-building projects. One such project, the Venture Studies program, took shape at the University of North Florida (UNF) at the point of its inception and was supported by its founding president. The other project currently is unfolding at UTRGV as the institution seeks to implement the university’s guiding principles to promote bilingualism, biculturalism, and biliteracy throughout its curricular programs. The project at UNF addressed racial tensions between White and Black Americans reflected in the demographic realities of place, space, and time. The critical discourse on HSIs is significantly aided by looking at pertinent, examples of projects that place race and culture front and center of its new curriculum such as that instituted at UNF.

The project at UTRGV focuses on a more complex dialectic on race and racial tensions, as Mexican Americans have historically been viewed as “Caucasian,” even as they have been treated as a racialized group (Anzaldúa, 1987; Blanton, 2004; Gómez, 2007; Guajardo & Guajardo, 2004; Menchaca, 2001; Molina, 2014; Montejano, 1987; San Miguel, 1987). The history of Mexican Americans is characterized by policies and practices that relegated this population to second-class citizenship as a non-White racial group (Menchaca, 2001; Gómez, 2007). The historiography chronicles the cultural front that led to the historical racialization of Mexican-origin people that resulted in their social, economic, and political exclusion. Scholars trace the process of subordination to the industrialization of the Southwest that began after the U.S.-Mexico war ended in 1848 (Acuña, 1988; Barrera, 1979; Griswold del Castillo, 1990; Gómez, 2007). Like African Americans in the deep South and elsewhere, Mexican Americans experienced residential, school, and social segregation, labor segmentation, and political disenfranchisement throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

UNF developed as an institution at a cultural front and point of innovation that grappled

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3 After the U.S.-Mexico War ended in 1848, Mexicans in the acquired territories, which numbered about 100,000-110,000 were granted citizenship in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. During this period, citizenship was conferred only to white male land owners and only whites could be naturalized, thus under the Treaty, Mexicans citizenship status was equated with being white.
with the contentious racial tensions that plagued Black-White relations rooted in race relations of the American South. UTRGV stands at its own point of innovation, as it seeks to reconcile issues of race, culture, language, and identity through its institution-building efforts. The authors’ roles in participating in the birth and growth of the comparative institutions provide unique perspectives of the development of innovative curricular programming. As faculty members and administrators, the authors are engaged in the response to institutional and regional racial, ethnic, and cultural realities within their respective disciplines.

**Context & Institution-Building**

UNF and UTRGV have distinct histories and were chosen as case studies for analysis because both universities exercised institutional risk-taking during times of social and political contention. UNF’s innovation took place while the South continued to grapple with the realities of *Brown v. Board of Education Topeka* (Coleman, Kelly & Moore, 1975). UNF’s Venture Studies program tackled the issue of racial tension that plagued Black and White relations through a bold innovative course called “Conflict in Black and White.” UTRGV was born by legislative mandate in 2013 and opened its doors in the fall of 2015 in response to a socio-political and human capital readiness for greater regional investment in higher education. The university’s innovation is marked by the advent of a B3 Institute (Bilingual, Bicultural, Biliterate—English and Spanish) to expand and promote existing coursework and curricula that can be delivered in Spanish or bilingually and through culturally relevant pedagogies. This innovation comes during a time of heightened racial tensions where border walls and deportations shape the social and political discourse, especially in the Rio Grande Valley. Both universities played, and continue to play, significant roles in shaping their respective socio-cultural and economic regional environments. Similarities exist between the curricular innovations each institution developed to address critical community issues stemming from race relations. UNF created an innovative Venture Studies program that explored race relations at the height of the Civil Rights Movement. Along the border, UTRGV is transforming itself as a bilingual and bicultural institution through innovative curricular, pedagogical, research and service initiatives at the height of contentious immigration debates. These two examples highlight points of innovation amidst points of tension at different historical times and places.

Located in Jacksonville, Florida, UNF was nestled in a cultural and political environment
that mirrored the values and practices deeply embedded in the American south. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Jacksonville was marked by segregation in schools, housing, and discrimination in the job market. The Ax Handle incident precipitated by boycotts led by Black youth in the early 1960s highlighted the racial angst in the community (Hurst, 2008). In 1970, Jacksonville’s total population was 528,865 with Whites comprising 407,695 and Blacks 118,158. Whites made up 77.7% of the population and Blacks were 22.3%.4

The founding president of UNF was hired in the late 1960s to build the infrastructure for new upper-division and graduate programs. UNF would be launched with approximately 500 students and would grow to 5,000 during its first decade. The student body was largely white, but saw an increasing enrollment of Black students. Building a new university combined with the socio-cultural and political milieu of the day formed a backdrop primed for creativity and innovation through curricula and programming. One such innovation supported by the UNF’s founding president included a bold experiment that would bring students and community members from different racial backgrounds together through a program called Venture Studies. Shortly after the university opened its doors to students in the fall of 1972, a class called “Human Conflict in Black and White” was developed and taught in the Psychology Department. The class responded to the institutional impulse for innovation as part of Venture Studies. It also responded to the need for students to have access to a curriculum that fostered a deeper understanding of the historical racial tension and conflict between White and Black Americans rooted in U.S. race relations. “Human Conflict in Black and White” would provide a transformative educational experience for who enrolled in this course and would become a celebrated example of the possibilities for higher education to delve into the challenging societal issue of race (Kranz et al., 2005; Kranz, Ramirez, Steele, & Lund, 2006).

The discourse on race in the 1970s drew almost exclusively from the history of race relations between Whites and Blacks in the United States. The White/Black binary was a well-established historical narrative in the 1970s, and it continues to dominate the terms for discussions on race well into the 21st century. The demographic shifts in the United States that occurred between the 1970s and the new millennium due to increased migration from areas south of the border caused a dramatic flux in the definition of race and the meaning of ethnicity.

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and culture. The new demography of the nation requires a redefinition and expanded discourse of this historical framework. The ebb and flow of race relations in American history provides the context for the creation of both universities. While UNF was born during the Civil Rights Movement, UTRGV was recently created amidst a different socio-cultural and political environment. A different brand of activism defined by institution-building has gripped this region of the borderlands. The founding of UTRGV is the most prominent example of this change that includes a new medical school and new state-of-the-art academic facilities. A guiding principle of the new university calls for building an HSI that reflects the cultural and linguistic heritage of its surrounding community. Given its location, UTRGV is poised to reshape the social, cultural, and economic dynamics of the region as it seeks to integrate bilingualism, biculturalism, and biliteracy through curricular and programmatic innovations. UTRGV is leading efforts to create official bilingual zones, dual language programs in local public schools, and stronger connections between the university and families, community organizations and other stakeholders.

This article employs a multi-sited ethnographic methodology. It looks at a racial project at UNF in the early 1970s that encouraged the creation of cutting-edge courses. And it examines an institution-building initiative at UTRGV that is building bilingualism, biculturalism, and biliteracy into its curricula through innovative pedagogy and programming. In studying the two cases, it looks at nuanced racial, cultural, and linguistic spaces through the cultural fronts analytical framework that informs the learning across races and cultural groups. The two sites engage in projects that address racial issues which we use as units of analysis to inform this research and imagine new discourses, practices, and policies for future HSI work. Pedagogical practices include building positive relationships, creating community-engagement projects, learning in a bi-directional manner, debriefing conversations, and reflecting on lived experiences. It also includes the art of creating new knowledge and privileging latent community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) embedded in communities of color that are oftentimes not acknowledged or legitimized by formal institutions. We explore the nuanced spaces created by these projects while maintaining the authenticity of the lived experiences. What follows is a snapshot of the lessons learned from the past and how they can be applied to and inform the development of curricula, pedagogical practices, and a new brand of HSIs.
The purpose of this work is to augment the study of HSIs by providing a better understanding of how these institutions can move toward curricula, instruction, research, and service that reflect and respond to the populations they serve. It achieves this by analyzing the innovative work of two distinct universities with different populations in two contexts. The article does not intend to engage in an analysis of the entire deep South, but we find that the educational, cultural, and political lessons of the Ventures Studies program in north Florida can inform the racial, political, and pedagogical encounters experienced along the U.S.-Mexico border at a different geopolitical context and time. While the demography of each site is different, the conflict created by the encounters of multiple worlds of values, practices, culture, politics, and identities are similar and transferable. This article chronicles the experiences and theories used to make sense of the lived experiences and it places this work in conversation within HSI literature. The authors intentionally de-center the conversation from the HSI by moving it beyond the norm of university learning. The theoretical framework draws from historical racial projects, identifies cultural fronts as points of tension and innovations, and provides a dynamic critical pedagogy that privileges the student, faculty, and community as creators of knowledge and power.

In the following sections, we outline the historical background of HSIs and the methodology of the article. We also describe a racial theory in practice, and examine lived experiences as observables by delving into micro ethnographies situated in north Florida and the Rio Grande Valley of Texas. A discussion of the lessons learned and recommendations concludes the document. These are accompanied by a discussion of challenges, possibilities, and opportunities related to transforming higher education environments that respond to the historical, cultural, and racial realities of students. This article highlights a theoretical framework that broadens the meaning of access in higher education beyond the brick and mortar of the university to provide educational equity. It offers a framework that allows faculty, administrators, and students to make meaning of issues of race, ethnicity, and class in different cultural contexts, places, and time. This expanded meaning of access focuses on giving Latina/o students enhanced contact with ideas, conceptual knowledge, and the intellectual tools to enable them to challenge historical boundaries and move beyond the “borders” of regional, cultural, and economic isolation.
Historical Background of HSIs

The term Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) as an official designation was formalized in 1992 when Congress reauthorized the 1965 Higher Education Act (HEA) under Title III, and again in 1998 under Title V. Under this legislation HSIs are defined as “…accredited and degree-granting public or private nonprofit institutions of higher education with 25% or more total undergraduate Hispanic full-time equivalent student enrollment” (Laden, 2001, 2004; Santiago, 2006, p. 3). Inspired by the opportunities gained by Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) stemming from the HBCU designation under the 1965 HEA, the notion of a “Hispanic Institution,” gained traction during the early 1980s (Laden, 1999 & 2001; Nevárez, M., personal communication, August 20, 2016). Leaders in Texas, New Mexico, Illinois, and Puerto Rico recognized that Latina/o students who were concentrated in colleges and universities with limited resources represented “a definable group in higher education” that faced unique challenges in completing college degrees (Santiago, 2006, p. 6). In 1986, leaders from New Mexico and Texas created the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) and decided that a university or college with a Hispanic student population of 25% was a sufficient critical mass for the HSI designation (Santiago, 2006; Nevárez, M., personal communication, August 20, 2016; Avila & Pankake, 2016).

In 1987 the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and other advocacy organizations filed a class-action lawsuit against the State of Texas, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, and several state universities with the assistance from the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF). In LULAC et al. v. Ann Richards et al., MALDEF lawyers argued that Mexican Americans in South Texas and other areas along the U.S.-Mexico border were denied equitable access to the state’s flagship university systems. They were also denied access to comprehensive graduate and doctoral programs, professional schools, and state funding for institutions of higher education in the region. MALDEF also argued the state’s method of distributing funds for higher education discriminated against students and schools along the border. In response to the lawsuit, in 1989 the Texas State Legislature created the South Texas Border Initiative to increase funding to nine border universities and brought the University of Texas-Pan American and University of Texas at Brownsville under the University of Texas System (Flack, 2003). In 1992, a District State Court ruled in favor of LULAC, finding the state’s funding system for higher education unconstitutional.
Muñoz, 1991; Santiago, 2006). The following year, the Texas Supreme Court overturned the District Court’s favorable ruling in LULAC v Richards. Despite this loss, the reauthorization of the HEA and creation of an official HSI designation under Title III signaled a positive move “to improve and expand the capacity of Hispanic-Serving Institutions to serve Latina/o and other low-income students” via federal funding (Santiago, 2006, p. 7). Since then, HSIs have significantly increased access to higher education for Latina/o students nationwide.

Although UTRGV’s legacy institutions were predominantly White in enrollment in their early years, they became de facto HSIs by the 1980s due to the demographic shifts in the region (Avila & Pankake, 2016; Cortez, 2011). This demographic shift was captured by one UTPA administrator who stated, “We have always been an HSI and there needs to be a different designation for us who are doing it with greater numbers” (Cortez, 2011, p. 162).

Although the university did not gain official HSI status until after 1992, some faculty, staff, and administrators already perceived it as a “Hispanic Institution” (Avila & Pankake, 2016; Cortez,
The continued growth of the Mexican-origin population in the region is currently reflected in UTRGV’s predominant Mexican-origin student population (90%), making it one of the highest Latina/o percentage HSIs (Santiago, 2008; Excelencia in Education, 2016a).\(^8\)

Because of this demographic reality, recent studies of HSIs call for a new mission to provide Latina/o students with an equitable education that acknowledges and nurtures their cultural and linguistic wealth to promote academic success and college-completion rates (de los Santos & Cuamea, 2010; Greene et al., 2012; Lara & Lara, 2012; Núñez & Bowers, 2011). Given persistently low graduation rates, location, and demographics, UTRGV looks to other models of student success geared toward Latina/o students (Contreras & Contreras 2015; Núñez, Ramalho, & Cuero, 2010). As a new HSI, UTRGV has a rare opportunity to create a “more intentional” “Latina/o-enhancing” university that serves students by providing curricula that are culturally relevant, inclusive, and transformative—curricula that focus on Latina/o students’ lived experiences, knowledge, and cultural wealth (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Cuellar, 2016; Gonzales, 2016; Greene et al., 2012; Lara & Lara, 2012; Núñez et al., 2010; Yosso, 2005).

UTRGV also has a unique opportunity to “develop a culture that is relevant to Latina/o students” and become “Latina/o-enhancing,” “meaning that students not only see themselves in the institutional practice, but develop a deeper sense of self along the way” (Corral, Gasman, Nguyen, & Samayoa, 2015; García, n.d.). This paradigm shift compels the university to institutionalize a mission that is historically and epistemologically congruent with the realities of Latina/o students and their communities (Arciniega, 2012; Brown, Santiago, & López, 2003; Kranz & Lund, 1998; Santiago, 2009).

**Method and Theoretical Framework**

Research shows that college choice among Latina/o students is based upon proximity to family, cost of higher education (Brown et al., 2003; Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Flores & Park, 2015; Núñez & Bowers, 2011), and the reality of their lived experiences. Factors such as cultural and academic capital, family influence, socioeconomic status, peers, and potential

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\(^8\) The Rio Grande Valley is comprised of four counties (Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, and Willacy) and has a population of 1.3 million residents. Latinos/as make up 89% of Cameron County, 91% of Hidalgo County, 96% of Starr County, and 88% of Willacy County. (See www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045216/48489,48061,48427,48215,00)
employment opportunities also determine whether students attend or transfer to a 4-year college, including HSIs (Núñez & Bowers, 2011). Students at UTRGV fit this general profile. For the most part, students at UTRGV choose to attend college close to home because it is more affordable and they can remain close to family. Many students have additional responsibilities of caring for their own children, parents, and/or extended family members while working full-time jobs. Culturally, students have familial knowledge and experience centered in Mexican, Mexican-American, Anglo-American, and trans-national border cultures. Family, faith, and a strong work-ethic are central values. While Spanish is commonly heard in the halls and classrooms students vary in their levels of Spanish proficiency. According to the American Community Survey (2013), an estimated 80.4% of RGV residents are Spanish-speakers. Student skill level ranges from being fully bilingual, partially bilingual, or from having knowledge and understanding of Spanish as a heritage or home language (Brown et al., 2003; Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Delgado-Gaitán, 2004; Núñez & Bowers, 2011; U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

To capture the shift of the historical framework that represents the reality of lived experiences within a different time, space, and place, we adopted a multi-site ethnography as method for this inquiry. This methodological approach allows researchers to systematically chronicle, inquire, and examine the phenomenology within lived experiences (Marcus, 1995; Pierides, 2010). The authors propose this method as a tool for exploring the daily lives of people and communities within a world systems context. This method facilitates the study of academic initiatives that are cross-disciplined, as it probes two dynamic and purposeful cross-cultural racial projects (Omi & Winant, 2014). The projects are grounded in pedagogical strategies designed to influence the human conditions of students, organizations, and communities in two geographic spaces during two different times. The two communities are distinct and diverse in their composition and socio-political dynamics, yet both address issues of race, ethnicity, and culture in different ways. Examining these two distinct sites allows the research team to interrogate the stubborn systems that have sustained the status quo in universities and communities as it looks at institutional projects that aim to break the cycle of oppression, racism, and stagnation in higher education.

The data sources include student evaluations, student testimonials, and ethnographic notes of faculty members and administrators immersed in the work at both ethnographic sites. The ethnographic data, especially student testimonials of their transformational learning
experiences, supports the secondary literature that demonstrates the effectiveness of providing culturally relevant pedagogical methods such as building voice and story, community-based projects, and critical self-reflection that brings student knowledge and experience to higher education (Alvarez & Martínez, 2014; Guajardo & Guajardo 2017; Lara & Lara 2012). The authors analyze two racial projects through an examination of pedagogical, political, and transformational strategies to promote change for students and their communities. The purpose is to identify approaches to reframe the status quo (Guajardo et al., 2016) with a deliberate focus on points of contact or cultural fronts (Anzaldúa, 1987; González, 2001). This ethnography uses thick description (Geertz, 1973) to describe the moments of contact for people who come from different backgrounds and experiences. The method provides the space for narrative presentations of experiences and reflective thought by researchers and other participants who have lived these realities. The researchers have spent significant time at both sites at different times and understand the local histories, politics, racial, and cross-cultural experiences.

**Construction of a Racial Theory in Practice**

Race is a signifier and concept that is generative, continuously contested, and informed by a socio-historical amalgamation of events and actions informed by place, values, bias, and preconceived notions. This article proposes a framework shaped by place and people who are in relationship, engaged in institution building, and whose collective histories inspire their work. One clear assumption is to move beyond the idea that race is a biological issue. Ornstein (1993) tells us that biology matters little when discussing issues of race, and ample scientific research demonstrates this position (Wexler, 2010). Though biological premises serve as a sorting trait, science establishes there is little difference between races. The issue of race is largely a social construction grounded in socio-historical perspectives and human actions based on ill-conceived beliefs, values, and misconceptions.

This article considers the following theories to make meaning of racial phenomena. The racial formation process outlined by Omi and Winant (2014) acknowledges that racial formation is a deliberate action. Numerous examples in the history of the United States have revealed racial projects intended to hold people of color in marginalized spaces. These projects range from the micro-level of daily lived experiences to the macro-level of structural
interventions to create barriers to equal opportunity through policy, legislation, and practices. The historical practices marked by chattel slavery, de jure and de facto racial segregation, community planning practices, and school segregation establish a clear pattern and narrative. This pattern has also been contested through persistent efforts to right the historical wrongs of this country’s history. This emerging theory has utility in responding to meta-level analysis and mapping the socio-historical racial formation of communities.

González’s (2001) cultural fronts, a framework akin to Anzaldúa’s (1987) third space, or Borderland, find appropriate theoretical convergence. They speak to the unique intersection that is negotiated by diverse groups who come to the common space with varied experiences, values, and histories. The construction of this contact creates a new reality. The concept of cultural fronts is descriptive for the point of contact that creates the blending of two or more realities. The cultural front is a place of tension created when differences meet. This tension can be the impetus for creativity or conflict. The context and learning are dependent upon the preparation and facilitation of this contact.

An additional construct useful to this emerging theory is a framework advanced by Guajardo et al. (2016) to “make meaning” of this provocative racial exchange and phenomenon. This framework is guided by a dynamic-critical pedagogy that highlights the learning and development of people, organizations, and communities (Guajardo et al., 2016). It is a process that crosses boundaries and is informed by five axioms: 1) Learning and leadership are a dynamic social process; 2) Conversations are critical and central pedagogical processes; 3) The people closest to the issues are best situated to discover answers to local concerns; 4) Crossing boundaries enriches the development and educational process; and 5) Hope and change are built upon assets and dreams of locals and their communities.

These axioms are situated within a set of ecologies of knowing that span from the micro-level of the self, to the meso-level of organizations, and the macro-level of community, policy, and economy. This framework inspires and produces a dynamic theory of change. It is generative and allows for the topic to be identified, the point of contact to be negotiated, and for participants to be creators of knowledge and agents of their own transformation. We apply this framework to our pedagogical and institution-building practices. In the UNF experience for example, interracial activities and assignments formed the essence of the teaching and learning. In the UTRGV experience, the integration of bilingual and bicultural curricular development
shaped the new identity of the institution. Courses are taught across disciplines in Spanish and bilingually through the use of culturally relevant practices. Partnerships with community-based organizations also enhance community participation in shaping an education responsive to the people of the region.

Lived Experiences as Observables: The Experiment at the University of North Florida

“The Human Conflict in Black and White” course offers an appropriate micro example of how to engage the challenging issues of race, ethnicity, and history. When “Conflict” was created in the early 1970s, it probed deeply-ingrained attitudes about race held by both Black and White students through an intensive interactive process where students were required to live in different and often uncomfortable physical, social, and cultural spaces. An examination of the class shows a social and political context of notable racial tension. Approximately 90 undergraduate students across disciplines enrolled in the course over a six-year period. Taught by a licensed psychologist, course requirements included small group discussions of racial issues in a gracious space. Gracious space refers to a learning environment that promotes open and honest dialogue; it engenders climate that invites the stranger to learn in public (Hughes, 2004).

An important formative step in the implementation of the class was relationship-building between the professor and students, which led to a degree of trust necessary to cross racial borders. The learning taking place in this context allowed the strangers, in this case Black and White students and families, to co-construct a learning exchange that confronted issues of race, class, and other differences (Hughes, 2004). The learning space facilitated by the instructor allowed for a generative exploration of self, community, and society within a dialogical process driven by the students to places, spaces, and time where differences met. They read about racial issues, kept personal journals about relevant experiences, visited an HBCU, and spent a week in the home of someone from a different racial background. The interactive nature of the course compelled students to explore and define personal racial convictions in significant depth. Students realized their own prejudices, biases, and misconceptions as they listened to people from different lived realities. They found that the lack of personal contact with the different racial group engendered their ignorance and racialistic thought and behavior. Students came to understand their own negativity, which was often born from unfounded ideas. In addition to
helping class members learn about a different race, the experience enhanced personal development and self-discovery.

While enrolled in the class, two students, an African American student named Ann and a White student named Judi, reflected on the transformative pedagogical act of being in the same physical space with people of different races. In written testimony, Ann wrote that the class forced her to think differently about herself through a different racial lens. She stated that she would not have had this kind of experience had she not been invited to do so through the class and she argued that her understanding of race was enhanced through the experience. Growing up Black in the deep South kept her from having intimate conversations and exchanges with White people. She asserted that the class forced her to engage in a new cultural front and thereby, her views on race would be changed forever. Similarly, Judi reflected as she wrote about the prejudices that existed in her family growing up White in Jacksonville and how her Whiteness would be shaped out of this lived experience. Her close personal contact with Black students in the class compelled her to rethink her misconceptions about Black people. For both Ann and Judi, the class was instrumental in changing attitudes, perceptions, and feelings about members of the other group. Because the class fostered honest dialogue between the two groups, students’ views on race were questioned, discussed and transformed through difficult dialogue. Students’ personal growth was further enhanced by the requirement of a 7-day home visit with a family of the other race.

In a 20-year follow-up study, which included a reunion of the students from these classes, students reported that their experience was indeed profound and life-changing. Their responses reflected the transformative learning that occurred in the classes held during the 1970s. Students who took “Conflict in Black and White” and followed through with course requirements acknowledged that their previous implicit biases and prejudices were significantly altered. By going through this process, the students formed close interpersonal relationships (Kranz, Lund & Johnson, 1996; Kranz et al., 2005). The “Human Conflict in Black and White” class created the opportunities for the overlapping of the life worlds of students and communities with the systems world of faculty and university administration (Sergiovanni, 1999). The experience afforded faculty the opportunity to take pedagogical risks by engaging with sensitive and provocative issues pertaining to racial realities. Students reaped the rewards, as their testimonials demonstrated (Kranz et al., 2005).
One major reason “Human Conflict in Black and White” in the 1970’s was successful and received national media attention (Thurow, 1997) was due to the university administration’s strong support for the innovative courses of the Venture Studies program. The department chairs, deans, provost, and president had a clear vision for the university that embraced ground breaking courses in all major fields that challenged student perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes. The administration encouraged innovation and creativity; their only mandate was to make courses relevant to regional socio-historical conditions. As risk-taking was encouraged, faculty explored new material and teaching methods without fear of repercussions or censure. Student discomfort was anticipated, as these courses extended beyond the typical structure of lecture-only classes. The student was not to be a passive recipient of knowledge but was to be an active learner involved in the community and in dialogue with one another. The result was that students often found themselves reaching beyond their comfort zone as they explored new internal attitudes and external learning possibilities (Kranz et al., 2005).

The course fostered an exciting environment for creative and engaged learning. The positive working relationship created between faculty and administration enhanced trust and commitment to meaningful educational experiences for students and faculty. This point of innovation reflected in practice is supported by our conceptual framework of cultural fronts. When the dynamic critical pedagogy is employed, as evidenced in the UNF class experience, the opportunity for creating a new awareness for student, community partners, and the institution is presented. This dynamic bond added unique value to the learning process that went beyond typical academic pedagogical practices in higher education. This innovation challenged the students to critically think about where they were and where they needed to be and the critical self-reflection enabled students to confront their own knowledge. It is this opportunity for innovation that establishes the relationship between the UNF experience and the lived experience in UTRGV. Through multi-sited ethnography, we can transfer lessons learned from UNF to a different socio-cultural context and lived experience in a different time, space, and place. Student learning at UTRGV occurs within the context of the cultural front of the border region.
Expanding Access in a New HSI along the Texas-Mexico Border

In 2013, the University of Texas Pan American and the University of Texas at Brownsville were dissolved and merged by legislative mandate to create a new regional state university to serve South Texas. The legacy schools have historical roots in the region as they had important functions in community and regional development. They existed throughout the nineteen hundreds as comparatively under-resourced institutions. Although both joined the University of Texas System in the late 20th century, underfunding persisted for much of their existence. The move to dissolve, merge, and recreate was driven by the need to make greater investments in the development of the region, including higher education and healthcare. With the merger, the opportunity to access the Permanent University Fund (PUF), the multi-billion-dollar endowment of the University of Texas System became possible for the first time in the institution’s history.

Between the time the Texas legislature passed a bill to create the new university in 2013 and the time the university officially opened in September 2015, approximately one-half billion dollars were invested to develop the physical infrastructure of the new institution. A new medical school was built, along with a new science building, and many other brick and mortar additions that would change the look of higher education along the border. Scaffolds, cranes, and a new wave of brown-skinned construction workers would characterize the compelling portrait of the emerging university landscape. The physical layout of the university would never appear the same. In the face of the new construction, a new university with a new strategic plan emerged. Therein, it promises to pursue the following HSI-congruent goals: (1) it will build a bicultural, bilingual, biliterate infrastructure; 2) it will engage community through curricular and programmatic strategies, and (3) it will become a leading HIS in the United States. The remainder of the article highlights early actions guided by this strategic plan and lessons from Venture Studies program.

A historical reflection of how the legacy university viewed the local language is captured in a story told by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) describing the taming of “a wild tongue.” This story offers a poignant historical context that also serves as parable for the region. Anzaldúa attended Pan American College as a young woman, but before she enrolled she was first subjected to a speech test as part of a course placement practice. The practice was typically reserved for Mexican American students who may have spoken with thick accents. If they spoke with a
detectable accent they would be expeditiously dispatched to a remedial speech class, where their “wild tongues” would presumably be “tamed” (Anzaldúa, 1987; Cole & Johnson, 2014). The story of taming the wild tongue is not unique to the history of south Texas. College-going students from the Bronx, New York similarly had their pronounced Bronx accents rehabilitated when they attended any of the CUNY schools in the mid-20th century. Deborah Meier, who grew up in New York in the 1950s recalls, “My Jewish peers were forced to fix their accents, but so were Italians, Irish, and other kids from the Bronx” (Meier, 2016). College-going students from Appalachian regions and youth from other parts of the country faced similar institutional attitudes against regional and cultural speech patterns (Davis, D., personal communication with Francisco Guajardo, February 16, 2016).

Anzaldúa’s wild tongue experience implies much more than a linguistic adjustment and requires deeper levels of analysis. By the mid-20th century, the Mexican-origin population in south Texas had thus been established as a minority group generally subjected to the socio-political and economic conditions of the Jim Crow South (Barrera, 1979; Blanton, 2004; Montejano, 1987; Guajardo & Guajardo, 2004; San Miguel, 1987; Woodward, 1974). The advent of railroads and large-scale irrigation technologies pushed the old economy of ranching to the annals of history and gave way to a new capitalized agricultural economy. The region would be marketed as “the Magic Valley,” a tropical paradise with fertile land, good year-round weather, and cheap Mexican labor (Brannstrom & Newman, 2009; Montejano, 1987; Zamora, 1993). A two-tiered society emerged, where young Mexican Americans were more useful as agricultural or manual laborers than as students in which to invest academic capital. Their ability to pick crops and clear fields mattered more to employers than their academic abilities, refined speaking, or intellectual capacities (Acuña, 1988; Guajardo & Guajardo, 2004; González, 1990). Throughout the first half of the 20th century, Mexican Americans were discouraged from attending college due to economic and social reasons—Mexican Americans could not afford to pay for college and local growers and others did not perceive the educational advancement of Mexican Americans as expedient (Avila & Pankake, 2016; Guajardo & Guajardo 2004). Anzaldúa came of age within this socio-cultural milieu, a reality that would later in life inspire her to theorize about growing up in this borderland. The repressive racialist and linguistic practices of the university represented practices common across the region in what emerged as a place that instituted real and symbolic borders for Mexican-origin people.
Even as an increasing number of Mexican American students gained access to this university in the latter part of the 20th century, institutional practices such as the speech test, failure to recruit and retain a diverse faculty, and a chronic level of underinvestment in the public-school system across the region presented systemic barriers for this group. The wild tongue was much more than a matter of language; it also implicated race, class, regional development, and acceptance of Mexican Americans as second-class citizens (Montejano, 1987; Guajardo & Guajardo, 2004). The wild tongue symbolized more than speech—it represented an ethos that established a collective expectation for an entire community.

While attitudes of the wild tongue persisted through the 20th century, broad socioeconomic and economic changes were set in motion in the late 1960s and 1970s that fostered social, political, and institutional change. In 1966, local melon farm workers staged a strike against melon farmers to protest low wages, poor working conditions, and unfair labor practices. Two years later, local high school students followed others across the Southwest and staged a series of walkouts to protest systemic injustices marked by racism and other forms of discrimination, including language suppression (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2004; Muñoz, 2007; Navarro, 1995). The impulses for change mirrored the macro forces of the larger civil rights movement aimed at creating a more just society.

In this borderlands region, an irony materialized when Anzaldúa’s alma mater emerged as an important incubator for regional transformation. As more Mexican American students enrolled at the university in the late 20th century and as many began to graduate, a Mexican American middle-class developed. As the old millennium gave way to the next, a new consciousness began to take root, and a strategic push for a more significant investment in higher education for Latinas/os eventually made its way into the halls of the Texas Legislature (Flack, 2003; Santiago, 2011). Compelled by legal action, the argument at the legislature centered upon the historic underinvestment of higher education along the Texas-Mexico border, and the pressing need to respond to the economic, healthcare, and educational needs of the community. When the governing body proposed a set of principles to guide the creation of the new university, including a move to promote “bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate” programming, it evolved from an institution that “tamed a wild tongue” to one that advocated for bilingualism, biculturalism, and biliteracy.

Over the years, changes have been palpable at the legacy institutions in terms of physical
facilities and academic programming that encourages students to critically evaluate issues of race, ethnicity, culture, language, and history. Similar to students who took “Human Conflict” and like courses in the Venture Studies program, students who enroll in Mexican American Studies (MAS) courses report benefiting from “life changing” experiences when for the first time read Rodolfo Acuña (1988), engaged with Anzaldúa’s Borderlands theory, or discovered critical race theory (CRT) as a lens of analysis. Like the Venture Studies program that was created at UNF in the early 1970s, Mexican American/Chicano Studies also came of age in the early 1970s and shaped by events that occurred during the Civil Rights era. The programs initially emerged as Chicano Studies programs within colleges and universities in California and other states in the Southwest, however they are now found in colleges and universities across the nation.

While Mexican American Studies at UTRGV has existed in different forms, the transdisciplinary nature of the current program offers students the opportunity to critically analyze issues of ethnicity, race, class, culture, language, and political economy in the context of their own lived experiences and that of their families and communities. Students and faculty reflect upon the seeming reversal of hegemonic forces. They sense a transformation that is personal, institutional, and regional in the emerging work guided by culturally and linguistically relevant pedagogical practices. Writing for Excelencia in Education, a nonprofit research organization, Gina García argues that scholars have long advocated for “the importance of developing curricular and pedagogical practices that are centered on the experiences of minoritized students. These types of curricula not only recognize the voices and experiences of Students of Color, but they encourage critical consciousness and community engagement. The most obvious curricula to model are those found in ethnic studies departments” (García, n.d.). Amanda T. illuminates the impact of MAS on her education:

I was alienated from my inner most self for most of my life. Lacking direction in life I would drop out of both UTPA and STC in 2010. I credit this mostly to my inability to identify with the materials being taught to me…With the guidance of a former friend I was encouraged to return to school in the fall of 2012. In a U.S. History course, I would come across Borderlands/La Frontera by Gloria Anzaldúa and suddenly everything changed. I learned to embrace my true self.
Like Amanda, other students emphasize the liberating impact of being in class where bilingualism is valued and where their experiences, viewpoints, and history are central to course content, discussion, and analyses. In reflecting upon her experience, Leslie S. states, “The first MAS course I took was in the spring semester of 2016… I quickly became very engaged in the lectures and course work because it was an aspect of American history that I had never learned. In high school, the only time they mention a Mexican American at any point in American history is when you’re taught about the accomplishments of Cesar Chavez and even then, the lesson is very brief. History is taught showcasing the accomplishments and shortcomings of White men throughout American history, the accomplishments and struggle faced by Black men in the Civil Rights movement with a little bit of White feminism thrown in there with a lesson or two on the women’s suffrage movement and its leaders… In this course, I realized just how excluded I was as an American; as if the history of Mexican Americans doesn’t count or didn’t quite make the cut in order to be seen as important… I felt like American history happened around Mexican Americans, not with Mexican Americans. It wasn’t until I took Mexican American History and Mexican American Civil Rights in the fall of 2016 that I realized just how wrong I was. Taking MAS courses has had a great impact on my life… I have a greater sense of self and admiration of my culture and a newfound respect of both my parents and grandparents who have worked so hard to give me the opportunities that I have had.”

Similarly, Jesus S. emphasized the importance of curriculum in student learning: “[MAS] has given me an opportunity to learn about my history. MAS has opened many doors in which I have developed many close friendships and mentors that are supportive of the work that we do. I was always interested in knowing more of our history and started taking courses in Mexican American history and felt that it was a major that would suit me. When I was about to finish my undergrad, I was still confused and did not know what I wanted to do. I was advised on continuing my education and now I’m almost done with my MAIS MAS. I am currently also teaching a class and the students that I had in my class
were very grateful and thankful. … They need to see that they are reflected in the classroom.

The above testimonials were provided by the students to the author when asked to reflect on their experiences and the impact Mexican American Studies had on their educational processes, critical awareness, and drive to continue their education beyond their undergraduate degree. These students took Mexican American history courses for the first time in their academic careers in college. These courses incorporated requirements that encouraged students to explore family and community histories through oral history projects and reflective assignments that connected their lived experiences to the history of the region and its people. Students’ exploration of their family histories invites them to reflect on their lived realities and explore a critical awareness of their own position in life and the world in which they live.

The critical nature of Mexican American Studies curricula and pedagogical practices enables students to interrogate ancestral knowledge so that they might connect it and their story to prior knowledge that has been explored at different points in their lives. Knowledge construction is a relational process that occurs in both a local and a global context. In the case of these students, constructing knowledge occurs in a transnational context within the Texas-Mexico borderlands and is the brand of pedagogy that is practiced in MAS at UTRGV. Multiple cultural fronts in the context of UTRGV is the coming together of life stories, culture, language, politics, ways of knowing, and different systems of inquiry. This is done through the community-based learning in cooperation with local organizations that focuses on applying student knowledge to their history, wisdom, and power.

**Discussion**

Contemporary higher education environments bristle with racial hostility and administrators often respond with reactive approaches. National media tend to shine a spotlight on issues that have led to the dismissal of university personnel and contentious environments on college campuses. The experiment at UNF and initiatives that focus on critical reflection and cross-cultural understanding can mitigate historical and systemic prejudice and discrimination and more needs to be done in this regard. Like UNF, UTRGV can expand curriculum and programming to promote cultural competence vis-à-vis students, faculty, curriculum, and the
institution itself. Participants in the “Human Conflict in Black and White” course found that when constructive dialogue on issues of race occurred, greater understanding between the two groups evolved.

The success of the lived experience in the 1970s can be attributed to administrative leadership and faculty support. Similarly, faculty, administrators, and community at this borderlands HSI should work together to develop innovative educational curricula that prepare students to address complex challenges such as redressing historical discrimination and inequities in education, reducing labor force segmentation, and shaping public policy. As university class sizes increase to raise revenues, the quality of education often suffers and obscures issues of inequity. Small classes, once the hallmark of an enriched academic experience, are quickly disappearing. The business ethos of higher education is replacing the innovative, creative spirit that once energized both students and faculty. If universities are to continue to be a central force in the exchange of ideas, discussion, and debate of different theoretical positions and philosophical tenets, the face-to-face dynamic between faculty and students must be preserved. Relational processes in smaller teaching and face-to-face learning environments work most effectively for first-generation, minority student populations (Delgado-Gaitán, 2004; Trueba, 2004). The values that nurture this development are access, excellence, and relationships. In contrast, we have witnessed a move towards efficiency, choice, and accountability in which systems are pushed to produce numbers rather than smaller faculty-student ratios and other investments in relational processes.

The attitude and philosophy of "getting students in and out" in accelerated time to boost graduation numbers and revenue does not bespeak of quality education that promotes an exchange of ideas and academic capital (Núñez & Bowers, 2011). The business model of higher education counters educational wisdom of providing students with an equitable education that fosters their intellectual growth and development, self-knowledge and self-discovery to their fullest potential (Gándara, 1995). This model perpetuates an educational system that focuses on skills development in preparation for the workforce to satisfy the needs of labor markets and to produce loyal citizen-workers rather than one that develops human capital, cultivates local knowledge, and produces critical thinkers.

The example of UNF offers a model of leadership and guidance. When university administrators establish an environment for innovation and when they encourage faculty to
experiment with teaching and learning approaches, some faculty members respond. Such was the case with the course entitled “Human Conflict in Black and White.” While UTRGV has experienced a change in name and is undergoing dramatic transformation in physical infrastructure, it is also changing the university’s cultural values and practices.

Through multi-sited ethnography, we have been privileged to explore a point of innovation from a Black and White binary experience of the past, while living in the space, place, and time of an institution that is in the process of becoming a new brand of HSI. This work proposes that we learn from the past lived experiences of its members. We employ a dynamic critical pedagogy and encourage the development of the socio-cultural and political context that responds and respects its local ecology. This process of engagement invites students and their families to develop a collective way of imagining the future and its processes in becoming an HSI that goes beyond the quantifiable measures of its student population. This brand of HSI becomes proactive in community-building, pedagogical development, and regional development that respects its stakeholders and their process of becoming fuller human beings. UTRGV is geographically and historically situated in borderlands that allow for the theorization of cultural fronts and we propose this too as a viable conceptual framework for theorizing and reframing the conversations about HSIs. The opportunity to look back at the Venture Studies at UNF allows us to see the possibilities of applying the cultural fronts theoretical framework not only to HSIs, but to any racial project to incorporate local experiences. From a historical perspective, there is value in learning from the diverse experiences of racial projects of the past. The value here is that we bring together scholars from different disciplines who have diverse lived experiences to populate this theoretical framework of cultural fronts.

Leading social change and in this case, educational change, is a slow process. What strategies and approaches can UTRGV implement to be most effective in leading change that embodies the guiding principles it espouses to “…produce state, national and world leaders who are bicultural, bilingual and biliterate,” and to “become one of the largest and most successful Hispanic-Serving Institutions in the country?” These are important and relevant questions for UTRGV to consider given its historical development, geographic location, student population, and the community it serves.

To its credit, UTRGV has seen tangible developments toward innovation and creativity specific to present-day regional and socio-cultural realities. In uniting two universities that
served traditional functions, the new HSI is attempting to address the specific conditions of its population. The two original legacy institutions experimented with infusing regional linguistic and other cultural elements into coursework, but the efforts were under development. In its new iteration, UTRGV is taking the bold step of addressing bilingual, bicultural, and biliteracy as builds its B3 institute to support and foster bilingualism. It has moved one step closer by teaching courses in Spanish and bilingually. In building a new partnership between faculty, administrators, school districts, and the community, UTRGV is working with community leaders and organizations to integrate community knowledge, expertise, and needs into its curriculum, programs, and community engagement projects. Mexican American Studies faculty along with faculty across the university work to develop curricula and community-based projects that build on the cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) of the community and informs teaching, research, and service.

**Recommendations**

Research on best practices of HSIs that have developed programs, initiatives, partnerships, and services to promote Latina/o student perseverance, academic success and college completion rates demonstrate that the model for Latina/o student success looks different than at traditional majority White institutions (Benítez & De Aro, 2004; Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Nuñez & Bowers, 2011). This research offers recommendations regarding what works for Latina/o students to achieve academic success and facilitates the process of changing higher education to serve these students more appropriately and responsibly (Evans, 2009; Hagedorn et al., 2007; Greene et al., 2012; Lara & Lara, 2012; Núñez et al., 2010; Núñez, Crisp, & Elizondo, 2016; Verdugo, 1995). These recommendations are divided into two categories—life worlds and systems worlds.

Improving life worlds requires increasing the number of faculty who understand the culture, language, and experience of Mexican-origin students, and can teach courses that provide culturally and linguistically relevant material. UTRGV can identify and hire faculty and administrators who have an awareness of the local ecology, its people, and culture and who are ready to teach courses in a bilingual and bicultural learning environment. Much of the HSI literature points to the importance of increasing the number of Latina/o faculty and administrators who have direct experience in working with Latina/o students and can provide...
culturally responsive mentorship and advising (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Ruiz & Valverde, 2012). Considering UTRGV’s student demographic and location, it has a relatively low number of Latina/o faculty. Out of 1,345 faculty, 506 (37.6%) identify as Hispanic or Latino. Of these 267 (52.8%) are lecturers with the remaining 239 (47.2%) being full-time faculty. These figures indicate that more than half of UTRGV’s Hispanic/Latino faculty are lecturers and only 17.8% are full-time faculty. The low number of full-time faculty reduces the number of faculty who can serve as role models, advisers, and mentors and potentially the number who can or are willing to offer linguistically responsive courses. These low numbers, combined with UTRGV’s predominately Mexican-origin student population, suggest this recommendation is even more pressing. Another recommendation includes incorporating student perspectives in university curricula and policies to provide a more equitable education because it can foster a sense of belonging and empowerment, two factors that are known to influence student choice when attending an HSI (Nuñez & Bowers, 2011). Courses that encourage students to draw from and enhance cultural knowledge and linguistic skills and placed-based community projects in the core curriculum, promote educational equity by enabling students to draw from their “funds of knowledge” and “cultural wealth” (Gonzales, 2016; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992; Yosso, 2005).

UTRGV currently has the capacity to integrate the “cultural” and linguistic components of the guiding principles and enhance life worlds through an expanded investment in its MAS program. Historically, this interdisciplinary program aimed to fundamentally change higher education to meet the needs of Mexican American/Chicana/o students. Student activists of the Chicano Movement viewed higher education as more than a means to obtaining a job. Rather, it was about developing a critical consciousness informed by a socio-cultural understanding of Chicanas/os’ role and place in American society. They wanted to connect learning in higher education to their communities through community-based research that would address historical issues of poverty, employment discrimination, educational inequalities, health disparities, and poor infrastructure in barrios and colonias (Muñoz, 2007). For Chicana/o activists of the late 1960s, knowledge of their history, culture, language, and lived experiences became

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9 Of the 1,345 faculty, 590 are female and 755 are male. Of the 506 Hispanic/Latina/o faculty, 271 are female and 235 are male. Of the 239 Hispanic/Latino lecturers, 125 are female and 11 are male. These figures were provided by UTRGV’s Office of Institutional Research.
sources of action toward the public good (Freire, 2000; Mariscal, 2005; Muñoz, 2007; Peña, 2010). In advocating for a culturally relevant college curriculum, student activists of the day recognized the importance of the Spanish language in their identities, cultural heritage, and knowledge. Thus, a curriculum that cultivated bilingualism and biculturalism made sense to them:

The present needs of the Chicano must be met in such a way as to provide relevant programs which will sustain self-confidence and provide a feeling of acceptance on the student’s terms…bi-lingual studies must constitute a part of the University’s realistic recognition of community realities and innovative academic potential…to develop student’s abilities in a bilingual, bicultural manner…by focusing on an intellectual perspective of and about the Spanish-speaking communities, [and] to develop a potential for self-fulfillment in at least two cultures (Muñoz, 2007, p. 158).

Looking back at the original intent of Chicana/o Studies reminds us that students were active in advocating and crafting, the type and quality of education they viewed as relevant for themselves and their communities. In addition to a curriculum that fostered their cultural and linguistic capital, students called for the recruitment of Mexican American students, faculty, counselors, and administrators and research programs as a vehicle for producing knowledge through community-based research and for developing bilingual and bicultural community leaders. These goals fall in line with UTRGV’s B3 Institute and recommendations offered by the extant HSI research.

Improving the systems worlds calls for HSIs to develop and establish partnerships with local K-12 school districts to create curriculum that fosters students’ bilingualism and biculturalism and in this manner, enhance students’ academic capital. The Center for Bilingual Studies, a division of the B3 Institute, works to develop the faculty and research capacities in the areas of bilingualism and biliteracy of faculty and public school teachers. Administrators should also find way to increase financial investments in research and knowledge production to address issues faced by local communities. Studies have established that increasing financial aid to students from low-income families promotes student success by reducing their need to work more than 20 hours per week, as most students at UTRGV do (Evans, 2004). The need to
work full-time to pay for college often functions as a barrier to college completion and impedes their time-to-degree progress. When we align curriculum to student and local community needs, we help student resolve issues in their communities and respond to issues in their lives. Self-assessment of HSI systems, programs and services is also encouraged to ensure that they have the resources and mechanisms in place to respond to the needs of students and their communities.

Conclusion

The emerging framework that encompasses two ethnographic sites helps us make sense of the task at hand. The Venture Studies program at UNF engendered the creative capacities of faculty to engage the most challenging issues of the day. In the 1970s, the course “Human Conflict in Black and White” tackled the issue of race in creative and transformative ways. Testimonials from students and faculty point to the undeniable success of the Venture Studies experiment. Students took the lessons from the class and used those lessons to enrich their cultural and racial lives, even if the institution did not sustain its investment in this aspect of the Venture Studies program. The creativity that marked its success evaporated when faculty moved on and the university’s leadership changed.

UTRGV can learn from the Venture Studies program as it attempts to embed issues of race, culture and history to shape its new institutional ethos. UTRGV exists in a place Anzaldúa (1987) described as “an open wound”; a place that requires healing through a process of critical self-reflection and an honest critique of the institutions that have created the very “wound” Anzaldúa described. Whereas the “Human Conflict in Black and White” Venture Studies course focused on the wounds of the Old South, MAS courses can heal the “open wound” by affirming the cultural and historic identity of this borderlands region. The work at this HSI thus provides a framework for expanding the meaning of access, excellence, and equity in higher education to specifically serve Latina/o students. Providing a more equitable education for Latinas/os within the context of a new political economy informed by the history, culture, and economic realities of this border region requires a more intentional goal to serve the students, families and communities that populate this HSI. It is our intention to guide the conversation regarding the critical role HSIs play in providing Latinas/os access to an effective, culturally appropriate educational experience relevant to their communities and current socio-economic realities.
Researchers call upon HSIs to provide Latina/o students with the academic capital to be culturally informed to serve families, communities, schools, and businesses in an ever-changing social, cultural, economic, and transnational environment (García, 2012; Gonzales, 2016; Núñez et al., 2010). Within a short time of operation, UTRGV is cultivating and expanding students’ and the community’s knowledge by fostering innovative research, appropriate teaching methods, and community projects with the goals of supporting students in becoming culturally and linguistically informed. The creation of the B3 Institute has empowered UTRGV to direct and move the university toward instituting the guiding principles of producing bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate students. The institution is thus poised to take the lead in promoting social change and fostering the paradigm-shift of higher education for HSIs to provide broader access to a more equitable education that enhances “funds of knowledge” (Moll et al., 1992) for students and the communities in which they live.
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Assessing Empowerment at HSIs: An Adapted Inputs-Environments-Outcomes Model

Marcela G. Cuellar
University of California, Davis

Vanessa Segundo
University of California, Davis

Yvonne Muñoz
University of California, Davis

Abstract
Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) play a critical role in advancing postsecondary access and success for Latinx students. Scholarship has begun to examine how HSIs influence Latinx student experiences and outcomes, yet much remains to be explored. In an effort to inform future research of Latinx students at HSIs, we argue that student experiences and outcomes should be based on notions of empowerment given the historically marginalized status of this group. We propose a model to guide assessment on Latinx empowerment at HSIs, which builds on the Inputs-Environments-Outcomes (IEO) model (Astin & Antonio, 2012) and integrates critical theoretical frameworks, namely critical race theory and community cultural wealth. In proposing an adapted IEO model assessing Latinx empowerment, we encourage scholars and practitioners to expand notions of what constitutes success and excellence at HSIs in terms of how they educate and empower Latinx students.

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.24974/amae.11.3.362
Introduction

Despite steady increases in postsecondary enrollment since the 1980s, only 14% of Latinx individuals age 25 or older possess a bachelor’s degree or higher (Stepler & Brown, 2016). Persistent lower levels of educational attainment among Latinx students adversely shape the advancement of this historically marginalized group (Telles & Ortiz, 2008). As Latinx students continue to enroll in higher education in greater numbers, many enroll at Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), which are broadly described as institutions with at least 25% Latinx students. Between 1994 and 2014, HSIs grew from 189 to 409 and enroll more than 60% of all Latinx undergraduates (Santiago, Taylor, & Calderón Galdeano, 2016). Summarizing the impact of HSIs can be challenging given the varied approaches employed towards serving the Latinx and general student body (Santiago et al., 2016). Nonetheless, HSIs graduate Latinx students at comparable rates to their non-HSI counterparts after institutional and student characteristics are controlled (Flores & Park, 2015). As such, HSIs clearly play a pivotal role in advancing postsecondary access and success for Latinx students.

The spirit of the HSI designation promotes intentional institutional change to better serve Latinx and low-income students (Santiago, 2012). These institutions are thus uniquely positioned to challenge majoritarian views of education, which calls for the creation of an affirming and transformational education (García, 2012). Beyond enrollment and graduation rates, however, there are few indicators to determine the extent to which these colleges and universities serve Latinx students (García, 2016). While important, conventional metrics of performance (e.g. retention and graduation) provide only a glimpse into the education at HSIs that is necessary to ensure the full socioeconomic and political advancement of this racialized group. These measures, for instance, do not capture the experiences of students at these institutions or the quality of education, such as empowerment, which also serve as indicators of success for Latinx students (Cuellar, 2015). Additional metrics are thus necessary to examine how HSIs enhance Latinx empowerment.

In an effort to holistically understand the influence of HSIs on Latinx students, we contend that future examinations of outcomes at these institutions should be grounded in notions of empowerment given the historically marginalized status of this student population. Towards this aim, we propose a conceptual model to guide future research examining empowerment at these colleges and universities. We build on the foundation of the Inputs-
Environments-OUTcomes (IEO) model (Astin & Antonio, 2012) and integrate equity-oriented theoretical perspectives, namely critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). Given contemporary political, economic, and social attacks to the Latinx community and other marginalized communities, we hope our model can inform the ways that scholars and institutional leaders think about assessing the impact of HSIs to include how Latinx students are holistically empowered for continued socioeconomic and political advancement.

**HSIs as Spaces for Marginalized Student Empowerment**

The notion of empowerment is central to an educational philosophy that aims to foster personal growth and develop critical learners (Ashcroft, 1987). Ashcroft (1987) broadly defines an empowered person as one who believes in his or her ability/capability to act, which in turn leads to able/capable action. Drawing on Freire’s liberatory and social justice frames as well as critical social work theory, Stanton-Salazar (2011) defines empowerment as an active process of gaining resources and competencies that allow for control over one’s life and achieving one’s goals. At its core, empowerment connects beliefs to actions, a connection that takes on a pronounced role with regard to disenfranchised populations. Building on these perspectives, we view empowerment as the process through which Latinx students draw on their cultural assets and obtain the requisite skills, knowledges, and resources to transform themselves, their communities, and society. We view empowerment as integral to the education of Latinx students given the historical marginalization this community has systemically experienced, and the current sociopolitical context.

Inarguably, the empowerment of Latinx students in any educational context is imperative; however, we contend that this process is extraordinarily significant within HSIs. As institutions enrolling the majority of Latinx undergraduates, HSIs are in a unique position to substantially shape these students’ educational and long-term success. Such a position provides an incredible opportunity for HSIs to define what it means to serve Latinx students and promote justice for Latinx communities (García, 2012; Gonzales, 2015). In particular, García (2012) challenges HSIs to courageously stand against systems of education that dismiss and marginalize Latinx students, which we interpret as a call for providing an empowering education. Further, HSIs can cultivate inclusive and empowering environments by drawing on
the cultural knowledge and assets embedded within the communities these institutions serve (Gonzales, 2015). Such views require HSIs to intentionally strive to offer an educational experience that values Latinx students and provides them with the requisite knowledge and skills that position them to transform themselves, their communities, and society.

Yet, how do we assess Latinx empowerment? How do we ensure that institutions provide an empowering education to Latinx students? Assessment is one way colleges and universities self-evaluate to improve and assess what they value and aim to achieve (Astin & Antonio, 2012). What then, is the potential significance of HSIs assessing for empowerment? An assessment model grounded on the empowerment of Latinx students can serve as a useful guide for HSIs to cultivate environments that provide a transformative education and provide useful information to further enhance the empowerment of Latinx students. Though the process of empowerment is difficult to holistically assess, we propose a conceptual model that captures aspects of this transformative process.

An Overview of the IEO Assessment Model

The Inputs-Environments-Outcomes (IEO) model provides a simple yet useful framework to assess the empowerment of Latinx students at HSIs. The IEO model promotes the idea that assessment serves a purpose of enhancing student development, which runs counter to traditional notions of institutional excellence (Astin & Antonio, 2012). Traditional metrics of assessment and notions of institutional excellence, such as graduation rates, are heavily based on the accumulation of resources or academic reputation, thereby failing to capture one of the most important purposes of education, which is to educate students (Astin & Antonio, 2012). As an alternative, Astin & Antonio (2012) define excellence as the ability of an institution to holistically develop students’ academic and personal talents and make a positive difference in their lives, which they succinctly refer to as talent development. To this end, Astin & Antonio (2012) propose that colleges and universities consider how they “add value” to students and assess how they influence students’ development.

Accordingly, the IEO model shown in Figure 1, aims to assess the impact of colleges and universities on students (Astin & Antonio, 2012). The model is comprised of three components: inputs, environments, and outcomes. It illustrates how students change over time (input to outcome) as a result of elements in the college (environment) that may influence student
experiences and development. As such, the model posits that we must consider student inputs before considering how the college environment influences student outcomes.

Figure 1. Inputs-Environments-Outcomes (IEO) Model (Astin & antonio, 2012)

Inputs represent the characteristics students possess before entering college, such as demographic background, values and attitudes, behavioral patterns, and educational background. The environment encompasses structural aspects of the institution, such as size, selectivity, and student body composition, that can affect students’ experiences. Sub-environments within an institution, such as particular programs or activities in which students are involved, can affect college experiences as well. After taking inputs and environments into account, we can examine the influence of colleges and universities on student outcomes.

In a holistic typology, Astin and antonio (2012) categorize outcomes as cognitive or affective. Cognitive outcomes refer to intellectual capacities whereas affective outcomes reflect non-cognitive attributes. Among cognitive outcomes, institutions often evaluate basic and complex academic skills, subject matter competency, and professional competencies. In terms of affective outcomes, institutions consider self-concept, personal values, attitudes, and student satisfaction. To assess these two types of outcomes, psychological (internal characteristics or processes) and behavioral (observable actions) measures can be used. By considering these various elements of the IEO model, we can evaluate how colleges and universities develop the talent of students and add value through the college experience (Astin & antonio, 2012).

Given its straightforward and holistic design, the IEO framework has guided many studies on how colleges affect students (Mayhew et al., 2016) and will likely remain an influential guide in assessment. The model and its underlying principle of talent development inform how
to examine the empowerment of Latinx students at HSIs by considering how students’ backgrounds and college experiences shape outcomes. However, the IEO model was largely developed with “traditional” students in mind, such as full-time students living on campus, which may not reflect many Latinx students at HSIs. Although the model accounts for race as a demographic characteristic, the racialized experiences of marginalized students are not theoretically embedded in its IEO components, which may further limit its applicability to Latinx student populations at HSIs.

Recognizing such possible limitations, Astin & Antonio (2012) encourage the incorporation of theoretical perspectives into the model to ensure alignment between the values and practices that institutions want to assess. Implicitly building on an IEO approach, scholars have developed models that acknowledge how students’ racial and cultural identities shape their experiences on college campuses in order to maximize diverse students’ opportunities for success (Hurtado, Alvarez, Guillermo-Wann, Cuellar, & Arellano, 2012; Museus, 2014). However, these models have not centered empowerment as an outcome in itself. As we consider how to build on the IEO model to understand Latinx student empowerment, we infuse perspectives that acknowledge and value these students’ racial and cultural backgrounds and their subsequent empowerment.

**Critical Perspectives to Adapt the IEO Model**

We turn to critical race theory (CRT) to re-imagine how a basic IEO model can better capture the ways in which Latinx students can be served at HSIs. CRT takes head on the claim that higher education is the great equalizer by examining racial inequities in school contexts and challenging dominant ideologies (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012). CRT acknowledges that higher education institutions in the United States are premised on false claims of “objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, race neutrality and equal opportunity” (Yosso, 2005, p. 74). Such dominant frameworks of student success often perpetuate the marginalization of students of color by focusing on knowledges these students do not possess, thereby placing the fault on them and their families for lacking normative cultural knowledge and skills to succeed in higher education (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). A prime example of this deterministic view is well represented in the concept of the achievement gap, a “hegemonic Western science view” (Garcia, 2012), that serves to support the structural inequities inherent in the ways we
expect students to succeed and the tools they need to be successful. Challenging these dominant ideologies, CRT invites us to consider the systemic role of education beyond these conventional metrics.

Moreover, CRT centers the lived experiences of communities of color to advocate for a more socially just society (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012). CRT allows us to name the ways in which race has been an integral factor in the continued marginalization of Latinx students in higher education. Latinx undergraduate students’ experiences with microaggressions, racism, and institutional oppression are well documented (Rendón, Nora, & Kanagala, 2014; Yosso et al., 2009). Nonetheless, more scholarship on the salience of race and racialization within the schooling experiences of Latinx undergraduates at HSIs is necessary. Perhaps most importantly, through its critical perspectives, CRT extends the invitation for scholarship to work towards the elimination of racism and all other forms of subordination experienced by marginalized communities, while working towards their empowerment (Yosso et al., 2009).

As aforementioned, deficit-based theories place the fault on Latinx students and their families for not possessing normative cultural knowledge and skills to succeed in higher education (Yosso et al., 2009). To counter such epistemological foundations, Yosso (2005) developed community cultural wealth to better capture Latinx students’ knowledges, strengths, and success as manifested in education. Yosso (2005) draws from CRT to identify six forms of capital: aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital. Aspirational capital refers to the ability of a student to remain hopeful amidst obstacles and barriers they face, while setting high expectations about what they can accomplish because they hold education to a high esteem. Navigational capital recognizes that students operate in liminal spaces within educational contexts and adapt to these new cultures. Social capital speaks to the importance and value of developing relationships, within schools and their communities, to strengthen a student’s social network and access to resources and mentorship. Linguistic capital emphasizes the skills of students to engage in intentional code-switching between languages, and within formal/informal interactions. Familial capital positions family as a central source of motivation and strength for students, who share cultural, ancestral, and situated knowledge. Resistant capital is represented by the resilience students exercise to challenge inequality when confronting varying degrees of oppression. Latinx students draw from these cultural assets to
navigate systems and structures that were not historically designed with them in mind as evidenced in their college experience (Yosso, 2005).

Rendón et al. (2014) contributed to the community cultural wealth framework by identifying four additional forms of capital that Latinx students employ to successfully navigate college within an HSI context. *Ganas/perseverance* acknowledges the inner strength students cultivate to develop self-reliance in order to persist in college. *Ethnic consciousness* speaks both to the cultural pride students develop and commitment to uplift the Latinx community, while embracing their membership as part of an HSI. *Spirituality/faith* is the sense that students honor a higher power to make meaning of their experiences and channel strength to overcome barriers. *Pluiversal* represents Latinx students' ability to make sense of and thrive beyond the contradictions they experience in the many systems they navigate. Latinx students possess these cultural assets and ways of knowing that are further developed and nurtured throughout their lifetime (Rendón et al., 2014). To this end, community cultural wealth and its recent additions, recognizes the cultural contexts of Latinx students and values the assets Latinx students possess and employ to succeed in higher education. Above all, community cultural wealth serves as a tool to re-position Latinx students in relation to schooling, and to assess the impact policies and practices have in cultivating or hindering success.

As HSIs educate the majority of Latinx undergraduates, these concepts are especially relevant in considering how HSIs empower these students. Empowerment broadly represents Latinx students' agency to effect change in their life, in their communities, and more broadly within society. Building on earlier work (Cuellar, 2015), we posit that empowerment occurs when Latinx students' backgrounds and cultural assets are affirmed and leveraged when they encounter environments that honor their culture, serving as impetus towards their long-term advancement.

**A Model for Assessing Latinx Empowerment at HSIs**

To this end, our model's outcomes aim to examine the empowerment of Latinx students that can occur at HSIs. Our model is guided by the following principles, which builds from the IEO model through incorporation of CRT and community cultural wealth: 1) Latinx students are racialized beings who are producers of knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 2002), a disposition that can be further cultivated during college; 2) HSIs have the potential to
intentionally serve Latinx students by providing positive, empowering environments and experiences (García, 2012); and 3) it is paramount to institutional excellence to move beyond traditional notions of success to consider ways in which empowerment can be assessed for Latinx students, particularly at HSIs (Cuellar, 2015). By applying CRT in our model, we respond to Hermán S. García’s (2012) question regarding “what role(s) can HSIs play in rethinking colleges and universities’ dysfunctional roles in promoting the cognitive justice needs of Latin@ students?” (p. 199). In essence, our model provides a blueprint for HSIs in assessing a transformative educational experience that considers Latinx student assets and their subsequent empowerment.

We developed our model by reviewing current literature on Latinx students at HSIs and weaving in our personal and collective experiences of working at or attending HSIs. Our model, displayed in Table 1, addresses core elements within Latinx students’ backgrounds and environmental features that affect student experiences. We propose these elements should be assessed at HSIs to capture the empowerment occurring at these institutions. Though we recognize that HSIs are heterogeneous in several institutional characteristics (Núñez, Crisp, & Elizondo, 2016), our model focuses on elements that broadly promote empowerment for Latinx students. We detail each component of our model in the following sections and highlight research addressing corresponding elements as well as provide ideas for future research.

Outcomes of Empowerment

Our model calls for outcomes that comprehensively capture the ways in which HSIs influence Latinx students and propel them towards long-term personal, academic, and professional success. While the IEO model classifies outcomes as either cognitive or affective as evaluated through psychological or behavioral measures, our model adopts the view that non-cognitive outcomes also involve higher-order levels of thinking (Conley, 2013). We take the opportunity to both contribute to and move beyond a binary classification. Instead, our outcomes of empowerment focus on three domains that we argue are essential to understanding Latinx students’ empowerment: psychosocial, behavioral, and spiritual.

Psychosocial. Within the psychosocial domain, we include outcomes that refer to individual, internal dispositions associated with academic, personal, and professional empowerment. HSIs can assist students in developing their academic skills and self-concepts,
Table 1
*A Model Assessing Latinx Empowerment at HSIs*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>Environments</th>
<th>Outcomes = Empowerment</th>
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<td>Positive Academic Self-Concept</td>
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<td>Socioeconomic Status</td>
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<td>Critical Consciousness</td>
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<td>Generational Status</td>
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<td>Immigration Status</td>
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<td>Validating Pedagogies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic Skills and Perceptions</td>
<td>Faculty Interaction and Mentorship</td>
<td>Ability to Navigate Systems</td>
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<td>Community Cultural Wealth</td>
<td>Bridge/Transition Programs</td>
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<td>Linguistic</td>
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<td>Ganas/Perseverance</td>
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<td>Pluiversal</td>
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<td>Spirituality/Faith</td>
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which are associated with persistence and retention (Robbins et al., 2004). HSIs have shown a positive influence on first year Latinx students’ higher-order learning (Fosnacht & Nailos, 2015) as well as academic self-concepts despite entering college with significantly lower self-concepts than their peers at non-HSIs (Cuellar, 2014). As such, future research should continue to examine how HSIs advance Latinx academic skills and self-perceptions given the strong interrelationship with student success.

Similarly, a holistic approach to engaging students involves a recognition of their personal development. Studies have shown that HSIs enhance Latinx students’ personal development as documented in positive academic and social integration and increased student engagement (Abraham, Lujan, López, & Walker, 2002; Fosnacht & Nailos, 2015; Nelson Laird, Bridges, Morelon-Quainoo, Williams, & Salinas Holmes, 2007). Some studies also demonstrate how HSIs facilitate Latinx development in other key areas, such as ethnic identity and salience (Garcia, Patrón, Ramirez & Hudson, 2016; Guardia & Evans, 2008). A strong ethnic identity is linked to ethnic consciousness, which manifests in positive self-perceptions of students themselves and pride in attending an HSI (Rendón et al., 2014). Similarly, the development of critical consciousness, as well as a social justice orientation, among students of color is associated with a plethora of positive outcomes, such as academic engagement, career development and attainment, and political participation (Diemer & Li, 2011). Thus, the consideration of how HSIs affect these aspects of Latinx students’ personal development seems essential to their empowerment and future success in multiple areas of their lives.

Further, we encourage the evaluation of how HSIs advance Latinx students in their future professional success. For example, Latinx students have indicated that HSIs provide opportunities for professional advancement (Abraham et al., 2002) but with few details in what respect. As such, we propose that HSIs evaluate professional development, such as graduate school and career aspirations as two indicators of how effectively these institutions are preparing Latinx students to navigate educational and employment opportunities for socioeconomic and political advancement beyond their undergraduate education.

Behavioral. Within the behavioral dimension, we highlight actions that result from engaging in environments that foster Latinx student talents and position them to successfully navigate within and beyond the confines of the academy. We propose that institutions examine
to what extent students know how to navigate systems to ensure success in general. We also propose civic engagement as a critical outcome of an empowering education. Civic engagement may further advance Latinx degree attainment; consequently, it is important to consider how Latinx students engage civically on campus and beyond (Alcantar, 2014). Research shows that civic engagement among Latinx students at one HSI has been positively affected by their engagement in student organizations (González, 2008). More research is needed. Moreover, one of the most significant testaments to how well an HSI is serving students, is its ability to motivate and prepare Latinx students to subsequently enroll in a graduate program. Although degree completion at the undergraduate level is a priority for HSIs, the pursuit of a graduate education is also telling of the investment these postsecondary institutions make towards empowering their Latinx student populations.

**Spiritual.** Furthermore, we propose that HSIs consider assessing spirituality among Latinx students. Spirituality has been considered more recently as a subset of quantifiable affective outcomes (Astin & antonio, 2012); however, we note this as a key gap that remains to be addressed if we are to serve and empower Latinx students at HSIs and thus advocate for measures of spirituality that are grounded in Latinx students’ views. Scholars in the field of higher education (Rendón et al., 2014) and other disciplines (Anzaldúa, 1999) have centered the ways in which spirituality is important in how Latinx students define their sense of purpose, retain faith in seamlessly hopeless situations, and are able to humanize themselves in oppressive environments. Moreover, notions of spirituality are associated with persistence among Latinx students (Nora, 2003). These contributions point to the need to further integrate seminal work across disciplines that have laid the foundation for the salience of spirituality as exercised by Latinx students.

We offer our list of outcomes, not as a comprehensive or deterministic compilation, but rather to stand in solidarity with scholars, practitioners, and administrators who reconcile standard psychometrics with new measures and approaches to holistically assess the ways Latinx students thrive in higher education. Similarly, we provide the following discussion on inputs and environments in our model as a starting point to advance holistic approaches to evaluating how HSIs empower Latinx students. As we move forward in this work, we will expand and further ground elements in our proposed model.
Inputs

Our model acknowledges the entering characteristics of Latinx students. Consistent with Astin and antonio (2012), some of these entering characteristics are demographic while others represent student values, beliefs, and attitudes. Our model, however, recognizes some of the racial and cultural realities that inform these entering characteristics among Latinx students. For example, our model acknowledges the fluidity and intersectionality of various social identities among Latinx students (Núñez, 2014) as well as the cultural assets possessed by Latinx students and the communities from which they originate (Yosso, 2005; Rendón et al., 2014). Collectively, understanding the inherent diversity among Latinx students and the cultural assets they bring into higher education can help institutions account for the empowerment Latinx students may already possess to assess how college experiences additionally empower students.

Intersection of social identities. Our model centers the racial and ethnic background of Latinx students given the strong representation of these students at HSIs. Latinx students are more likely to enroll at both two- and four-year HSIs than students from other racial groups (Núñez & Bowers, 2011; Núñez, Sparks, & Hernández, 2011). Moreover, Latinx students who self-identify as “Other Latino” are more likely to enroll at four-year HSIs and emerging HSIs compared to Mexican Americans, indicating an increasingly diverse Latinx student population at these institutions (Cuellar, 2015). Unfortunately, most studies on Latinx students at HSIs have not considered the racial and ethnic heterogeneity within this racialized group. Although these groups share commonalities in language and aspects of culture, there are also unique experiences that may affect students’ experiences or outcomes. For instance, although Mexican Americans are the most populous Latinx community in the country, this group maintains the lowest level of educational attainment among Latinx students (Zambrana & Hurtado, 2015). Further, it is important to consider how geographic region of residence may also shape Latinx students’ social identities. Thus, HSIs should consider how Latinx students’ racial/ethnic background may affect their experiences within college in an effort to identify and eliminate any possible inequities within this monolithic group.

Several other background characteristics also matter in our model. Despite growing college enrollment gaps between Latinas and Latinos (Saénz & Ponjuan, 2009), Latinos are more likely to enroll at two-year HSIs than their female counterparts (Núñez et al. 2011), whereas
Latinas appear more likely to enroll at four-year HSIs (Cuellar, 2015), indicating the importance of considering how gender subsequently may shape Latinx students’ experiences and outcomes at HSIs. Socioeconomic background is also important to consider since Latinx students attending HSIs are more likely to enter with fewer economic resources (Cuellar, 2015; Núñez & Bowers, 2011).

In addition, generational status should be considered, both in terms of college attendance and family origin in the United States. Many Latinx students at HSIs may be the first in their family to go to college and consequently face greater challenges than their non-first-generation counterparts. In addition, generational status in terms of a Latinx students’ family origins in this country can affect academic success. According to a longitudinal study, third and fourth generation Mexican Americans show a decline in educational attainment despite initial gains in the second generation (Telles & Ortiz, 2008), suggesting that intergenerational advancement can be impeded by racialized experiences within the United States among some Latinx groups. Many Latinx students at four-year HSIs are not first-generation immigrants (Nunez & Bowers, 2011), which underscores the importance of understanding how this might also affect students’ experiences and outcomes. Furthermore, our model accounts for immigration status, both at the student and familial level. We urge scholars and practitioners to recognize that many undocumented Latinx students attend HSIs and experience their college environments in unique ways relative to their peers as do students who are part of mixed status families, where issues of deportation, financial constraints, and negatively impacted well-being are common happenstance. As such, HSIs should consider how these various background characteristics among Latinx students intersect and simultaneously influence their college experiences and outcomes.

**Academic skills and perceptions.** Additionally, another set of entering characteristics we include in our model reflect a students’ initial academic preparation and self-perceptions. Latinx students attending two-year HSIs are more likely to have entered with AP credit in high school and a desire to transfer (Núñez et al., 2011), while those attending four-year HSIs are more likely to have lower standardized high school math scores (Núñez & Bowers, 2011). Further, Latinx students enter four-year HSIs with lower self-perceptions of their academic abilities as compared to their peers attending non-HSIs (Cuellar, 2014). These studies collectively demonstrate the tremendous potential for HSIs to develop the academic
talents of Latinx students (Núñez & Bowers, 2011). Thus, it is essential to understand the entering academic characteristics of Latinx students to fully capture how HSIs cultivate their scholarly potential.

**Cultural assets.** In order to maximize the impact that HSIs can have on Latinx students’ advancement, our model accounts for the cultural assets Latinx students possess that are often overlooked or devalued despite the powerful influence these can have on students’ achievements. In other words, it is critical to assess Latinx students’ community cultural wealth so that HSIs can account for the influence of these assets on students’ experiences and outcomes. HSIs should gather information on the educational hopes students have as they enter college to fully understand the aspirational capital and ganas students possess. Institutions should also gauge the familial capital students may possess since family is strongly influential on Latinx enrollment at HSIs (Cejda, Casparis, Rhodes, & Seal-Nyman, 2008; Cuellar, 2015; Núñez et al., 2011). Further, the family unit has been identified as a source of support for Latinx students attending HSIs (Kouyoumdjian, Guzman, Garcia, & Talavera-Bustillos, 2015), which in turn influences their degree attainment at these institutions (Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016). Familial capital may be measured according to how much the family influences a students’ educational pursuits and knowledge fostered within the home. Knowledge that is gained through family and cultural connections can shape learning although these sources of information are rarely acknowledged in the educational outcomes of Latinx students (Rios-Aguilar, 2010). Moreover, the linguistic capital students possess should also be considered and expanded to account for the multifaceted forms in which Latinx students express themselves (Martinez & Montaño, 2016). For example, Latinx students often speak Spanish to enhance their ethnic identity and feel more connected to their campus community (Garcia et al., 2016; Guardia & Evans, 2008). Several Latinx students may also speak other languages, such as indigenous languages.

In addition, HSIs should consider additional forms of capital that Latinx students draw from to succeed in higher education. Latinx students’ social capital is especially important to their success in college. For instance, Latinx students at HSIs receive support from institutional agents, such as teachers and counselors, but also rely on extended family, community leaders, and peers (Cejda et al., 2008). In addition, many Latinx students pursue a postsecondary degree to transform society, which represents resistant capital (Yosso, 2005). Furthermore, it is critical
to also consider spirituality and ethnic consciousness as this can also motivate Latinx student success (Rendón et al., 2014). Thus, it is important for HSIs to consider the various assets Latinx students possess to cultivate environments that value these, which in turn has the potential to yield more empowerment.

**Environments**

With regard to environments, our model calls for the assessment of elements across an HSI that provide Latinx students with positive and empowering experiences. Though HSIs have been shown to vary in structural aspects, such as two-year/four-year, public/private, small/large (Nunez et al., 2016), we highlight environmental features that support and make Latinx students feel valued and can contribute to an empowering education. Several aspects within the environment at HSIs can help first-generation Latinx students balance their academic and personal obligations (Dayton, Gonzalez-Vasquez, Martinez & Plum, 2014; Medina & Posadas, 2012). As such, it is important to consider both student perception of and their participation in various environmental aspects of a college that can shape their experiences. We focus on three environmental areas that collectively influence the experiences of students of color and their success in higher education and beyond: campus climate, curricular domain, and co-curricular domain (Hurtado et al., 2012).

**Campus climate.** Understanding students’ views of the campus climate is critical given the adverse influence that student perceptions and interactions with racially diverse students, staff, and faculty can have on the experiences and outcomes of students of color (Hurtado et al., 2012; Museus, 2014). The campus climate is a multifaceted construct that captures how students perceive the environment, e.g. welcoming or hostile, and how students interact with individuals from different social identities on a campus. Students have shared that the atmosphere at HSIs is welcoming when institutions embrace and celebrate Latinx identity through cultural representations in personnel, events, and organizations (Medina & Posadas, 2012; Perrakis & Hagedorn, 2010). Although Latinx students appear to generally view campus climates at HSIs as positive, students have also perceived microaggressions, particularly when linguistic barriers exist for Spanish-speaking students accessing resources (Cuellar & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2016). Latinx students have suggested that offering more courses in Spanish and hiring more Spanish-speaking personnel would improve the social atmosphere of an HSI campus.
Additionally, interacting with peers from different racial/ethnic groups can positively impact feelings of belonging for Latinx students at HSIs (Maestas, Vaquera, & Muñoz Zehr, 2007). As such, it is important to assess how Latinx students at HSIs perceive the campus climate, how students interact with diverse peers, and how this influences their success.

**Curricular.** Considering how Latinx students experience the curriculum and classrooms are also critical in our model. Culturally relevant curricula can offer Latinx students with an affirming and empowering education (Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015). Although many HSIs have not incorporated ethnocentric curricula (Cole, 2011), it is essential to consider how it shapes Latinx students’ experiences and outcomes when it is available. In addition, the pedagogies that faculty employ within the classroom can further affirm or marginalize students of color (Hurtado et al., 2012). Latinx student interactions with faculty are especially important given the positive influence of such interactions on a multitude of outcomes (Crisp, Taggart, & Nora, 2014). Studies situated at HSIs document how faculty mentorship enhances the academic success of Latinx students (Dayton et al., 2014), including degree attainment and sense of belonging (Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016). In turn, sense of belonging has also been shown to promote Latinx student academic achievement at HSIs (Chun, Marin, Schwartz, Pham, & Castro-Olivo, 2016). However, it is essential to note conceptual differences on perceptions of mentoring between Latinx and students from other racial groups in a survey of students at an HSI, which suggests a need for measures designed for different groups of students (Crisp & Cruz, 2010). Furthermore, it is critical to assess if Latinx students are engaging in academic enrichment opportunities, such as bridge or research and internship programs, and how these experiences further empower them.

**Co-curricular.** To holistically assess the experiences of Latinx students, HSIs should also consider co-curricular aspects of the college environment that can directly or indirectly influence experiences and outcomes. For instance, Latinx students often find community within cultural centers and student organizations, which cultivates students’ sense of belonging and resilience (Yosso et al., 2009). HSIs that provide opportunities for Latinx students to interact with one another, such as those that allow students to explore their identities within supportive spaces on campus, have been found to positively affect Latinx ethnic identity (Garcia et al., 2016; Guardia & Evans, 2008). In addition, co-curricular activities with cultural or social
justice approaches are opportune spaces in which critical consciousness and awareness of institutional inequities can be enhanced (Rendón et al., 2014). As such, it is essential for HSIs to assess the extent to which Latinx students are engaging in such spaces or activities and how this engagement shapes their outcomes. Lastly, as more Latinx students work to afford college, institutions must consider how these employment opportunities, particularly those on campus, can be enhanced to foster intellectual and career development (Núñez & Sansone, 2016). Across these various programs and opportunities, HSIs should also explore how Latinx students interact with staff as well as the possible mentorship received from these individuals.

**Implications for Research, Policy, and Practice**

As the number of HSIs increases, these institutions hold tremendous potential in advancing Latinx students’ academic, personal, and professional success. However, more research is necessary to understand how HSIs holistically empower Latinx students. We argue that future institutional assessment and research should examine how HSIs empower Latinx students. In an effort to inform future research, we propose a model to guide assessment on Latinx empowerment at HSIs based on foundational frameworks and critical perspectives. Based on our model, future research should honor Latinx students’ multiple social identities and assets, assess the environments students experience, as well as the empowerment Latinx students embody as a result of attending an HSI.

Future scholarship and institutional research on Latinx students at HSIs should examine their experiences and empowerment through comprehensive and novel quantitative approaches. Larger-scale national datasets, such as the Cooperative Institutional Research Program and National Survey of Student Engagement, may capture facets of our model (Astin & antonio, 2012); but, most lack elements for an integrated analysis of Latinx students at HSIs. While we acknowledge such limitations, we encourage scholars to create studies that center empowerment as a process and an outcome in order to further understand student success beyond conventional metrics. Institutional level instruments or smaller-scale studies may already thoroughly assess the influence of HSIs on Latinx empowerment. In these cases, we encourage researchers and scholars to disseminate and share their assessment approaches and findings to inform how others may follow suit.
More holistic evaluations of Latinx student empowerment at HSIs may also require the development of new instruments or measures that capture the concepts we propose are essential. For example, the community cultural wealth of Latinx communities is under-examined through large-scale, quantitative studies despite the fact that some of these cultural assets, such as familial capital, are integral to Latinx student success (Cuellar, 2014, 2015; Kouyoumdjian et al., 2015). Also, most existing surveys are not grounded in the lived experiences of Latinx students. Given that HSIs can cultivate empowering environments by drawing on the cultural knowledge embedded within the communities these institutions serve (Gonzales, 2015), the evaluation of these environments should also be based on the cultural assets and educational views of Latinx students. Accordingly, Latinx student perspectives must be interwoven in the process of creating new measures and surveys for HSIs.

Additionally, we encourage scholars and institutional researchers to explore Latinx empowerment at HSIs through different methodological approaches. Several scholars point to a variety of qualitative and indigenous research methodologies that represent robust and rigorous asset-based approaches, such as interviews, testimonios, and focus groups (Rendón et al., 2014; Smith, 1999; Yosso et al., 2009). Of particular importance are the twenty-five indigenous projects Smith (1999) describes, with emphasis on envisioning, democratizing, creating, and sharing as these position students as both experts in their own experiences and as stakeholders in HSIs. We further recommend the employment of participatory action-research that includes students in the reciprocal process of creating and assessing HSIs for continual improvement towards enacting an empowering education.

**Conclusion**

As Latinx students continue to enroll at HSIs in large numbers, these colleges and universities are uniquely positioned to educate and empower these students. By centering Latinx students at these institutions, HSIs are in a position to restructure around the community cultural wealth inherent among communities of color (Yosso, 2005), which in turn has the potential to self-correct some of the structural inequities inherent in higher education and society. Current approaches to assessing Latinx student success do not holistically tap into the transformative form of education that is necessary to fully advance this historically marginalized group. By employing a model that assesses Latinx empowerment, HSIs can ensure
that students are obtaining the requisite knowledge and skills to transform themselves, their communities, and society. Through the empowerment of Latinx students, HSIs can proactively promote economic, social, and political equity for this racialized group.
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Assessing Empowerment at HSIs

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What Does it Mean to be Latinx-serving? Testing the Utility of the Typology of HSI Organizational Identities

Gina Ann Garcia

University of Pittsburgh

Abstract

While scholars agree that enrolling a large percentage of Latinx students is not enough for postsecondary institutions to be considered “Latinx-serving,” there continues to be a debate about what it means for institutions to have an organizational identity for serving this population. The Typology of HSI Organizational Identities is a guiding framework that suggests there are multiple ways for an institution to serve Latinx students, and thus multiple “types” of Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs). The typology considers academic and non-academic outcomes for Latinx students as well as the institution’s ability to provide a culture that enhances their racial/ethnic experience. In this study, I used the typology to classify four HSIs and two emerging HSIs in the Midwest, a geographic area in the United States with a growing population of Latinxs and HSIs. I drew on secondary data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and primary data from institutional websites. In doing so, I sought to test the utility of the typology for classifying institutions for research, practice, and policy, and found that it is a useful tool for looking at how postsecondary institutions may serve Latinx students beyond enrollment. Implications for research, practice, and policy are discussed.

Keywords: Hispanic-Serving Institutions, Latinx-serving identity, Latinx college students, organizational culture, organizational identity

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.24974/amae.11.3.363
Introduction

Individual identity development of college students is a concept that higher education scholars have grappled with for some time. Less effort has been spent trying to understand the organizational identity of postsecondary institutions, with Weerts, Freed, and Morpew (2014) concluding that “literature on this topic has produced a fragmented set of studies only loosely connected to the broad concept of organizational identity” (p. 230). While organizational theorists have spent over three decades conceptualizing, defining, and testing the concept of organizational identity, the extensive body of literature on the topic complicates any endeavor to understand the concept. Gonzales (2013) contends that organizational identities of postsecondary institutions are constructed along “institutionalized ways of knowing,” or based on measures that the field of higher education recognizes as “legitimate.” Other researchers suggest an organizational identity is embedded within the culture (Hatch & Schultz, 1997), or rooted in historical legacies and institutional sagas (MacDonald, 2013; Weerts et al., 2014).

The organizational identity of Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) is even more complex, with scholars and practitioners grappling with the question, “What does it mean to be Latinx-serving?” By definition, HSIs are accredited, degree-granting, non-profit institutions that enroll 25% or more fulltime equivalent enrollment of undergraduate Latinx1 students (Santiago, 2006). Santiago (2012), however, points out that this is a political identity, based solely on enrollment and the federal government’s desire to address the low college-going and completion rates of the Latinx population. Moreover, HSIs are newer organizational forms, first being recognized by the federal government in 1992, meaning they do not have extensive histories or organizational sagas from which to construct an organizational identity.

While few scholars have attempted to conceptualize an organizational identity for HSIs (Garcia, 2016, 2017), some argue that HSIs are not Latinx-serving, simply because they operate like traditionally white2 institutions. Researchers have concluded that the mission statements of HSIs do not reflect a commitment to serving Latinx students (Contreras, Malcom, & Bensimon, 2008), the curricula are not ethno-centric (Cole, 2011), and HSIs embrace white normative practices that reinforce dominant ways of knowing (Ledesma & Burciaga, 2015). Furthermore,

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1 I use the term “Latinx” as a gender inclusive term for people who self-identify as having racial and ethnic roots in Latin America, South America, Mexico, and parts of the Caribbean.
2 I intentionally use a lower case “w” when referring to white as a race in order to decenter whiteness in my research and writing.
the faculty and administration remain predominantly white (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Santos & Acevedo-Gil, 2013). Although these may all be indicators of a Latinx-serving identity (or lack thereof), there is a need to further operationalize this identity in a way that is useful in practice and policy. The purpose of this study was to move from theoretical propositions laid out by Garcia (2016, 2017) about the ontological construction of a Latinx-serving identity, to a more useful approach to understanding and classifying HSIs beyond enrollment. As such, I used the Typology of HSI Organizational Identities (Garcia, 2017) to classify six eligible HSIs and emerging HSIs (eHSIs; postsecondary institutions that enroll between 15%-24% Latinx students) in the Midwest along multiple indicators of a Latinx-serving identity, as suggested by the literature and Garcia (2017).

**Literature Review**

Theoretically, it has been proposed that an organizational identity may be socially constructed by organizational members based on their understanding of the central, distinct, and enduring features of the organization, or developed by organizational leaders based on their desire to gain legitimacy when compared to similar organizations in the field (Pedersen & Dobbin, 2006). While I contend that both are theoretically useful, I turned to the current research on HSIs to better understand how scholars have framed what it means to be Latinx-serving. While most have not called it a “Latinx-serving identity,” I used the literature to understand what a Latinx-serving identity may look like in practice.

Some have implied that if an institution produces positive academic outcomes, it is effectively serving Latinx students (and vice versa). In reviewing persistence data (enrolling for three consecutive semesters), 30-unit completion rates, transfer rates (from community college to four-year institutions), and graduation rates (associates or bachelor’s degree) at 56 HSIs in California, Contreras and Contreras (2015) found that while Latinx students persisted and completed 30-units in equitable rates compared to white students, they transferred and graduated at lower rates. As such, the authors suggested that California HSIs (both two-year and four-year) are not effectively serving Latinx students. These findings paralleled earlier work by Contreras and colleagues (2008), who provided evidence that HSIs are not producing equitable outcomes for Latinx students in comparison to white students, and therefore not effectively serving Latinx students.
Scholars using advanced statistical modeling, however, have shown that when institutional characteristics, such as selectivity, are accounted for, the significant differences in graduation outcomes for Latinx students at HSIs versus non-HSIs essentially disappear (Flores & Park, 2013, 2015; Rodríguez & Calderón Galdeano, 2015). Others have used alternative measures of academic success to complicate the notion of serving Latinx students. In a study of nine community colleges in California, Hagedorn, Chi, Cepeda, and McLain (2007) found that a critical mass of Latinx students and faculty on campus was a positive predictor of a variable they called “meta-success,” inclusive of course success ratios, cumulative GPA, and course completion rates. While the authors of these studies did not make strong claims about the extent to which HSIs are serving Latinx students, they provided evidence to suggest that if academic outcomes are in fact indicators of how well institutions are serving Latinx students, HSIs may be serving Latinx students as well as comparable non-HSIs.

Non-academic outcomes could also be indicators of a Latinx-serving identity. Fosnacht and Nailos (2015) used a counterfactual decomposition technique to account for institutional differences and found that HSIs have a positive, yet modest effect on engagement outcomes for Latinx students. Similarly, González (2008) contends that Latinx students at HSIs engage in civic activities at similar rates as white students, despite the fact that numerous studies have shown that People of Color\(^3\) are less likely to be civically engaged. Cuellar (2014) found that Latinx students at HSIs show a significant increase in their academic self-concept over four years. Latinx students may also develop racial identity salience as a result of attending an HSI or eHSI (Garcia, Patrón, Ramirez, & Hudson, 2016). Again, these authors did not discuss an HSI organizational identity, per se, but they framed their studies to suggest that non-academic outcomes may be indicators of a Latinx-serving identity.

A third way that a Latinx-identity may be understood is through the campus culture. In this regard, the argument is that if an institution has a positive, culturally engaging campus, it is effectively serving Latinx students (and vice versa). For example, the culture at HSIs may help Latinx students feel connected to faculty and staff on campus with similar racial/ethnic backgrounds (Dayton, Gonzalez-Vasquez, Martinez, & Plum, 2004) and may increase their sense of belonging (Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016; Maestas, Vaquera, & Muñoz Zehr, 2007). Staff

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\(^3\) I intentionally capitalize “People of Color” and all its forms in order to center the experiences of racialized people within my research and writing.
and administrators at HSIs may also create campus cultures that foster success for Latinx students (Espinoza & Espinoza, 2012; Garcia & Ramirez, 2015). Some HSIs incorporate advising models that are culturally relevant (Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015) while others enact student support programs that validate Latinx students (Martinez & Gonzales, 2015). There are also numerous examples of faculty at HSIs that utilize culturally relevant pedagogy in their classrooms, recognizing the unique ways of knowing of Latinx students (Cervantes, 2015; Kiasatpour & Lasley, 2008; Lara & Lara, 2012; Núñez, Murakami-Ramalho, & Cuero, 2010). Alternatively, some studies have revealed that the way that Latinxs experience the campus culture at HSIs is complex (i.e., sometimes positive and sometimes negative) (Cuellar & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2016; Garcia, 2015), further complicating the argument about the extent to which HSIs are effectively serving Latinx students. Whether studies are framed around academic and non-academic outcomes, or campus culture, the argument (often unintentionally) is that these variables are good indicators of the extent to which institutions are serving Latinx students.

**Theoretical Framework**

Recognizing the need to specifically conceptualize a Latinx-serving identity, I proposed a Typology of HSI Organizational Identities (see Figure 1) (Garcia, 2017). Drawing on the extant literature on HSIs, incorporating two organizational theories (institutional theory and cultural theory), and using data from an in-depth case study of a four-year HSI in the Southwest, I synthesized the indicators of a Latinx-serving identity. With the typology, I proposed a comprehensive understanding of this identity based on outcomes for Latinx students (e.g., graduation, post graduate job placement, post-baccalaureate degree attainment) and a culture that ultimately produces these outcomes (e.g., positive campus climate, support services, community engagement).

I developed the typology based on how organizational members in the study constructed an ideal HSI identity and proposed four quadrants based on this construction. The overwhelming majority of participants said that an HSI should produce desirable outcomes typically used to measure institutional success with regard to serving students (i.e., graduation rates). Others suggested that an HSI should enact a culture that enhances the experiences of Latinx students. The typology, therefore, incorporates both outcomes and culture, complicating
What does it Mean to be Latinx-serving?

In proposing a typology, I intentionally chose not to suggest rank ordering HSIs, and instead argue that all types of HSIs are worthy and valid within an overly stratified system of higher education.

One organizational identity, *Latinx-enrolling*, suggests that an institution enrolls the minimum 25% Latinx students needed to become federally designated as an HSI, but does not produce equitable outcomes for Latinx students. Furthermore, it may not have an organizational culture that supports Latinx students. A second organizational identity, *Latinx-producing*, suggests an institution enrolls at least 25% Latinx students and produces a significant number of outcomes for Latinx students. The institution, however, might lack a culture for supporting the success of Latinx students. A third organizational identity, *Latinx-enhancing*, is based on enrolling a minimum of 25% Latinx students and enacting a culture that enhances the educational and racial/ethnic experience of Latinx students. The institution, however, may not produce an equitable number of outcomes for Latinx students, as legitimized by the field. Finally, a *Latinx-serving* identity is one in which an institution enrolls 25% Latinx students, produces an equitable number of outcomes for Latinx students, and enacts a culture that enhances the educational and racial/ethnic experience of Latinx students. In this study, I used the typology to classify six HSIs/eHSIs in the Midwest as different types, not necessarily identities, since I theoretically conceptualize organizational identities as socially constructed. Instead, this approach is more practical and relevant to policy.
Methods

The purpose of this study was to test the extent to which the Typology of HSI Organizational Identities can be used to classify HSIs. I used a multiple case study approach, first looking at the single cases, comparing and contrasting them, and then seeking to understand the larger “quintain.” The quintain is the “object or phenomenon or condition to be studied—a target, but not a bull’s eye” (Stake, 2006, p. 6). In this study, the quintain is, “being Latinx-serving,” beyond simply enrolling 25% or more Latinx students. I first looked for indicators of a Latinx-serving identity as suggested by Garcia (2017), then I began to make sense of the quintain by examining the similarities and differences across each case.

Data Collection

For this study, I used two sources of data including secondary data maintained by the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and primary data gathered through a systematic review of each institution’s website. Data collection occurred during the fall 2015 semester. As such, the IPEDS data are for the 2013-2014 academic year. Data gathered from the institutional websites are based on the most up-to-date information available on each site during the time of data collection.

From IPEDS I collected undergraduate and graduate enrollment for fall 2013, disaggregated by race. I also collected the percentage of faculty and administrators who identify as People of Color and Latinx (see Table 1). To better understand institutional characteristics, I collected SAT/ACT composite scores and data on whether or not the institution has an open admissions policy (indicators of institutional selectivity), information on the number of students who receive Pell grants (indicator of percentage low income students enrolled), and institutional expenditures on instruction, academic support, and student support services (see Table 2).
Table 1

**Compositional Characteristics for Six Cases (Fall 2013)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>FTE</th>
<th>Undergraduate Enrollment</th>
<th>Latinx Undergrad</th>
<th>SOC Undergrad</th>
<th>Graduate Enrollment</th>
<th>Latinx Graduate</th>
<th>SOC Graduate</th>
<th>Latinx Administrators</th>
<th>Latinx Faculty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACU</td>
<td>6,635</td>
<td>8,950</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>1,871</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCU</td>
<td>1,971</td>
<td>2,069</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>1,401</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APC</td>
<td>1,325</td>
<td>1,607</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RPU</td>
<td>2,701</td>
<td>2,781</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RRU</td>
<td>15,914</td>
<td>16,671</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>11,367</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCU</td>
<td>2,636</td>
<td>2,920</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>1,332</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. SOC = Students of Color
Note. All data were retrieved from IPEDS except FTE; FTE obtained from Excelencia in Education.
Table 2

*Institutional Characteristics for Six Cases (Fall 2013)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>FTE</th>
<th>Part-time Enrollment</th>
<th>Percent Pell</th>
<th>SAT Composite</th>
<th>Open Admission</th>
<th>Instructional Expenditures/FTE</th>
<th>Academic Support Expenditures/FTE</th>
<th>Student Services Expenditures/FTE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACU</td>
<td>6,635</td>
<td>3,882</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>990</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>14,278</td>
<td>1,936</td>
<td>2,866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCU</td>
<td>1,971</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>1160</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>14,983</td>
<td>4,150</td>
<td>3,491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APC</td>
<td>1,325</td>
<td>464</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4,575</td>
<td>1,077</td>
<td>1,302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RPU</td>
<td>2,701</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>7,633</td>
<td>3,636</td>
<td>9,642</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RRU</td>
<td>15,914</td>
<td>1,269</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>1240</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>45,852</td>
<td>9,948</td>
<td>3,403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCU</td>
<td>2,636</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>1115</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>11,621</td>
<td>2,050</td>
<td>3,931</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. All data were retrieved from IPEDS except FTE; FTE obtained from *Excelencia* in Education.
For persistence and graduation data, I gathered six-year graduation rates and data on the percentage of completers, disaggregated by race. As argued by Santiago, Taylor, and Calderón Galdeano (2016), completion rates may be better indicators of how well HSIs are doing with regard to producing equitable outcomes since these rates account for students who transferred in from other institutions, whereas six-year graduation rates only account for first-time, full-time students. In order to understand equity in graduation and completion rates, I compared these outcomes for Latinx students to all races and white students. While there are numerous data points I could have drawn from IPEDS, I chose to limit my analysis to these variables as a way to focus on indicators of access and graduation, both of which have been noted as important indicators of an HSI organizational identity.

In reviewing websites of the institutions in the sample, I looked for indicators of what Museus (2014) calls a culturally engaging campus environment, including opportunities to engage in meaningful racial/ethnic and cross-racial/ethnic interactions with faculty, staff, and other peers, as well as opportunities to participate in humanizing and validating educational environments. Others have expanded and highlighted these factors within an HSI context (Garcia, 2016; Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015; Torres & Zerquera, 2012). Guided by these propositions, I reviewed mission and value statements, strategic plans, websites for programs that support minoritized students (low income, first-generation, Students of Color), and news articles about the institution’s status as an HSI. I tracked the number of multicultural and/or Latinx specific cultural centers, ethnic studies programs, and/or Latinx specific curricular programs, pre-college outreach and enrollment programs, such as TRiO and Educational Opportunity Programs, and academic support programs that are specifically for minoritized students within each institution. I also tracked the number of Latinx student organizations.

While there are other ways I could have determined how engaging a campus is for Latinx and other minoritized students, I limited my qualitative review to these factors based on Garcia’s (2016, 2017) theoretical propositions and scholarship reviewed for this study.

Case Selection

The cases used in this study are part of a larger project called the Midwest HSI Study. While there are many geographic areas in the United States worth examining in order to learn about the population of HSIs, this project is focused on the Midwest for two reasons: (1) there
is a significant number of Latinx people in the Midwest, with Illinois alone being one of five states with the largest Latinx population (2.2 million) (Stepler & Lopez, 2016), and (2) there are 19 HSIs in the Midwest and 31 eHSIs in the Midwest, with a majority situated in the greater Chicago area (Excelencia in Education, 2016, 2017). More empirical research should look at HSIs and eHSIs in this region, with this project being one of the first to embark on this process.

I followed Stake’s (2006) suggestion about the three main criteria to consider when selecting cases: (1) relevancy of the case to the quintain, (2) diversity across the cases, and (3) opportunity to complicate overall understanding of the quintain. In order to meet these criteria, I considered all four-year postsecondary institutions in Chicago that met the eligibility requirement of 25% enrollment of Latinx students to be considered an HSI. At the time of data collection, five institutions met this enrollment criterion, while 11 were eHSIs, enrolling between 15%-24% Latinx students. Four of the five eligible HSIs were included in this multiple case study along with two eHSIs. All six sites are located in Chicago and have been affected in similar ways by the historical, educational, and political contexts of the city (Garcia & Hudson, in press). In looking to find diversity across the cases and seeking opportunity to complicate an understanding of the quintain, the chosen sites range in size and type, from small liberal arts, to mid-size and large public institutions granting associates, bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral degrees. Using Núñez, Crisp, and Elizondo’s (2016) typology of institutional diversity of HSIs, which they developed as a way to more accurately compare HSIs for research purposes, two institutions are similar to Big Systems Four-Years and four are similar to Small Communities Four-Years. The institutions also varied in their enrollment of Latinx students (24%-88% at the time of data collection).

Case Descriptions

Azul City University (ACU; a pseudonym) is a four-year, midsize, public institution classified by Carnegie as a master’s college/university. It was founded in late nineteenth century as a teaching college, and is now considered an urban comprehensive university offering over 80 degree programs. The undergraduate FTE is 6,635 and compositionally diverse, with 39% identifying as white, 35% as Latinx, 10% as Black, and 9% as Asian American. The graduate enrollment is 1,871, with fewer self-identified Latinxs (14%). The institution has been recognized as one of the most diverse institutions in the Midwest and has been federally
recognized as an HSI for nearly 20 years. It has received numerous HSI grants from the federal
government in order to develop its capacity for serving Latinx students.

Morado Catholic University (MCU; a pseudonym) is a four-year, small, private
institution classified by Carnegie as a master’s college/university. It has a strong tradition as a
Catholic university, founded as an all women’s college that eventually became co-educational.
The undergraduate FTE is 1,971, with 40% of all students identifying as Latinx and 40% as white.
Other racialized populations are represented in much smaller numbers, including 7% Black and
3% Asian American. The graduate population is also significant at 1,401 students, 13% of which
identify as Latinx. The institution is officially recognized as an HSI and has received some federal
funding.

Amarillo Private College (APC; a pseudonym) is a small, private institution classified as
an associate’s four-year college offering minimal academic programs, including three bachelor’s
degrees and 10 associate’s degree. The undergraduate FTE is 1,325 with 88% of the population
identifying as Latinx. APC was founded as one of few dual-language/bilingual institutions of
higher education. The institution is officially designated as an HSI and has received funding from
the federal government for this designation as well as accolades from the Hispanic Association
of Colleges and Universities (HACU) for its work as an HSI.

Rosado Private University (RPU; a pseudonym) is a small, private institution classified by
Carnegie as a master’s college/university. It is an urban, comprehensive university focused
primarily on undergraduate education, with fewer graduate programs. The FTE is 2,701 with
27% of the population identifying as Latinx. The compositional diversity of the undergraduate
population is notable, with nearly 60% of all students identifying as Students of Color. As such,
it has been recognized as one of the most diverse institutions in the Midwest. RPU has received
at least one Department of Education Title V grant for developing HSIs and is federally
recognized as an HSI.

Roja Research University (RRU; a pseudonym) is a four-year, large, publically funded,
research university (very high research activity) offering doctoral degrees. The undergraduate
FTE is 16,671 and is compositionally diverse, with 24% of students self-identifying as Latinx, 38%
as white, 8% as Black/African American, and 22% as Asian/Pacific Islander. As a doctoral granting
university, RRU also enrolls a large graduate population of 11,367 with fewer identifying as
Latinx (9%). At the time of data collection, the institution was aware of its status as an eHSI and
was undergoing the process of becoming federally designated as an HSI while simultaneously applying for a Department of Education Title V grant.

Café Catholic University (CCU; a pseudonym) is a small, private institution classified by Carnegie as a master’s college/university. It has a strong tradition as a Roman Catholic institution, founded in the mid nineteenth century by the Sisters of Mercy to spread Catholic education in the city. The FTE is 2,636 with 23% of students identifying as Latinx. CCU also has a significant graduate population, just fewer than 1,400, although less than 10% of the population is Latinx. For a summary of the six cases, see Table 1 and Table 2.

Findings

In order to classify each of the six institutions within the Typology of HSI Organizational Identities, I looked at graduation and completion rates (see Table 3) and the number of programs and services that are culturally engaging for Latinx, low income, first generation, and other Students of Color (see Table 4). I categorized the institutions by comparing the graduation and completion rates of the six institutions relative to each other. At the same time, I observed the national average, finding that the six-year graduation rate for all first-time, full-time undergraduate students was 59% for the fall 2007 cohort (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). Five out of the six institutions had six-year graduation rates below the national average. The six-year graduation rate at HSIs, however, was 39% for the fall 2007 cohort (Santiago et al., 2016). Only two of the six institutions had six-year graduation rates below the national average for HSIs.

It is also important to note that on average, private not-for-profit institutions have slightly higher six-graduation rates than public institutions, which is likely connected to the resources available at these institutions. Even further, when selectivity is accounted for, the most selective institutions that admit less than 25% of all applicants have the highest six-year graduation rates in comparison to open access institutions (all students admitted) and broad access institutions (more than 25% admitted) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). Four of the six institutions in the sample are private, two are selective, and one is open access (see Table 2). These indicators were carefully considered as I classified each institution within the typology. Based on the data used and considering nuances in what it means to “produce”
What does it Mean to be Latinx-serving?

Table 3

Graduation and Completion Rates (Fall 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>6-year Graduation</th>
<th>6-year Graduation</th>
<th>6-year Graduation</th>
<th>Completers</th>
<th>Completers</th>
<th>Completers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACU</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>2,126</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCU</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>1,051</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APC</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>474</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RPU</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>1,634</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RRU</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>6,910</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCU</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>1,263</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. All data were retrieved from IPEDS.
Table 4

Number of Culturally Engaging Programs & Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Outreach &amp; Recruitment</th>
<th>Student Services</th>
<th>Grant Funded (e.g., TRiO)</th>
<th>Cultural Centers</th>
<th>Ethnic Studies Programs</th>
<th>Latinx Student Organizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACU</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCU</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APC</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RPU</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RRU</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCU</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. All data were retrieved through document analysis of institutional websites.
What does it Mean to be Latinx-serving?

I classified two institutions as Latinx-enhancing, two as Latinx-producing, one as Latinx-enrolling and one as Latinx-serving.

I classified Azul City University (ACU) as a Latinx-enhancing institution since its graduation and completion rates for all students, not just Latinx students are low. While the six-year graduation rate for all students at ACU is the lowest in the sample (20%) and lower than the national average for HSIs (39%), the graduation rate is even lower for Latinx students (18%), and higher for white students (26%), which reflects racial inequities in graduation. Even when contrasting the completion rates for Latinx students (22%) and white students (48%), there appear to be gross racial disparities. Another way to think about this disproportionality is to compare completion rates to enrollment rates for individual racial groups. With 35% of the population at ACU identifying as Latinx (compared to 22% of completers), and 39% as white (compared to 48% of completers), the inequities are even further highlighted. This is even more alarming when considering that ACU has one of the highest rates of instructional expenditures per FTE.

In comparison, ACU has one of the highest concentrations of programs and services that are culturally engaging (relative to other institutions in the sample). It has three ethnic studies programs, including Latinx and Latin American Studies, African and African American Studies, and Asian Studies. ACU also has six cultural centers for historically oppressed groups as well as a branch campus that caters to the Latinx community in the city. The campus is also home to multiple federally funded programs such as Talent Search and McNair Scholars. Moreover, the campus has multiple outreach and recruitment programs targeting Students of Color and low-income students and support programs that assist these students once they matriculate. ACU also has notable Latinx student organizations with long histories, both on campus and nationally. Based on these programs and services, I classified ACU as Latinx-enhancing, despite the campus having low graduation and completion rates. This is not to dismiss the institution’s responsibility in graduating Latinx students, but instead to recognize that it is making an effort to support Latinx students and to enhance their racial/ethnic understanding of self.

I also classified Roja Research University (RRU) as Latinx-enhancing based on data collected for this study. Of the six institutions in the sample, RRU has one of the highest six-
year graduation rates for all students (57%), slightly below the national average (59%), suggesting that it might be considered Latinx-producing. Of course, this is likely the result of selectivity of the institution and resources available, as it is one of the most selective institutions in the sample and most highly resourced (see Table 2), meaning that is should be graduating students in high numbers. As such, I was more critical of the fact that there are racial inequities in graduation and completion rates. The six-year graduation rate for Latinx students is 49% while the rate for white students is 58%. Even more concerning is the fact that the percentage of Latinx completers in 2013 was 14% compared to white students at 48%. This suggests huge disparities worth considering in conjunction with other institutional variables, such as selectivity and resources. Similar to ACU, the completion rates for Latinxs do not parallel their rate of enrollment, which is also worth considering in determining the extent to which the institution is producing legitimized outcomes.

Like ACU, I considered RRU to be Latinx-enhancing as a result of its culturally engaging programs and services. It has four well-established ethnic studies programs, including Asian American Studies, African American Studies, American Indian Studies, and Latin American and Latino Studies, as well as cultural centers that parallel these programs. RRU is also home to an academic support program that caters to Latinx students, with the program providing outreach services and academic support. It also has grant-funded programs that serve minoritized students including Upward Bound and McNair Scholars. Finally, the campus has at least 16 student organizations that cater to Latinx students including Greek organizations, academic organizations, and political organizations. As a result of these programs that enhance the experience of Latinx students, and in many ways value their cultural ways of knowing, I classified RRU as a Latinx-enhancing institution.

I classified Morado Catholic University (MCU) and Rosado Private University (RPU) as Latinx-producing. Not only is MCU’s six-year graduation rate well above the other five institutions in the sample (63%), it is above the national average for all institutions (59%) and all HSIs (39%). Even further, the six-year graduation rate for Latinx students (63%) is at parity with the campus’s overall rate, yet still slightly lower than the rate for white students (69%). What is concerning, however, is the percentage of Latinx completers (16%) compared to white completers (64%) and compared to overall enrollment of Latinx students at the institution (40%). This, however, may be due to the fact that MCU is a small, private Catholic institution.
enrolling a large majority of “traditional” students (first-time, fulltime); therefore the six-year graduation rate may capture the experience of these students more accurately than an institution enrolling a large number of “post-traditional” students (i.e., transfers students; part-time students) (Santiago et al., 2016). As such, I classified it as Latinx-producing, considering all data points as valid. When it comes to six-year graduation rates, MCU is doing remarkably well, although likely its success in this realm is related to its selectivity as an institution and its available resources, as noted in Table 2. Alternatively, it has limited culturally engaging programs and services, inclusive of only two ethnic studies programs and one Latinx student organization.

Rosado Private University (RPU) was the second institution I classified as Latinx-producing as a result of high and/or equitable graduation and completion rates, yet low numbers of culturally engaging programs and services. While the six-year graduation rate for all students (46%) is one of the lower among the six institutions, it is higher than the average for all HSIs (39%), yet a bit lower than the national average (59%); however, the rates suggest that RPU is graduating Latinx students in equitable numbers (55%), although still slightly lower than that of white students (58%). In 2013, 24% of the completers identified as Latinx, which is comparable to the enrollment of Latinx students (27%). This is an important finding, as it could be another way to think about equity in completion rates. Similar to MCU, RPU has very few programs and services specifically for Latinx students, including two organizations that are Latinx-centric, and well established federally funded programs that cater to minoritized students such as Talent Search and Upward Bound.

I considered Café Catholic University (CCU) to be a Latinx-enrolling institution. CCU has a similar six-year graduation rate for all students as RPU (47%), which is higher than the national average for HSIs; however, the graduation rate for Latinx students is lower (43%) than the completion rate for all (47%) and for white students (58%). Even further disparities exist when looking at the percentage of Latinx completers (9%) compared to white student completers (64%). This is concerning, as Latinx students appear to be earning degrees at rates that are inequitable compared to white students. In considering the resources of the institution, there is further concern, as it is not the most under resourced institution in the sample (see Table 2). The institution also has few culturally engaging programs, inclusive of only two ethnic studies programs, one Latinx organization, and one grant funded program for minoritized students (Student Support Services).
Finally, I classified Amarillo Private College (APC) as Latinx-serving. While it has a six-year graduation rate (26%) that is well below the other sites in the sample, the national average (59%), and the HSI average (39%), APC differs in its completion rates, as 88% of all completers in 2013 identified as Latinx, which is comparable to the number of enrolled students who identify as Latinx (88%). Presumably, this difference is related to the fact that a majority of APC’s students are “post-traditional” (i.e., transfers students; part-time students); therefore, the six-year graduation rate is highly inaccurate, yet the completion rate is much more reflective of the ways in which this institution is graduating students. Using the completion rate, it appears that APC is producing an equitable number of Latinx degree completers in comparison to Latinx enrolloers. At the same time, APC is somewhat of an anomaly in that it enrolls a majority Latinx population; therefore, the completion rates should reflect this percentage. Giving value to alternative ways of classifying an institution as successful when it comes to graduating students, I considered APC to be an equitable producer of Latinx degree holders.

Another peculiarity of APC is that it does not have any Latinx-specific programs and services; yet, APC is distinct in that it has an historical mission to serve Latinx students and was founded as a bilingual English-Spanish institution. As such, the institution may not need to establish Latinx-specific programs and services, as it is inherently within APC’s mission to serve Latinx students. Even further, it offers bilingual and bicultural curricula across all disciplines, suggesting there is no need to establish ethnic and Latinx-specific programs. As such, the ways in which I operationalized culturally engaging components of a campus environment for this study are highly inaccurate for this institution. Taking its unique characteristics into consideration, I classified APC as Latinx-serving.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to classify HSIs/eHSIs in the Midwest within the Typology of HSI Organizational Identities as a way to test the utility of the typology for policy and practice. Although I have theoretically described the complexities of an HSI organizational identity (see Garcia, 2016, 2017), this study allowed me to test the practicality of these theoretical propositions by using multiple sources of data and examining them across multiple cases.
Before classifying the six institutions within the typology, I first examined the racial composition within these institutions (Table 1) as this is the first indicator of a Latinx-serving identity, and the most basic factor used to determine HSI eligibility. These data confirmed previous findings about the high concentration of undergraduate Latinx students and Students of Color in HSIs. Based on undergraduate enrollment data alone, HSIs in the Midwest are meeting the Department of Education’s call for HSIs to increase educational opportunities and success for Latinx students (as suggested by the Title V grant competition) (Santiago et al., 2016).

What the compositional data show (Table 1) is that there is a lower percentage of faculty and administrators who identify as Latinx and People of Color as well as a lower concentration of Latinx graduate students and graduate Students of Color within HSIs. Although others have noted a lower concentration of Faculty of Color in HSIs (i.e., Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Santos & Acevedo-Gil, 2013), the compositional diversity of the graduate population within HSIs is a relatively unexplored topic. While the federal government does not consider these variables to be essential to the mission of HSIs as currently defined by the Title V grant competition, research has noted that faculty and administrators have the ability to make Latinx students feel a sense of belonging at HSIs (e.g., Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016), which may ultimately contribute to their academic success. As a political construct, perhaps an HSI identity is oversimplified, as it does not consider these dimensions. Moreover, these factors do not fit neatly within the typology used in this study, yet these descriptive findings further justify the need to consider the compositional diversity of faculty, staff, and graduate students in a Latinx-serving identity.

I next considered graduation and completion rates (Table 3) as a way to classify institutions within the typology, not because these rates are the best indicators of “serving” a population, but simply because organizational members believe they are important indicators (Garcia, 2017), as do researchers studying HSIs (e.g., Contreras et al., 2008; Flores & Park, 2013, 2015; Santiago et al., 2016). Using academic outcomes to classify institutions, therefore, aligned with the current research on HSIs, which sometimes frames the extent to which an institution is serving Latinx students as determined by persistence and graduation. Yet, comparing the six institutions and using both six-year graduation rates and completion rates
complicated this seemingly simply endeavor, likely as a result of other institutional characteristics (Table 2).

Based on six-year graduation rates alone, three institutions (MCU, RPU, & RRU) appeared to be doing well with regard to graduating all students (although likely the result of factors such as institutional resources and/or selectivity); however, there were racial disparities in these rates when comparing white students to Latinx students at all institutions except APC. Even further, when looking at completion rates by race, there appeared to be inequities in the number of Latinx completers at all five institutions except APC. Which rate, then, should researchers use to determine how well HSIs are doing with regard to academic outcomes for Latinx students? Santiago et al. (2016) argue that completion rates are better indicators for HSIs; however, the legitimized outcome that is most highly regarded by higher education scholars and practitioners is the six-year graduation rate. In this analysis, I placed value on both rates and took equity into consideration, which complicated the ways in which I classified institutions. This highlights the importance of looking at these rates from multiple angles before drawing conclusions about how well an institution in serving a particular population. Arguably, an institution that appears to have a low six-year graduation rate could still be considered Latinx-serving, as was determined through this analysis (APC).

Looking next at culturally engaging aspects of the campus, some institutions do not appear to enact a culture that enhances the educational, racial, and ethnic experience of its students (Table 4). While some appear to be doing well with regard to producing an equitable number of Latinx degree holders, they are operating from a, “Latinx-neutral” perspective, meaning they are not centering the experiences of Latinx students or being intentional in their efforts to create a culture that enhances the experience of Latinx students. Although there is no guarantee that creating a culture that values and embraces Latinidad will ultimately increase graduation and completion rates, research has shown that students’ perceptions of the campus climate affect their persistence (Museus, Nichols, & Lambert, 2008; Rhee, 2008). Even further, Garcia (2016) suggests that HSIs should enhance college students’ racial/ethnic identity and development, regardless of its effects on persistence and graduation. In other words, enhancing students’ racial/ethnic ways of knowing should be considered an important outcome of HSIs.

Two institutions in the sample that I classified as Latinx-enhancing are ACU and RRU, as they have longstanding, historical programs and services that are relevant to the racial, ethnic,
What does it Mean to be Latinx-serving?

and cultural ways of knowing of Latinx students (see Doran & Medina, 2017, this issue). While ACU has very low six-year graduation and completion rates for all students (not just Latinx), and RRU has inequitable outcomes for Latinx when compared to white students, both are doing well with regard to providing a culture that enhances the experience of Latinx students. Again, this is not to say that graduation outcomes are unimportant or that these institutions should not work towards producing equitable outcomes, but rather to suggest that there are multiple ways for an institution to serve Latinx students. While I classified institutions along this dimension based on previous research (Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015; Torres & Zerquera, 2012), I was unable to determine the extent to which these institutions are actually enacting a Latinx-enhancing identity, since this concept is better explored through interviews with organizational members and/or through direct observations of the culture (see Garcia, 2016).

Finally, it is worth noting that APC, the only institution I classified as Latinx-serving, is a unique case. While it does not appear to have culturally engaging programs as I operationalized them in this study, it does appear to have a culturally engaging campus environment as defined by Museus (2014) and other higher education scholars. By this I mean that it does not have any programs and services specifically for minoritized students and does not have any ethnic studies programs; however, it was historically founded to serve the Latinx population and therefore engages Latinx students within and beyond the classroom. There are numerous opportunities for students to have meaningful within-group racial interactions, as the campus enrolls mostly Latinx students as well as the highest concentration of faculty and administrators who identify as Latinx or People of Color. The educational environment is also humanizing and culturally validating, as classes are offered in English and Spanish. For APC, there is no need to establish specific programs for minoritized groups, as serving these populations has been normalized.

Implications

With the number of institutions reaching the eligibility requirement for HSI status increasing each year, researchers, administrators, and legislators will continue to grapple with what it means to be Latinx-serving. As I have proposed in other research (Garcia, 2016, 2017), an organizational identity for serving Latinx students is complicated and should not be reified and validated as a one-dimensional construct. Instead, there must be intentional efforts to
expand what it means for institutions to serve Latinx student, beyond simply enrolling them. With the findings of this study, I offer several implications for research, practice, and policy.

First, the typology proposed by Garcia (2017) proved to be useful for classifying HSIs and eHSIs along multiple dimensions. This typology, along with the typology proposed by Núñez et al. (2016), should be used in future research as a way to compare HSI and eHSIs. This is essential, as HSIs/eHSIs are not monolithic and should not be studied as such. Researchers must recognize the diversity of these institutions when asking empirical questions about them, including diversity by type, (two-year vs. four-year), control (public vs. private), location (Puerto Rico vs. mainland; rural vs. urban), and Carnegie classification (e.g., research, masters-granting, religious, liberal arts). Yet researchers must continue to test the usefulness of these typologies, as the typology proposed by Núñez et al. (2016) was somewhat limiting in this study. For example, while I classified two institutions as Big Systems Four-Years, they are not part of big systems, although they have similar characteristics.

The Typology of HSI Organizational Identities may also have limited usefulness across institutions. For example, HSIs in Puerto Rico may culturally engage students in very different ways than mainland institutions. This was evident with APC, as it did not have cultural indicators such as special programs and services for Latinx students, yet it has an historical mission to serve Latinx students, making it unique in comparison to the other institutions in the sample. This site alone is worth further exploration in order to test the utility of the typology, as the typology may not apply to historical HSIs.

The proposed typology can also be used for policy purposes. As legislators’ grapple with the difficult question about how to evaluate postsecondary institutions for the purpose of funding, they have largely focused on affordability, quality, and accountability (Espinosa, Crandall, & Tukibayeva, 2014). While HSIs should meet these criteria, the typology extends the meaning attached to institutional effectiveness. Looking at the various graduation and completion rates of the six institutions in this study showed how these rates can tell different stories, depending on the way they are used and evaluated. While these rates are important, they must be considered from different angles as policy decisions are made. The six-year graduation rates, for example, proved to be less useful for institutions that enroll more “post-traditional” students, which is the case for many HSIs. Also, six-year graduation rates do not capture the
complexities of available academic outcomes at HSIs, as many are community colleges and/or offer limited baccalaureate programs (Núñez & Elizondo, 2012).

I suggest that the federal government also consider its role in shaping the identity of HSIs. As institutions apply for federal funding, they are driven by the priorities of the funding agencies. For example, if the Department of Education’s Title V grant competition only places value on two things: (1) expanding educational opportunities to Latinx students and (2) enhancing academic offerings (Santiago et al., 2016), institutions will not address other aspects of a Latinx-serving identity. There must be more emphasis placed on multiple indicators of a Latinx-serving identity, including the academic and cultural outcomes suggested by Garcia (2017) and tested here. For example, requests for proposals (RFPs) from federal agencies should require institutions to show how they will implement grant activities in ways that enhance and utilize the racial and cultural experience and knowledge of all students, rather than focusing solely on providing academic and co-curricular experiences for racialized students. Moreover, the racial composition of the faculty, staff, and graduate population should be considered, and could easily be incorporated into federal grant RFPs.

The typology may also be useful in practice, as this study showed the importance of considering the campus culture for serving Latinx students. Rather than operating from a “Latinx-neutral” perspective, I argue that HSIs should use what Santiago (2013) calls a “Latinx lens,” or one that considers that the growing Latinx college student population has unique characteristics and needs. Even for those institutions that are seemingly doing well with regard to graduating Latinx students, it is important to recognize that colleges should provide an opportunity to earn more than a degree. Latinx students attending an institution that recognizes their unique characteristics and ways of knowing are likely to graduate students who are more socially and critically conscious, who become engaged civically, who vote in elections, who volunteer in their communities, and who ultimately give back to their alma mater in monetary and non-monetary ways, all of which are outcomes that most postsecondary institutions desire. HSIs must be more intentional about providing curricula, programs, and services that center the experiences, histories, and ways of knowing of Latinx students (Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015).

The data in this study showed that the percentage of graduate Students of Color in HSIs is much lower than that of undergraduates. Even further, the data revealed that the
compositional diversity of faculty and staff is not keeping pace with that of the undergraduate population. These are important considerations for administrators. Institutions should consider their role in increasing access to post-baccalaureate programs for Latinx and other Students of Color, making intentional efforts to evaluate the recruitment efforts and admissions policies for graduate programs. Providing post-baccalaureate opportunities could ultimately alleviate the struggle that HSIs have diversifying their administration and faculty. One of the best ways to increase the compositional diversity of administrators and faculty on campus is to “grow your own,” meaning institutions should develop programs that train future faculty and staff who can lead the institution through a Latinx lens. Institutions such as Adams State University have begun such efforts with the development of their Higher Education and Leadership Program (HEAL) (Freeman, 2015), as well as Northeastern Illinois University with their ENLACE (ENgaging LAtino Communities for Education) program.

**Conclusion**

Researchers, practitioners, and legislators would be remiss to classify HSIs as monolithic or to conceptualize a Latinx-serving identity as one-dimensional. Rather than basing what it means for an organization to have a Latinx-serving identity on one or two variables, this study shows that it is essential for multiple factors to be considered. Future research should continue to explore what it means for organizations to be Latinx-serving beyond the compositional diversity of the undergraduate students. This includes a look at the compositional diversity of faculty, staff, and graduate students, as well as the cultural indicators of a Latinx-serving identity, and academic and non-academic outcomes for all members.
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References


Modeling an Effective Program for Latina/o College Student Success

Kenneth P. Gonzalez  
*El Paso Community College*

Vanessa S. Meling  
*University of Texas Health Science Center*

**Abstract**

This article presents a case study of the design, implementation, and results of a program developed to increase Latina/o student success at a Hispanic-Serving Institution. A team of university faculty, staff, and administrator researchers drew from four sources of evidence to design and examine the effects of the program, including: (a) longitudinal cohort data, (b) the scholarly literature on Latina/o student success, (c) focus group data with students, and (d) syllabi analysis data. Participants in the program demonstrated increased mid-term grade point average (GPA), end of first-term GPA, and fall-to-fall persistence.

**DOI:** [http://dx.doi.org/10.24974/amae.11.3.364](http://dx.doi.org/10.24974/amae.11.3.364)
Introduction

We are a nation of several generations: the GI generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and now, Generation Z (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Generations are known for their unique circumstances and attributes, i.e., they can be described and discussed due to what makes them unique (Strauss & Howe, 1991). The GI generation, also called the Greatest Generation, is comprised of individuals born between 1901 and 1926. This generation was marked by the hundreds of thousands of soldiers that fought and died in World War II, the spawning of labor unions, and the golden age of radio (Delcampo, 2011). The Baby Boomer generation, which includes people born between 1946 and 1964, was known for their engagement in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, the large influx of women entering the labor force, and the age of television (Cannon Gibney, 2017). Americans born between 1965 and 1980 are known as Generation X. Characteristics of this generation include rising divorce rates, a lack of after-school adult supervision, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Mulrennan, 2015). Millennials include children born between 1981 and 2000 and are known for having omnipresent parents, enormous academic pressure, and computers in schools and homes (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Recently, the Millennials surpassed the Baby Boomers as the largest generation in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2016). The latest generation is referred to as Generation Z and is comprised of children born after 2001. They are the internet generation and have never known a world without computers or cell phones (White, 2017).

Examining these distinct generations through the lens of the Latina/o experience illuminates a sobering reality. It is not the trends that change over time that calls our attention. Rather, it is what persists: the struggle for educational access and achievement in postsecondary education. For those concerned with this struggle, two questions remain: (a) How can more Latinas/os enroll in college, and (b) How can more Latinas/os complete college degrees?

With regard to progress in college enrollment for Latinas/os, in 1992, the federal government took action to recognize colleges and universities as Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI) if they met an enrollment threshold of 25%. Subsequently, federal grants were made available to such institutions with the intention of supporting their efforts to increase college access for Latinas/os. Today, approximately 409 colleges or universities meet this threshold and
are recognized as HSIs (Contreras, Malcom, & Bensimon, 2008; Excelencia in Education, 2015; Nuñez, Hurtado, & Calderon Galdeano, 2015; Vigil-Laden, 2001).

Progress in college completion for Latinas/os is another matter. A college or university earns the designation HSI due to its enrollment of Latinas/os rather than the number of Latinas/os completing a degree. In fact, there is no substantive accountability structure for HSIs that receive funding to increase degree completion for Latina/os but that do not succeed in doing so (Contreras, Malcom, & Bensimon, 2008; Nuñez, Hurtado, & Calderon-Galdeano, 2015; Vigil-Laden, 2001).

Review of college completion rates (College Scorecard, 2016) for two states with large Latina/o populations, California and Texas, reveals several concerning patterns. For example, in California, only six of the state’s 32 public, four-year universities have graduation rates higher than 80%. In five out of these six universities, the representation of Latinas/os is small, somewhere between 10 and 13%. Conversely, more than two-thirds of California’s public, four-year universities have graduation rates below 60%. Latina/o enrollment for most of these institutions ranges between 25 and 60%. Stated differently, nearly every California HSI has a graduation rate below 60%. Upon closer examination, California’s public universities with the highest proportion of Latina/o students (California State University Los Angeles, California State University San Bernardino, California State University Northridge, California State University Bakersfield, and California State University Dominguez Hills) yield some of the lowest graduation rates in the system. California State University Los Angeles, which serves over 20,000 undergraduates, 61% of which are Latina/o, has a graduation rate of only 38%. Similar patterns occur in California’s private, non-profit universities. When Latina/o enrollments reach 25% or higher, the graduation rate drops below 60%. In sum, too few Latinas/os attend California’s four-year universities with high graduation rates and, too few Latinas/os graduate from California’s four-year universities with large Latina/o enrollments.

Texas shows similar patterns regarding enrollment and graduation rates for Latinas/os (College Scorecard, 2016). Only the two public flagship institutions (The University of Texas at Austin and Texas A&M University) have graduation rates approaching 80%. The remaining 32 public four-year universities have graduation rates near 60% or below. Latinas/os comprise only 18% of the undergraduate student population at The University of Texas at Austin, despite being more than 50% of the state’s K-12 enrollment. At Texas A&M University, the Latina/o
population drops to 14%. Mirroring a pattern in California, Texas’ public, four-year universities with the largest enrollments of Latinas/os have some of the lowest graduation rates in the system (University of Texas at Brownsville, University of Texas at San Antonio, Texas A&M Corpus Christi, University of Texas at El Paso, Texas A&M at Kingsville, and the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley). Graduation rates at each of these institutions range between 27 and 40%. Similar patterns occur in Texas’ private, non-profit universities. Institutions with the largest percentage of Latina/o undergraduates have the lowest graduation rates in this sector.

Despite decades of research (Baumann, Cabrera, Scott, & Swail, 2007; Crisp, Taggart, & Nora, 2015; Nora & Crisp 2009; Salis & Nora, 2012; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006) and practice pertaining to Latina/o college completion (AAC&U, 2014; Santiago, 2011), it is clear that much more progress needs to be made. Before yet another generation emerges after Generation Z, more effective answers to the question: How can more Latinas/os complete college degrees? must be found, followed by successful implementation of solutions. What is intriguing about this special issue of the Association of Mexican American Educators Journal is the notion that both answers and solutions may lie within HSIs—instiutions that historically have experienced low graduation rates.

Scholars and leaders in the field of higher education agree that significantly increasing the graduation rates of institutions with large enrollments of Latinas/os is an effective strategy to increase the total number of Latinas/os earning a college degree (Contreras, Malcom, & Bensimon, 2008; Nuñez, Hurtado, & Calderon Galdeano, 2015; Vigil-Laden, 2001). Excelencia in Education, a not-for-profit organization that promotes policies and practices that support Latina/o college achievement, shares this notion and has consistently recognized a handful of institutions for demonstrating promising practices, or Examples of Excelencia (see www.ed.excelencia.org). Gonzalez and Arámbula Ballysingh (2012) appraised the value of such programs in light of their effort to increase Latina/o college completion. They found that for those programs that exhibited effective practices, the following characteristics were present: (a) use of longitudinal, disaggregated, cohort data; (b) use of scholarly literature; (c) collection and application of local data that identified the experiences and challenges of Latina/o students specific to a campus; and (d) use of formative assessment data. The remainder of this article presents a case study (Stake, 1994) of the design, implementation, and results of a program that exemplifies these characteristics at a HSI. Notably, the program increased Latina/o student
success and positioned the university to increase Latina/o college completion rates in a sustained and broad manner.

Designing Latina/o Student Success in Context

The site of this exemplar program was a private, religiously affiliated, HSI in a large, metropolitan city in Texas. The university enrolled approximately 2,000 undergraduate students, 71% of which were Latina/o at the time of the study. Data collection and review of this program occurred between fall 2012 and spring 2014. Prior to the design and implementation of the program, longitudinal cohort data indicated that the fall-to-fall persistence rate remained flat at approximately 55% with no clear pattern of increase or decrease. Graduation rates also held steady at approximately 37% during this time period. It was clear to the university faculty and administration that both persistence and graduation rates for their predominately Latina/o student population were consistently low. To address lagging graduation rates, the institution recognized the first year as pivotal to increasing the retention and graduation rates for Latina/o students. The institution set out to design a program to best meet the needs of their distinct student population.

To begin, a team of faculty, staff, and administrators used the university’s longitudinal cohort data as a point of departure and consequently delved into the scholarly literature to better understand the factors that supported or impeded Latina/o student success in college. They noted the following conceptual insights: Latina/o students must achieve a sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997), engagement (Kuh, 2001; Nora, 2002), and integration (Nora & Crisp, 2009; Tinto, 1975, 1997) fostered by a campus climate (Hurtado & Carter, 1997) that recognizes and validates (Rendón, 1994) their cultural heritage, family relationships, and academic potential as learners. The team also became cognizant of polices, practices, and interactions that engendered microaggressions (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solorzano, 2009) and thereby reduced students’ sense of belonging, engagement, integration, and validation.

Prior to applying the scholarly literature to the design of an intervention, the team of faculty, staff, and administrators conducted a series of focus groups with their Latina/o students to acquire a local understanding of the common barriers impeding their success during their first semester. The team argued that coupling the scholarly literature with local focus group data would produce a deeper understanding to inform the design of an effective program. The
team conducted five focus groups with first-term Latina/o students at the university. First-term Latina/o students were selected due to the fact that only 55% of this population returned for their second year in college. The team found five common barriers that were consistently noted by the students as the following: (a) difficulty managing time; (b) failure to submit assignments; (c) discomfort asking questions in class; (d) failure to complete online class assignments; and (e) difficulty managing the academic workload of multiple courses. The team noted that four of the five common barriers were interconnected and related to managing their collegiate academic workload (i.e., the assignments, tests, quizzes, and readings associated with being a full-time student). The interconnectedness of these barriers prompted a deeper question posed by the team: How heavy is the students’ academic workload?

**Academic Workload Analysis**

To answer the question regarding academic workload, the team conducted an analysis of course syllabi for four different groups of full-time students: humanities majors (first-term and third-year status students) and biology majors (first-term and third-year status students). Latina/o students were well represented in both majors, 68 and 57% respectively. The goal of the syllabi content analysis was to quantify the number of assignments, tests, quizzes, and readings required of first-term students and contrast it with students in their third year. The findings were striking and produced a breakthrough insight that drove the design of the subsequent program intervention.

With regard to students majoring in humanities, first-term students bore nearly three times the workload of third-year students in the same major. During the fall 2013 semester, first-term students carrying a 13-unit load were given 88 assignments, quizzes, exams, and readings to complete in the month of September; 70 in the month of October; 62 in the month of November; and 48 in the month of December. In contrast, third-year students in the same major with a 13-unit load were required to complete 26 assignments, quizzes, exams, and readings in the month of September; 19 in the month of October; 14 in November; and 12 in December. The same pattern was present for biology majors. First-term students carrying 13 units were expected to complete 90 assignments, quizzes, exams, and readings to complete in the month of September; 74 in the month of October; 69 in the month of November; and 43 in the month of December. In contrast, third-year students in the same major with a 13-unit load
were given 26 assignments, quizzes, exams, and readings in the month of September; 20 in the month of October; 16 in November; and 12 in December. Although no two assignments can be weighed equally, the sheer number of assignments and the contrast between first-year and third-year was a compelling discovery. Tables 1 and 2 describe the number and types of assignments given during the month of September that first-term and third-year biology majors were required to complete with a 13-unit academic load.

Table 1

Academic Workload for a First-Term Biology Major

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Name</th>
<th>Week 1 (Aug)</th>
<th>Week 2 (Sept)</th>
<th>Week 3 (Sept)</th>
<th>Week 4 (Sept)</th>
<th>Week 5 (Sept)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First-Year English</td>
<td>Chapter 4: pgs. 62-83</td>
<td>Three Essays on Ch.4</td>
<td>“Render unto Larry’s” pgs. 95-98</td>
<td>The Way We Lie Assignment on Essay 2</td>
<td>“Mother Tongue” pgs. 345-351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lynda Barry’s “The Sanctuary of School” pgs. 84-89</td>
<td>“An American Childhood” pgs. 90-94</td>
<td>“Longing to Belong” pgs. 99-103</td>
<td>Quiz on The Way We Lie</td>
<td>“People like Us” pgs 357-358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questions on pg. 88-89</td>
<td>Discussion Questions Online assignments Quiz readings last week</td>
<td>Questions on pg. 97-98 Peer Review Drafts of paper #1</td>
<td>Questions on pg. 102-103 Quiz on readings 95-98 Short Quiz 99-103</td>
<td>Questions on 345-351 Questions on reading 357-358 Draft of Essays 1-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Success Course</td>
<td>Signature Assignments</td>
<td>Chapter 3</td>
<td>Reading Demonstration/Review CSFI Results</td>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
<td>Chapter 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **First-Year Math Course** | HW 1.1  
HW 1.2  
My MathLabHW  
My MathLabHW  
Quiz 1 over Syllabus | HW 1.5  
HW 1.6  
HW 1.7  
My MathLabHW  
My MathLabHW  
Quiz 2 over 1.1-1.4 | Review  
Test 1  
Ch. 1  
Ch.2.1  
My MathLabHW | HW 2.2  
HW 2.3  
HW 2.4  
HW 2.5  
My MathLabHW  
My MathLabHW  
Quiz 3 over HW 2.1-2.2 | HW 3.1  
HW 3.2  
HW 3.3  
HW 3.4  
HW 3.5  
My MathLabHW  
My MathLabHW  
Quiz 4 over 2.3-2.5 |
| **Sociology Course** | Intro Disc due  
Ch. 1  
Ch. 2  
HW #1 due DISC #1 due | Ch. 5  
HW #2 due DISC #2 due | Ch. 8  
HW #3 due DISC #3 due | Ch. 9  
HW #4 due DISC #4 due |
| **Spanish Course** | Leccion 1: Hola, Que tal?  
Leccion 1 WebSAM for Ch.1 | Examen Leccion 1 Leccion 2 | Leccion 2 WebSAM for Chap. 2 | Examen Leccion 2 Leccion 3 |
| **Total # in a week** | Readings: 5  
Assignments: 7  
Quizzes: 1  
Exams: 0  
Projects: 0 | Readings: 9  
Assignments: 7  
Quizzes: 2  
Exams: 0  
Projects: 0 | Readings: 6  
Assignments: 8  
Quizzes: 2  
Exams: 1  
Projects: 0 | Readings: 8  
Assignments: 9  
Quizzes: 2  
Exams: 0  
Projects: 0 |
| **Total # in a Month** | Readings: 38  
Assignments: 40  
Quizzes: 10  
Exams: 2  
Projects: 0 |
### Table 2

**Academic Workload for a Junior Status Biology Major**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Name</th>
<th>Week 1 (Aug)</th>
<th>Week 2 (Sept)</th>
<th>Week 3 (Sept)</th>
<th>Week 4 (Sept)</th>
<th>Week 5 (Sept)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Biology Course</strong></td>
<td>Chapters 2-3</td>
<td>Chapters 4-5</td>
<td>Exam 1</td>
<td>Chapter 7</td>
<td>Exam 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physics Course</strong></td>
<td>Chapters 1 &amp; 3</td>
<td>Lab Summary</td>
<td>Exam 1</td>
<td>Chapters 4 &amp; 7</td>
<td>Lab Summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gen Ed Philosophy Course</strong></td>
<td>Chapters 1 &amp; 4</td>
<td>Dialogue Assignment 1</td>
<td>Chapters 5 &amp; 7</td>
<td>Dialogue Assignment 2</td>
<td>Chapter 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gen Ed Arts Course</strong></td>
<td>Chapters 1 &amp; 2</td>
<td>Studio Project One Draft</td>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
<td>Chapters 5 &amp; 6</td>
<td>Studio Project One</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total # in a Week**

|                          | Readings: 8 Assignments: 0 Quizzes: 0 Exams: 0 Projects: 0 | Readings: 2 Assignments: 2 Quizzes: 0 Exams: 0 Projects: 1 | Readings: 3 Assignments: 0 Quizzes: 0 Exams: 2 Projects: 0 | Readings: 5 Assignments: 1 Quizzes: 0 Exams: 0 Projects: 0 | Readings: 1 Assignments: 1 Quizzes: 0 Exams: 1 Projects: 1 |

**Total # in a Month**

|                          | Readings: 19 Assignments: 4 Quizzes: 0 Exams: 3 Projects: 0 |

The team was astounded by the stark contrast between the total number of assignments between first-term students and third-year students. They concluded that the students least prepared to manage the rigors of full-time university study—first-term students—were being required to complete the heaviest workload. The team shared their results with faculty.
members in the humanities and biology departments who taught first-year courses and documented their reactions. Although surprised by the total number of assignments required of first-term students, a common response from faculty was that these students would not be successful if their grades were based on fewer but more heavily weighted assignments. Instead, they intentionally designed their courses with a higher volume of smaller assignments as a means of scaffolding the learning process. As a result, the notable increase in the total number of assignments resulted in impeding first-term students to effectively manage their academic workload. During this time period, 37% of new students ended their first term with a GPA below 2.0 and were placed on academic probation. Only 16% achieved a GPA of 3.0 or higher. Many of the students placed on academic probation after their first term remained on academic probation after their second term and never returned for their second year in college.

The team discussed two options to address the unintended consequences of this approach: (a) educate faculty regarding the total number of assignments and spark a conversation about what a reasonable workload should be for first-term students; or (b) redesign the university’s student success course in a way that focuses heavily on time management and assignment completion. The team decided to address both options, recognizing that they had little control over the outcome of option A. However, option B, was initially where the team exerted their efforts. They used insights from the scholarly literature, focus group findings, and syllabi content analysis to redesign the university’s student success course.

**From Textbook-Driven to Data-Driven Student Success Course**

Before this effort, the university’s student success course—a one-unit course required of all first-year students—was designed in a conventional manner, driven primarily by the chapters of a textbook. The chapters covered common topics such as the benefits of college, time management, emotional and physical wellness, personality and learning preferences, critical thinking skills, reading strategies, note-taking and study skills, test-taking skills, campus resources, career development, financial literacy, and diversity. The course was redesigned to better align with the insights they gained from the scholarly literature regarding Latinas/os in college, the results from their focus group data, and the syllabi content analysis. The university team decided to eliminate the textbook and redesign the course to: (a) equip students with the
tools, skills, and dispositions to complete all assignments associated with a heavy workload; (b) facilitate a strong sense of belonging, engagement, integration; and (c) validate their cultural heritage, family relationships, and identities as powerful learners. Refer to Table 3 for the alignment between the scholarly literature, focus group findings, syllabi content analysis, and the redesigned components of the university’s student success course.

Table 3
Alignment between Data Findings and Components of Redesigned Student Success Course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Findings from Scholarly Literature, Focus Groups, and Syllabi Analysis</th>
<th>Components of Redesigned Student Success Course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty with Time Management and Assignment Completion</td>
<td>1) Academic Assignment Calendar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Semester Master Calendar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) Grade Tracker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing Sense of Belonging, Engagement, and Integration</td>
<td>1) Student Success Course Integration with New Student Orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Professor Communication and Meeting Assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) Staff Communication and Meeting Assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validation of Cultural Heritage, Family Relationships, and Identity as a Powerful Learner</td>
<td>1) Family Participation in New Student Orientation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Course sessions on (a) Cultural Ways of Being and Individual Calling, (b) Power of Execution, (c) Foundational Values.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To address the findings related to “difficulty with time management and assignment completion,” the team designed the following three tools for the student success course: 1) The Academic Assignment Calendar—a weekly, monthly, semester-long calendar built by students that included all assignments for each course taken. The assignments included readings, exams, quizzes, and out-of-class assignments; 2) The Semester Master Calendar—a comprehensive semester calendar that detailed social, family, self, work, and academic responsibilities using an online tool located on the university’s portal; and 3) The Grade Tracker—an electronic grade monitoring tool that tracked the point and percentage value of assignments, quizzes, exams, or
projects for each course. Students updated the *Grade Tracker* tool weekly based upon feedback and assignment of grades from their professors.

The team also designed and added three new components to the student success course to reduce the likelihood students would experience microaggressions (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solorzano, 2009) and to enhance students’ sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997), engagement (Kuh, 2001; Nora, 2002), and integration (Nora & Crisp, 2009; Tinto, 1975, 1997. The new student orientation program included a segment where students were grouped together by the instructor of their student success course. This was designed as the first class session for the student success course and enabled the students to quickly build a sense of belonging and community. During the program, the students engaged in discussion and reflection regarding what qualifies as a microaggression and discussed different intervention approaches. The second component required students to draft and send an email to each of their professors to introduce themselves. Students were asked to share a few details about their background and what brought them to the university and to request a one-on-one meeting with their faculty. Students were also asked to send a similar email to a student support staff member or advisor and request a one-on-one meeting.

Finally, to address the importance of validation (Rendón, 1994), the team added two components. First, students’ families were invited to participate in the new student orientation program. Parents met with bilingual faculty, staff, and administrators while younger siblings were invited to meet with current students and discussed navigating the pathway to college. Second, course sessions were designed to focus on cultural ways of being (Córdova, 2008), individual calling (Palmer, 1999), and the power of execution (McChesney, Covey, & Huling, 2012).

To acquire feedback on the redesign of the university’s student success course, the following formative assessment data were collected and analyzed: (a) Mid-term grades for first-term students; (b) End of first-term GPA; and (c) Fall-to-fall persistence rates. Three years of trend data for each of the data elements above were identified. For mid-term grades, 35% of first-term students had a GPA below 2.0. During the term of the redesigned student success course, this percentage dropped to 19%. For end of term GPA, 37% of new students ended their first term with a GPA below 2.0 and were placed on academic probation. Only 17% had a GPA of 3.0 or above. At the end of the redesigned student success course, 18% of new students ended their first term with a GPA below 2.0, and 36% had a GPA of 3.0 or above.
Finally, with regard to persistence, three years of trend data spanning the 2009-10 and 2011-12 academic years indicated that the fall-to-fall persistence rate was steady at 55%. After the redesign of the student success course, the students who entered in the fall of 2013 had a fall-to-fall persistence rate of 64%.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to determine that a redesigned program was the primary factor in increasing student success in the case study offered here. However, the team was emboldened by witnessing the percentage of students with end-of-first-term GPAs of 3.0 or higher increase by 19 percentage points. The notable reduction of students with GPAs below 2.0 also was a significant morale booster. Finally, the team felt that the increase in fall-to-fall persistence rates would translate into increases in degree completion rates. When they looked back at their process, they recognized the importance of using multiple sources of data and asking deeper questions. They acknowledged that much more work needs to be done, especially to address the potential of microaggressions emerging through polices, practices, and interactions. They set an internal goal that their work would not be complete until they matched the success rates of the best universities in the nation. That is a goal worthy of the students that they serve.

**Discussion**

Generations come and go, marked by unique events and changes in societal life (Strauss & Howe, 1991). The millennial generation, now the largest (Pew Research Center, 2016), should be known not only as one characterized by omnipresent parents, enormous academic pressure, and computers in homes and schools (Howe & Strauss, 2000), but also the generation that witnessed the rise of Hispanic-Serving Institutions and their role in increasing access to higher education for Latinas/os. The case study presented here demonstrates that HSIs can be more than places of large Latina/o college enrollment; they can be institutions that facilitate and support high levels of success. Perhaps, in the future, individuals will look back and characterize this generation as the one that produced the largest increase in Latina/o college graduates.
References


Nora, A. (2002). A theoretical and practical view of student adjustment and academic


Becoming an Hispanic-Serving Research Institution:  
Involving Graduate Students in Organizational Change

Patricia Marin  
*Michigan State University*

Priscilla Pereschica  
*University of California, Santa Barbara*

Abstract  
The changing demographics of higher education have led to an increase in the number and type of Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs). As research universities continue to see a rise in the enrollment of Latino/a students, a better understanding of the implications of this change within the existing institutional context will be essential to best serve this growing community of students. We position our study within a tradition of organizational culture theory that points to the importance of organizational actors' interpretations, perspectives, and actions in order to understand an organization’s general behavior and change. By acknowledging the importance of graduate students within research universities, we focus on their perspectives at an Emerging Hispanic-Serving Research Institution (HSRI) and ask, “What are the organizational culture implications of an HSI designation for a research university?” Our analysis revealed four important themes: communicating institutional pride as an HSRI, engaging the benefits of an HSRI, operationalizing a serving mission, and involving graduate students as institutional actors at HSRI. Institutional recommendations that follow from our findings include providing clear communication regarding HSI status, objectives, and commitment; assessing the campus climate; and increasing graduate student involvement as key leaders within HSRI.

DOI: [http://dx.doi.org/10.24974/amae.11.3.365](http://dx.doi.org/10.24974/amae.11.3.365)
Introduction

For decades, demographers have predicted increases in the U.S. Latino/a population. This growth has resulted in significant changes in Latino/a higher education enrollment: in 2014, 35% of Latinos/as ages 18 to 24 were enrolled in college, an increase of 13 percentage points since 1993. This represents a greater enrollment increase than that observed for Whites, Blacks, or Asians during approximately the same time period¹ (Krogstad, 2016). Because Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) are largely classified based on Latino/a enrollment—they must have at least 25% Latino/a undergraduates—the changing demographics of higher education have led to an increase in the number and type of HSIs (Excelencia in Education [Excelencia], 2016).

Although historically the vast majority of HSIs have included community colleges and teaching-focused comprehensive universities, over time this designation has expanded to other sectors. Most recently, due to changing enrollment, research universities with the highest research activity (Research 1 institutions) are adding HSI to their list of classifications, deliberately or not (Excelencia, 2016). Despite the various types of institutions now included among the HSIs ranks, however, the policy, practice, and research conversations have primarily centered on institutions that are under-resourced, broad-access institutions (e.g., Conrad & Gasman, 2015; Núñez, Hurtado, & Galdeano, 2015). While this narrative is important, it is no longer the story of all HSIs. Consequently, as more types of institutions take on the HSI classification or meet the criteria for being eligible to do so, it is critical that researchers continue to trace such shifts so that HSIs are not characterized as a monolithic group. Ultimately, as research universities continue to see a rise in the enrollment of Latino/a students, a better understanding of the implications of this change within the existing institutional context will be essential for these institutions to incorporate the HSI designation into their identity and best serve this growing community of students they enroll.

Different from most HSIs, Research 1 institutions typically include a substantial graduate student body. This group of individuals is essential to an R1 for many reasons, including the service and support they provide as teaching assistants, research assistants, lab instructors, and mentors to undergraduates. Because of their engagement with the organization through

¹ Data for Asians are only available starting in 1999.
multiple roles, these students provide unique insight into the implications of organizational change. With this important vantage point in mind, in this study we focus on the perspectives of graduate students at a Research 1 Emerging HSI\(^2\) to answer our research question: What are the organizational culture implications of an HSI designation for a research university?

To frame this work, we first provide a brief history of HSIs and summarize existing strands of HSI research. To make clear why graduate students’ perspectives are particularly important in the Emerging HSI context, we then highlight studies of the contributions of graduate students within research institutions. Next, we position our study within a tradition of organizational culture theory that points to the importance of considering organizational actors’ interpretations, perspectives, and actions to understand an organization’s general behavior and change. Finally, after explaining our methodology and presenting our four major themes, we discuss the related implications for Hispanic-Serving Research Institutions (HSRI)—the term we use to distinguish this group of institutions from other HSIs—with a focus on recommendations for institutional practice.

**Hispanic-Serving Institutions: History and Research**

Hispanic-Serving Institutions are unique among Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) because they were not necessarily created with a mission to serve Latino/a students. In fact, their mission statements may not even reflect their HSI status (Núñez & Elizondo, 2012). Rather, these institutions became HSIs through population shifts and increasing Latino/a undergraduate enrollment, resulting in institutions that are HSIs due to demography and not necessarily intention. In the 1980s a growing concern emerged among higher education leaders about Latinos/as’ limited access to college and low college degree completion rates. Further fueling these concerns was the fact that large percentages of Latino/a students were enrolled in a concentrated number of poorly funded institutions. These institutions carried a great responsibility to educate Latino/a students and to provide them a quality education (Santiago, 2006). As a result, at that time concerned advocacy groups and institutional and government leaders explored ways to support these institutions with the goal of improving Latinos/as’ access to higher education as well as their college completion rates. After various failed

\(^2\) *Excelencia* (2016) defines Emerging HSIs as having “15–24% undergraduate Hispanic FTE enrollment” (p. 4).
legislative attempts, HSIs were finally federally recognized in 1992 as institutions with a Latino/a undergraduate enrollment of 25% triggering access to federal funding supporting the development of these institutions.

As Latino/a enrollment in higher education continues to increase, so does the number of HSIs. In 2014–2015, 435 institutions were identified as HSIs and 310 institutions were identified as Emerging HSIs (Excelencia, 2016), representing increases of 26 and 14 institutions, respectively, from the previous academic year. Of the current HSIs, the majority of institutions are public, two-year (46%); 28% are private, four-year; 21% are public, four-year; and four percent are private, two-year. Nearly 40% of these institutions ($n=172$) have graduate programs and, among those, 90 institutions have doctoral programs (Excelencia, 2016). Seven of the HSIs with doctoral programs are listed in IPEDS as “highest research activity” with 17 more institutions with similar classification identified as Emerging HSIs. As the number of HSIs with graduate programs has more than tripled in the last 20 years, it is a phenomenon that deserves further study to better understand the similarities and differences of these institutions as compared to other HSIs. Despite these changes in the landscape of HSIs, the majority of research continues to focus on other institutional types.

Current research on HSIs includes several lines of inquiry. For example, some strands of research have focused on the development of HSIs, their institutional characteristics, and the institutional agents of HSIs (e.g., de los Santos & de los Santos, 2003; Doran, 2015; García & Ramirez, 2015; Laden, 2004; Murphy, 2013; Santiago, 2006). Additional research has examined factors that influence Latino/a students’ persistence, success, and college-going experiences at HSIs suggesting that the unique context at HSIs is an important factor impacting educational outcomes for these students (e.g., Arana, Castañeda-Sound, Blanchard, & Aguilar, 2011; Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016; Cuellar, 2012; Fosnacht & Nailos, 2016; Maestas, Vaquera, & Zehr, 2007; Musoba, Collazo, & Placide, 2013). Other studies have focused on why students choose to attend HSIs (e.g., Cejda, Casparis, & Rhodes, 2002; Núñez & Bowers, 2011; Núñez, Sparks, & Hernandez, 2011; Santiago, 2008; Torres & Zerquera, 2012). Generally, with a few exceptions, research institutions are not reflected in these bodies of work.

A handful of studies have focused solely on graduate students at HSIs (e.g., Craven & Kimmel, 2002; Perez, 2011; Tran, 2011; Vaquera, 2008). Vaquera’s (2008) study of doctoral student persistence at the University of New Mexico, an R1 HSI, found that Latino/a students...
reported higher levels of persistence than their peers of other racial/ethnic groups. The author suggests that the institution itself, as an HSI, created an environment conducive to their success. This environment included the visibility of Latino/a students and faculty, positive relationships with faculty advisors, and positive academic integration (e.g., participation in academic activities like conferences) and academic satisfaction. Another study on graduate students at HSIs found that while graduate students’ persistence/dedication and time-on-task to their academics were the strongest variables contributing to their success, graduate student involvement, positive interactions with faculty and peers, and the structure and organization of the students’ departments and programs were also important factors (Perez, 2011). Generally focusing on the experiences of the graduate students themselves, this literature suggests the importance of involvement, integration, and positive relationships with others. To fill the gap in the HSI literature that examines R1 institutions, our study focuses on graduate students as members of the university who play vital roles within the institution. The institution in our study is a public, four-year Research 1 university that offers master’s and doctoral degrees. At the time of our study, it was an Emerging HSI, closely approaching HSI status.

Graduate Students as Important and Influential Actors in Research Institutions

The roles of graduate students position them as important and influential actors within research institutions. In this study, we focus on the roles that connect graduate students with undergraduates as this is the population that determines HSI status. Graduate student roles include: teaching assistant, graduate assistant, research assistant, and mentor (Austin, 2002; Dolan & Johnson, 2009; Flora, 2007; Gardner & Barnes, 2007; Park, 2004). Graduate students who serve as teaching assistants, for example, teach in classrooms and laboratories, lead discussions, grade student work, and advise undergraduates on academic and non-academic issues (Park, 2004). These opportunities, while providing support to undergraduates, simultaneously train graduate students to deepen their understanding about their discipline and provide opportunities to practice faculty duties (Austin, 2002; Park, 2004).

Mentorship between graduate and undergraduate students can also be a mutually beneficial experience (Dolan & Johnson, 2009; Reddick, Griffin, Cherwitz, Cérda-Pražák, & Bunch, 2012). Graduate student mentors often train undergraduate students in research, supervise them on research projects, and provide academic and interpersonal support. In
particular, graduate students have noted the importance of mentoring female students and students of color to advance these students through the educational pipeline, thus increasing diversity in graduate school and academia (Reddick et al., 2012). In turn, graduate students benefit from help that undergraduates provide on research projects, opportunities to develop their advising and mentoring skills, and an increased sense of empathy and self-awareness from these experiences. Many of these benefits make them more marketable, especially when they have worked with students with a diverse set of backgrounds (Dolan & Johnson, 2009). Overall, literature on the roles of graduate students indicates they can have significant involvement with and impact on undergraduate students, while simultaneously benefiting from these experiences. Tying this to the organizational culture literature we use as our conceptual framework, we focus on the perspectives of graduate students to examine the organizational culture of Emerging HSRIs—institutions that are shifting demographically because of undergraduate enrollment.

**Conceptual Framework: Organizational Culture Literature and HSIs**

Given this important background and the need to better understand research universities within an HSI context, we turn to organizational theory and respond to García’s (2015) call to use this theory to study change within HSIs. Using organizational theory allows researchers to uncover “ways in which HSIs are in fact changing…into organizations that embrace their newfound role to serve Latina/o students” (p. 84). In this context, we can broadly consider “values, processes, and goals” (Tierney, 1988, p. 3) of members of the organization and how, or even whether, changes are occurring. Although few studies on HSIs use organizational theory, “empirical research suggests that the organizational culture of each HSI is unique and enhances a number of important outcomes” (García, 2015, p. 89). For example, Cuellar (2014) studies the impact of the institutional contexts of HSIs, Emerging HSIs, and non-HSIs on the academic self-concept of Latino/a students. Doran’s (2015) case study of the University of Texas at San Antonio focuses on an HSI with Tier One aspirations and the impact of this “striving” on its historical focus on access. Another study “complicate[s] what it means [for an HSI] to have a Latina/o-serving identity” (García, 2016a, p. 137), suggesting that “a Latina/o-serving organizational identity is multifaceted” (p. 137). Collectively, these studies highlight the developing literature on HSIs and organizational culture.
Turning to the broader literature, researchers often employ organizational culture perspectives to study change in higher education institutions (García, 2015; Kezar & Eckel, 2002) because, in addition to external factors of influence, institutions “are also shaped by strong forces that emanate from within” (Tierney, 1988, p. 3). As suggested by Tierney (1988), this internal dynamic has its roots in the history of the organization and derives its force from the values, processes, and goals held by those most intimately involved in the organization’s workings. An organization’s culture is reflected in what is done, how it is done, and who is involved in doing it. It concerns decisions, actions, and communication both on an instrumental and a symbolic level. (p. 3)

Concepts used to study the organizational culture of a university include: environment, mission, socialization, information, strategy, and leadership (Tierney, 1988). While each concept occurs within institutional settings, they can differ in “the way they occur, the forms they take, and the importance they have” (p. 9). Ultimately, Tierney posits that to understand organizational culture one must include the interpretations of those individuals within the organization. This is supported by the work of Gonzales, Lanhai, and Hall (forthcoming) who indicate:

- It is important to note that although an organizational theorist’s overriding concern is the organization, this does not preclude them from being interested in questions related to human perspectives, experiences, or interactions. Indeed, people’s experiences and engagements are very often the entry point for understanding and theorizing about organizations and have been for a long time.

Our study, then, contributes to the literature by examining the organizational culture of an Emerging HSRI, in broad strokes, using graduate students as our “entry point” (Gonzales et al., forthcoming), a group “most intimately involved” (Tierney, 1988, p. 3) in essential functions of an R1 institution, especially those pertaining to undergraduate students.

**Methodology, Data, & Analysis**

This study focuses on the perspectives of graduate students at an Emerging HSRI and broadly asks, “What are the organizational culture implications of an HSI designation for a research university?” As two Latina researchers who have worked in higher education, this study stemmed from our interests in and commitment to HSIs and our belief in the importance
of these institutions serving their students. Further, our interest in research institutions and graduate students raised questions for us about potential changes to organizational culture and the related unique possibilities and challenges of this sector among HSIs.

We employed a qualitative design for our study. Using purposive sampling we selected an R1 Emerging Hispanic-Serving Research Institution to study a university just before it became an HSI, allowing participants to consider future changes to organizational culture as a result of an eventual HSI designation. When we conducted the research, the institution was on the cusp of reaching 25% Latino/a undergraduate enrollment\(^3\) providing a unique opportunity to expand the HSI literature by studying an Emerging HSRI. Once we identified an institution, we emailed a public graduate student listserv to solicit participants. All masters and doctoral students were eligible to participate. The invitation stated that students would discuss their awareness of the institution’s HSI status and their related experiences and perspectives. We indicated that participants were not required to have prior knowledge of HSIs. A $20 Amazon gift card was offered to each participant.

Forty-five graduate students participated across 10 open-ended, one-hour focus groups. We employed focus groups because the interaction among participants would “highlight the agreements and disagreements in a particular population” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 70)—in our case, graduate students. Further, group interviews can yield a wider range of ideas, as well as reconstruction of viewpoints (Morgan, 1988). In a group interview, students would be able to gain knowledge through the process and respond based on the information obtained during the focus group. Students were assigned to groups based only on availability not by any other criteria or characteristic(s). Ultimately, our sample was diverse and included representation from various racial/ethnic groups, as well as both domestic (35) and international students (10). Of the domestic students, 18 self-identified as White, 11 as Latino/a, two as Black/African American, and four as Asian/South Asian. Twenty-nine participants were female and 16 were male. Participants included nine masters students, five masters/Ph.D. students, and 31 doctoral students from a range of disciplines (social sciences, humanities and fine arts, education, and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics [STEM]). Only two

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\(^3\) Since the time this research was conducted, the institution has crossed the 25% threshold needed for HSI status. To maintain confidentiality promised to our participants, we do not identify the institution by name and minimize providing identifying characteristics.
participants previously attended an HSI. This diverse group of participants allowed us to simultaneously bring a wide range of viewpoints to the study while also benefiting from the unified experience of students enrolled in the same university.

We designed our semi-structured interview protocol to gain insights from graduate students on the organizational culture implications of an HSI designation for a research university. With a focus on organizational culture, graduate students were encouraged to discuss the institution in its present context, as well as offer thoughts on a future that could include an HSI designation. This allowed students to compare and contrast potential cultural changes to an R1 that they thought should occur as the institution became an HSI. Throughout the process, researchers encouraged participants to have exchanges with each other and not focus solely on responding to questions and prompts.

To analyze our data, we used Dedoose—a cross-platform application for analyzing qualitative data—to inductively code focus group transcripts guided by Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) method of qualitative data analysis. Specifically, we started with the data, versus *a priori* categories, and allowed “the categories and names for categories to flow from the data” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1279). This allows “new insights to emerge” (p. 1279) instead of being limited by existing theory.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain data analysis as having two main components: unitizing and categorizing. A researcher unitizes his or her data by searching for an element (phrase, sentence, paragraph) that is “heuristic” or “aimed at some understanding or some action that the inquirer needs to have or to take” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 345). In addition, this unit “must be the smallest piece of information about something that can stand by itself” (p. 345). This unitizing process, then, was applied to the qualitative data. After units were identified, they were grouped into broader categories. Finally, we reviewed the data put into each category to confirm whether they were similar, and should be in the same category, or different, and should be put in other or new categories. Ultimately, we used the final categories to observe patterns about the organizational culture of an Emerging HSRI as described by its graduate students.

**Findings and Discussion**

In this study, we focus on the perspectives of graduate students as individuals involved with essential functions of their institution to offer insights into the organizational culture of an
institution on its way to becoming an HSRI. Before discussing our resulting themes, we provide important context about our participants. First, prior to the information we shared in the study’s focus groups, graduate student participants held little to no knowledge concerning their institution approaching HSI designation. While some of the participants had heard the term “Hispanic-Serving Institution,” the information they held was quite basic and generally incorrect. For example, one participant, acknowledging her confusion about the definition, asked “does that mean 50/50?” Regardless of the awareness some had of the HSI term, most did not realize their own institution was on the verge of becoming an HSI. The few participants who had more knowledge of the topic tended to be in disciplines that would discuss the matter as a relevant academic subject—Chicano/Latino Studies, Education, Sociology, or Spanish/Portuguese.

After we provided graduate students with information about HSIs (e.g., the federal definition, available funding opportunities and uses) and encouraged them to ask questions and discuss the issues with each other, many were able to contemplate the impact of the designation and related institutional issues, discussing both potential positive and negative effects. Ultimately, our analysis revealed four important themes related to organizational culture from the perspective of graduate student participants: communicating institutional pride as an HSRI, engaging the benefits of an HSRI, operationalizing a serving mission, and involving graduate students as institutional actors at HSRI.

**Communicating Institutional Pride as an HSRI**

Participants first focused on the importance of a public acknowledgement from the institution regarding its new status upon becoming an HSI. As participants came to understand that their institution would be unique in its position as an HSRI, they hoped that the institution would take the opportunity to demonstrate pride and encourage other institutions to do the same. As one student suggested, “[the institution should say], ‘we’re an HSI and not only that but we’re proud that we’re an HSI.’” One student indicated:

> if you become an HSI, being responsible about the portrayal of the emerging increase of Hispanic students going to college [is important].... And so I think it’s responsible for an HSI to make sure that the perception of that trend is a positive one.
Participants agreed that there was great potential for this new designation to be seen as a negative both within and outside the campus and, therefore, highlighted the need for a positive institutional message because some people might not welcome the new HSI label. In fact, some participants indicated that any negative stereotypes about Latinos/as could result in students and their families saying, “I don’t wanna be associated with that school.” As one student said, “In the short-term I think maybe the perception would not be universally favorable.” This would require a commitment to educating people about the benefits of the designation and addressing any misconceptions. Participants articulated that there was potential for people to assume that the institution was changing its admission process to benefit Latinos/as (which would be illegal), and that they also might assume the institution “will just start catering, only serving the Latino population” which would generate “resentment” on the part of other racial/ethnic groups. In fact, some participants even wondered these things themselves, raising the issues in the focus groups. One student suggested that by becoming an HSI the institution was “going to push really good students out to get substandard people.” As these perceptions would not be in the institution’s interest, participants concluded that active institutional engagement to combat these notions, which would reflect a cultural change for the institution, would be important for the campus.

Because most of the students had not even heard about this on their campus, however, they questioned the plans the institution might have noting that it had not yet been incorporated into the institution’s messages but believed it was important for the campus to serve as a role model to other institutions and communicate, both internally and externally, about their new status. In particular they emphasized the responsibility of campus leaders to open and maintain communication with all students, faculty, staff, and external stakeholders, not just a select few, which would reflect a significant change. Overall, students described a need on the part of the institution “to circulate information about this change,” “to be very transparent,” and to communicate a strong message of pride in the new HSI designation. Participants believed that an HSI designation for a research institution in particular could lead to negative reactions and so leaders would be obligated to be proactive to address this. These insights of participants shed light on the mission and information components of an organizational culture framework and align with Tierney’s (1988) discussion of organizational culture as he points out that institutions “can perform quite differently because of the way their
identities are communicated to internal and external constituents and because of the varying perceptions these groups may hold” (p. 3).

Engaging the Benefits of an HSRI

Participants discussed the benefits of an HSI designation for the campus due to increased student diversity. With regard to the campus, students imagined existing racial barriers breaking down as a result of increased interaction across racial lines but also suggested that this would require “a certain awareness across campus about how to effectively use those opportunities.” Within the undergraduate classroom, students suggested that more diverse classes would provide an opportunity to “change the nature of the discussion or the examples that get brought up” making classes “more interesting” “because then we get to profit from that level of knowledge and that level of perspective.” One student concluded, “it’s diversifying perspectives that really allows research universities to flourish.” This aligns with existing literature on the educational benefits of diversity that highlights the potential educational opportunities resulting from increased campus diversity (e.g., Chang, 2011) and that requires the intentional engagement of this diversity to reap its benefits (Marin, 2000). Echoing the sentiments of other participants, one student emphasized the benefits resulting from “the cultural change that will occur with a demographic change of students.” This aligns with the organizational culture literature that has examined the resulting benefits at HSIs to educational outcomes (e.g., Cuellar, 2014; Doran, 2015). These insights from participants address environment, mission, and socialization components of organizational culture as articulated by Tierney (1988), highlighting how the ongoing demographic changes at an HSRI would, in fact, allow a research institution to “flourish” and more fully address its mission.

Operationalizing a Serving Mission

As graduate student participants discussed the implications of organizational change at their institution, they couched some of their insights in a concern that the current HSI definition only emphasizes undergraduate enrollment and does not focus on student experience or other critical outcomes such as retention and graduation. Participants acknowledged, then, that enrolling an increasing number of Latino/a students includes the institutional responsibility to provide the support necessary for their success. As one student described,
it's one thing to let people in but then it's something else to make sure that they are supported...that they have resources...I mean, even if you're hitting that 25% that still means that three out of every four people don't look like you and aren't like you and aren't coming from a background like you and maybe don't have the same first language as you and don't have all of these social things that you don't necessarily think about if you're in the majority but all of a sudden when you're not in the majority you can feel very different very quickly. And so part of that support is on the academic side but I think part of that support is also social support. It's making people feel like they do belong at this institution and they're not different or separate or whatever those things are. So, I think there's a dual responsibility there and both of those contribute to helping people get through. It's not just 'let you in.' It's 'get you through and help you be successful in whatever comes afterwards.'

Ultimately, participants emphasized that even at an institution with 25% Latino/a undergraduates, Latinos/as would still be a numerical minority and the institution would need to be mindful of the need to ensure the students did not feel “different or separate.”

Furthering their thinking on operationalizing the “serving” part of the Hispanic-Serving Institution term, graduate students decided that additional institutional responsibilities would include educating the campus and prospective students about HSIs, dispelling stereotypes about Latinos/as, and articulating how the institution planned to implement an Hispanic-Serving mission. These responsibilities stemmed from an acknowledgement of a current lack of knowledge about HSIs as well as proliferating stereotypes about Latino/a students that would need to be addressed because an increase in the population would not, in and of itself, change the stereotypes. In fact, several study participants thought that the increase in the Latino/a population would lead to an increase in students with academic and language barriers, thus hurting the reputation of the institution. Another student offered, “Maybe more people will know how to dance.” Overall, these insights suggest the importance of minimizing stereotypes, especially as new members join the community, and clearly articulating an HSI plan that requires the involvement of all members of the community. Here participants engage organizational culture concepts of environment, socialization, information, and leadership (Tierney, 1988) as they relate to the changes they believe are needed at an R1 institution becoming an HSI.
Involving Graduate Students as Institutional Actors at HSRIs

Although graduate students initially focused on the responsibilities of the formal institutional leadership, in due course and through discussion of their roles as graduate students, a majority of the students eventually saw clear and important responsibilities for themselves and other graduate students as their campus became an HSRI. Building upon the roles many of them already play as researchers, teaching assistants, and lab instructors for undergraduate students, they believed that their direct contact with undergraduates carried great responsibility to mentor Latino/a students, both formally and informally, encouraging these undergraduates to persist and continue through the educational pipeline. One participant shared:

I think for me specifically I would probably take on more of a mentorship type of role because I TA. I definitely would want to encourage Latinas or Latinos to pursue higher education, if that’s something that they’re thinking of. So I think it’s important to be a mentor.

This mentorship also included exposing Latino/a undergraduates to research, changing their position from “I don’t know if I can do that” to “I could do that,” as one participant suggested. Ultimately, participants indicated that a challenge to being able to successfully contribute to the new designation would be the overall lack of awareness and knowledge on this topic on the part of graduate students. Students, therefore, suggested institutionally provided training for graduate students, especially those who interact with undergraduates. Such training would include information about HSIs and Latino/a students, as well as opportunities to increase cultural competency.

In addition to the roles that they saw themselves playing, graduate students began to consider ways that a change in organizational culture would benefit them as well, even if they are not part of the HSI definition. In addition to simply increasing their own knowledge on the topic, one person described some potential spill-over benefits: “My hope would be that we would also see an increase [in], and also increased support for, graduate students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds.” Participants expressed an interest in being able to hire Latino/a students to assist with research projects that required Spanish speakers, as well as having a more diverse undergraduate population to expand their research pool (for those who require college-level participants). Several participants acknowledged that they considered the overall
experience to provide them with a “marketable skill.” One participant framed it as: “After grad school you could be like, ‘Yeah I was a grad student at an HSI university….I’ve worked with diverse undergrads.’ So that’s something you can take to the job market with you.”

Regardless of the responsibilities and benefits described by participants, generally they believed that it was essential for graduate students to at least be aware of the upcoming HSI designation and, at best, be involved with it. This, once again, relates to the institutional responsibility identified by participants. One student indicated: “I just think that we as students in general need to be more informed about [our campus’] participation in becoming an HSI because before this study I basically had no idea that this was going on.” Another student added:

Well, I think with any institutional decision being made it’s important that all players are involved in that…. Even though it may not directly impact them you never know. We’re still all a part of the same university so there can certainly be indirect benefits or consequences for certain decisions pertaining to subpopulations within [the institution]. So I think it’s important.

Ultimately, then, institutional leaders should be thinking about the contributions graduate students, an often-ignored population in the HSI conversation, can play to help with the responsibilities and challenges that exist for the campus and the information they need to better take on these roles within a changing organizational culture. This leads us to recommendations for institutional practice.

**Implications for Hispanic-Serving Research Institutions**

This study expands the HSI literature by highlighting an Emerging HSRI approaching HSI designation and focusing on the perspectives of graduate students as key actors within these institutions. Our findings present the insights of participants and their recognition of important aspects of a changing organizational culture as a research institution becomes an HSI. More specifically, they see themselves as important actors that need to be educated and trained to successfully contribute to the changing institution and contribute within a community that needs to intentionally adjust practices to be more aware, welcoming, and supportive of the changing student population, encouraging a collectivist cultural orientation. Guiffrida, Kiyama, Waterman, and Museus (2012) discuss the importance of institutional culture shifts that...
consider the development of more communal environments that involve a wider range of campus and local community members. Although Guiffrida et al. (2012) specifically reference faculty, staff, parents, and community members, they do not mention graduate students. It is clear that our participants believe that as important members of research institutions they also have roles in this cultural shift that would “provide a more communal, welcoming environment for all students” (p. 83).

Although institutions generally become HSIs due to changes in Latino/a undergraduate student enrollment and not by mission, practice, or culture changes, our participants indicated that institutions must look beyond enrollment numbers and focus on serving their Latino/a student population to ensure retention through graduation and beyond. While Santiago (2012) posits that a “critical mass of students motivates an institution to change how it operates to better ‘serve’ these students” (Santiago, 2012, p. 163), participants offered specific examples of such needed changes. From the perspective of the institution, this study offers concrete ways to educate, engage, and incorporate more members from the campus into the HSI process, especially graduate students. The recommendations that follow from our findings fall into the following categories, each suggesting changes to current organizational culture: provide clear communication regarding HSI status, objectives, and commitment; assess the campus climate; and increase graduate student involvement.

**Provide Clear Communication Regarding HSI Status, Objectives, and Commitment**

Study participants emphasized that a lack of communication regarding an institution’s HSI status, goals, and objectives makes way for misconceptions about the HSI definition and significance of this status, mistrust of institutional motives, and stereotypes about Latino/a students and the Latino/a community. It is, therefore, important that institutional leaders create a communication plan that is thoughtful in explaining how the institution’s HSI status will impact the campus and how it has the potential to benefit all students, including graduate students, and not just Latino/a students. Additionally, this messaging needs to reach all members of the campus community, including potential applicants, and not just select departments. The way the university chooses to unveil its messaging and incorporate it into the current culture may help set the tone for how the campus embraces the HSI status. One option for disseminating
information is to follow the model of the focus groups used in this project. Ultimately, the study served not only as a research project but also as an opportunity to educate participants about their campus’ HSI designation. Regardless of their motive to participate, at the conclusion of each focus group and the discussions that occurred among participants, most students indicated they had learned a great deal, were thinking further about the issues and their roles, and were interested to see how the institution would proceed.

Assess the Campus Climate

Graduate student participants shared concerns about the effects of an HSI designation on an already challenging campus climate and misconceptions and stereotypes directed towards Latino/a students. Campus climate can positively or negatively impact the academic and social experiences of students, thus, institutions should assess the campus climate for Latino/a students prior to and after becoming an HSI. This can be achieved through surveys, interviews, and forums. Following the recommendations of García (2016b), an additional step would be to more closely examine “microclimates,” a practice not currently employed, to identify differences that can be found within smaller units, such as departments, when compared to the campus as a whole. This information can help understand students’ experiences across the campus and can be used to educate those, including graduate students, who interact with undergraduate students in a range of environments. Doing so ensures that community members contribute to an institutional culture that cultivates learning, research, and academic performance.

Increase Graduate Student Involvement

Based on participants’ responses, we found that an institution’s HSI status does, in fact, implicate and impact graduate students—something not acknowledged in previous literature. Graduate students are highly involved on R1 campuses and interact with undergraduates in many capacities—this tends to be typical of the organizational culture of an R1. They are the first point of contact for lecture and laboratory classes, they provide undergraduates with research opportunities, and they assist them with their academic and postbaccalaureate choices. Just like staff and faculty, graduate students also support undergraduate students personally and academically. Even though the HSI designation is based on undergraduate enrollment, graduate
students will be impacted by the changing undergraduate population and can contribute to the needed cultural change. Therefore, institutions should maximize the roles and contributions of graduate students by including this population as it becomes an HSI. Many campuses have a graduate student association that represents the graduate student constituency and interests. These types of associations can help institutions disseminate HSI information to educate graduate students, address any concerns or impacts that graduate students may face as a result of demographic shifts in their classes or labs, and connect with graduate students to increase their involvement with the changing undergraduate population.

**Conclusion**

Demographic changes to higher education institutions will continue. In particular, growing Latino/a enrollment in all higher education sectors is resulting in an increase in the number of Hispanic-Serving Research Institutions—particularly doctoral granting institutions—a newer phenomenon in the HSI arena. For both research and practice this means that we must take a closer look at these institutions and not assume that everything we know about HSIs will apply to them since the culture of each institution is different. For this reason, in our study we chose to focus on graduate students—key actors within research institutions who serve multiple roles and contribute to the institutional culture. Our findings highlight benefits to take advantage of and responsibilities to act on. These require a shift in organizational culture to address existing and future challenges and point to the gains of including graduate students in that process.
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Presidential Leadership: Improving Completion Rates of Latino Male Students at Texas Community Colleges

Luis Ponjuán  
*Texas A&M University*

Leticia Palomín  
*Texas A&M University*

Susana Hernández  
*Texas A&M University*

Abstract

Enrollment rates for Latino male students continue to increase at community colleges; unfortunately, compared to their other racial and/or ethnic male counterparts they are less likely to earn a college credential or degree. This qualitative study explores the narratives of six presidents at Texas community colleges designated as Hispanic-Serving Institutions. We asked these presidents to describe their perceptions of their institution’s awareness and commitment to improve degree completion outcomes of Latino male students. We utilized cultural and social-cognition theories to help understand how these presidents may change or shift their institution’s efforts to address this pressing issue. Based on the findings, three key themes emerged that described how these leaders perceived their respective institution. Our findings suggest these presidents are concerned with the low completion rates for Latino male students; however, their institutions need to better align their institution’s core values, mission, and culture to support educational outcomes of Latino male students. Lastly, we highlight how other community college presidents could enhance their institution’s commitment to improve degree completion rates of Latino male students.

*Keywords:* Hispanic-Serving Institutions, Community Colleges, Presidents, Degree Completion, Latino Male Students

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.24974/amae.11.3.366
Introduction

Enrollment rates of Latino\(^1\) male students continue to increase at Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs)\(^2\) and a majority of these institutions are classified as community colleges. Upon closer review of the degree completion rates of male students of color at community colleges, Latino male students compared to other male racial groups are less likely to earn a college credential or degree (Baber & Graham, 2015; Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009, 2011; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Scholars have noted that Latino male students often face unique challenges as they attempt to complete a community college credential or degree. For example, some scholars suggest these students may not be familiar with the financial aid process (Fry, 2002; Núñez & Kim, 2012; Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2011) and encounter difficulties balancing the demands of academics, family, and work obligations (Harris & Wood, 2013; Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2011). These students also tend to lack help-seeking behaviors due to machismo (e.g. cultural value that dictates Latino male behavior) (Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009), which can stem from a fear of failing when confronted with challenges during their community college experience (Sáenz, Bukoski, Lu, & Rodríguez, 2013).

While these earlier studies focused on exploring the challenges these students faced, other scholars explored how community colleges can help address these challenges. These institutions have the distinct responsibility of improving educational outcomes of Hispanic students. Scholars have indicated Hispanic students who enrolled at HSIs tend to have more positive experiences and outcomes (Laden, 2001, 2004; Laden, Hagedorn, & Perrakis, 2008; Núñez, Hurtado, & Galdeano, 2015; Núñez, Sparks, & Hernández, 2011) because these institutions create a physical space to increase their sense of belonging (Garcia, Patrón, Ramirez, & Hudson, 2016). Despite community colleges commitment to helping Latina/o students academically succeed, Latino male students still face challenges in completing a community college credential or degree in comparison to their male peers (Ponjuán, Palomín, & Calise, 2015). This may suggest that community colleges need to reevaluate how they are meeting the educational needs of these particular students.

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\(^1\) We used Hispanic and Latina/o interchangeably based on the research cited.

\(^2\) According to the federal definition, a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) is an eligible not-for profit institution with an enrollment of undergraduate full-time equivalent students, which is at least 25% Hispanic (US Department of Education, 2016).
Scholars have found that administrators and practitioners at Minority-Serving Institutions make important efforts to help students of color academically succeed (Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2015; Stanton-Salazar, Macias, Bensimon, & Dowd, 2010). More specifically, other scholars suggest that community college presidents should strategically focus their institutions to improve degree completion for an increasingly ethnically diverse student population (Eddy, 2010; Nevarez, Wood, & Penrose, 2013). In this case, community college presidents at HSIs lead their institution’s core values, mission, and culture to ensure that Latino students complete a credential or degree. Although some studies focused on community college presidents’ leadership styles, behaviors, and self-reflexivity, there is scant research on how their institutions address the specific needs of Latino male students. Therefore, we need to further examine how community college presidents at designated HSIs can lead their institutions to improve degree completion rates of Latino male students.

The purpose of this study was to explore how community college leaders perceive the efforts of their institutions to improve the education outcomes of Latino male students. Therefore, the research question guiding this qualitative research study was, “How do Texas community college presidents describe their institution’s awareness and commitment to improving degree completion rates of Latino male students?” This study advances the research on Latino male students at community colleges by examining the role of community college presidents in addressing this critical educational issue. While there are some studies that have examined the leadership role of community college presidents, there is scant research on how these leaders address issues related to Latino male students at these types of institutions.

**Review of the Literature**

**Understanding Community College Degree Completion of Latino Male Students**

Many Latino male students start their college careers at community colleges designated as HSIs (Núñez & Bowers, 2011; Núñez, Crisp, & Elizondo, 2012; Núñez, Sparks, & Hernández, 2011). The complex nature of the degree completion issue of Latino male students revealed several factors that may delay their academic success. Scholars have found that the academic experiences of Latino male students can influence their persistence and graduation rates (Pérez & Taylor, 2015; Ross, Kena, Rathbun, KewalRamani, Zhang, Kristapovich, & Manning, 2012). This includes critically examining policies that may impede male students of color academic
progression. For instance, Latino male students placed in a developmental education curriculum often struggle with completing these courses (Acevedo-Gil, Santos, Alonso, & Solórzano, 2015; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Harris & Wood, 2013). Unfortunately, students who spend more time in developmental education courses are at a higher risk of becoming discouraged and dropping out since they are investing in non-college credit courses (Bettinger, Boatman, & Long, 2013; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Harris & Wood, 2013).

Some scholars have also examined how community college faculty members are often not adequately prepared to address the unique learning styles of Latino male students. For example, scholars suggest that some Latino male students enrolled at community colleges experience negative interactions with some faculty members and often perceive them as unapproachable (Gardenshire-Crooks, Collado, Martin, Castro, MDRC & Achieving the Dream, 2010; Harris & Wood, 2013). As a result, these students are less likely to approach faculty members for assistance and utilize institutional academic support services (Cabrera, Rashwan-Soto, & Valencia, 2016). In contrast, some scholars have found that Latino male students had positive experiences with Hispanic faculty members at community colleges because they were aware of their academic needs, served as role models (Laden, 2001; Núñez et al., 2011), and they helped strengthen their racial and/or ethnic identities (Dayton, Gonzalez-Vasquez, Martinez, & Plum, 2004).

Coupled with these varied educational experiences, other scholars have focused on institutional characteristics that may also contribute to degree completion rates of Latino male students. Scholars have started to focus on understanding how community colleges can address or ameliorate the potential barriers that Latino male students may face (Harris & Wood, 2013; Ponjuán & Hernández, 2016; Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2011). A national report on the academic success of male students of color at community colleges found that male-focused programs provide specific support for these students (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014). Other institutional policies and practices that contribute to the academic success of Latino male students include improving the recruitment and retention of faculty members of color (Levin, Jackson-Boothby, Haberler, & Walker, 2015), and creating a campus-wide awareness of the unique educational experiences of Latino male students (Sáenz, Ponjuán, & Figueroa, 2016). However, we know less about how community college presidents can
shape, guide, and lead institutional efforts to address degree completion outcomes of Latino male students.

Community College Presidential Leadership and the Degree Completion Agenda

Community college presidents, as a central figure and leader, play an important role when implementing institutional changes. For example, studies examining community college student success initiatives found that these efforts were highly dependent on a president’s involvement (Zachry Rutschow, Richburg-Hayes, Brock, Orr, Cerna, & Cullinan, 2011). These presidents play an essential role in constructing a new message that clarifies how the institution will move forward (Eddy, 2010). Furthermore, new initiatives or institutional changes were more successful when presidents were in the forefront of developing and communicating the message to the campus community (Eddy, 2010; Zachry Rutschow et al., 2011).

Existing literature highlights the importance of understanding how leaders align their institutional mission and commit resources to create a culturally supportive environment for the increasingly racially and ethnically diverse student population (Astin & Astin, 2000; Nevarez et al., 2013; Roueche, Baker III, & Rose, 2014; Shields, 2010). For example, community college presidents must ensure the institution adapts to the students they serve rather than forcing the students to change to fit the institution (Eddy, 2010; Gonzalez, 2015). Despite these efforts to meet the needs of a diverse student population, some scholars argue that community colleges have become more “enrollment-driven” institutions, and less focused on degree completion (Contreras, Malcom, & Bensimon, 2008; González, 2015; Núñez, 2015; Núñez, et al., 2011). Recently, policymakers have been incorporating degree completion rates as a performance metric through performance-based funding policies to pressure higher education institutions to increase degree completion rates (Gonzalez, 2015). This recent focus on the degree completion agenda may require community college presidents to implement institutional policies to address the external demands of improving degree completion rates, which may be at the expense of other pressing institutional goals (e.g. capital expansion).

While these aforementioned studies have suggested the importance of community college presidents and the degree completion agenda, few scholars have examined how they leverage their executive positional power to create innovative policies and practices to improve degree completion rates of Latino male students. Therefore, this study advances the extant
higher education research literature by exploring the perceptions of community college presidents at HSIs about the awareness and commitment of their institution to improving degree completion rates of Latino male students.

**Theoretical Framework**

Scholars have provided ample evidence on the importance of understanding organizational change in higher education (Kezar, 2001; 2013) and even how organizational change could improve students’ of color academic success (Kezar & Eckel, 2007). Past research highlights, higher education organizational change can be best understood using particular change models. Kezar (2001) states “[t]he cumulative evidence, so far, suggests that organizational change can best be explained through political, social-cognition, and cultural models” (p. vii). These different models are often used to better understand organizational change “at a macro level—the level at which many institutional leaders view (or should view) their organizations” (Kezar, 2001, p. 25). In order to understand how community college presidents can affect organizational change, we used Kezar’s social-cognition and cultural models to make meaning of the research study findings.

First, the social-cognition model states that organizational change occurs when leaders recognize the misalignment between the organizational functions and those they serve. In response, this allows leaders to alter and create a new organizational frame of mind (Kezar, 2001). The purpose of the social-cognition model is to examine “in greater detail how learning occurs and even tying the notion of change more directly to learning” (Kezar, 2001, p. 50). More specifically, people “reach a point of cognitive dissonance at which values and actions clash or something seems outmoded, and they decide to change” (Kezar, 2001, p.50). This may suggest with an increase of Latino student enrollment at community colleges, these institutional leaders are realizing they have to galvanize their institutions to align their functions and services to meet the needs of these students.

Next, similar to the social-cognition model, Kezar (2001) discussed that the cultural model tends “…to emphasize the collective process of change and the key role of each individual” (p. 52). This model focuses on “leaders’ ability to shape organizational culture and on culture as collective or shared” (Kezar, 2001, p. 52). More importantly, the leaders play a critical role in organizational cultural change through “modifying the mission and vision, creating
new myths and rituals, leaders performing symbolic actions, using metaphors, assessing the institutional culture, tapping into energy, developing enthusiasm, altering motivations of people through spirituality, and communicating values and beliefs” (Kezar, 2001, p. 52). In this case, community college presidents at HSIs play a critical role in shaping their institutional culture to serve Latino students. Both organizational change models have key elements that complement one another to understand how community college presidents may play an essential role in improving degree completion rates of Latino male students.

**Methods**

**Data Source**

The data source for this study was part of a larger research project exploring the level of awareness of senior administrators, faculty, and professional staff about the educational experiences of Latino and African American male students across several Texas independent school districts, community colleges, and universities. For the purpose of this study, we used data collected from six community colleges located in different metropolitan areas across the state of Texas. These selected institutions operate in different governing structures where some are a part of a multi-campus community college system and some are standalone campuses. For example, two of these community colleges are standalone campuses with one president while the other four community colleges are part of a system governed by a president at each respective campus.

**Data Sample**

We utilized a purposeful sampling approach in which we aimed to interview with different community college administrators. However, while collecting the interview data, we relied on opportunistic sampling to take advantage of the community college presidents who wanted to express their perceptions about this research topic (Creswell, 2012). The sample consisted of two female and four male presidents who all had a terminal degree. The presidents also had an average of 17 years of higher education leadership experience. These senior administrative leaders also discussed their extensive experience with implementing institutional policy and programmatic efforts to address other pressing and multifaceted institutional issues.
Qualitative research methodology scholars suggest that conducting interviews with select, influential, or prominent research participants provide unique insights that few organizational members could provide (Dexter, 1970; Maxwell, 2012; Seidman, 2013). While this study included only six individuals, these individuals provided important and insightful perspectives that only a senior postsecondary institutional leader can offer. Therefore, these presidents provide a unique perspective about leading its institution’s degree completion agenda. Given the critical importance of the president to this institutional priority, we were able to interview six presidents to learn how they understood their institution’s awareness and commitment to Latino male students’ degree completion.

Research Design

We utilized a qualitative research methodology for this study to explore how community college presidents understand the importance of improving degree completion outcomes for Latino male students at their respective institutions (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 1998). Each community college president was treated and analyzed as an individual case study (Stake, 2000; Yin, 2013). Then, we conducted a cross-case analysis across six institutions to better understand the insights of community college presidents and demonstrate how the findings do not reflect one institution but across all six institutions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Therefore, we utilized this approach to understand community college presidents’ perceptions of how their institution understands and addresses the educational outcomes of Latino male students. In addition, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that conducting interviews as a data collection method allows investigators to understand how participants describe their social settings. That is, participants’ insights shed valuable nuanced understandings about how they make meaning of their surroundings.

Interview Protocol, Data Collection, and Analysis

We collected interview data for this study using in-person semi-structured interviews (e.g. approximately an hour) with each community college president. The interview protocol focused on four educational constructs: transitions to college, academic experiences, campus engagement, and degree completion. For the purpose of this study, we focused on the perceptions of the community college presidents about Latino male degree completion. Based
on the literature, this construct is a critical educational milestone for Latino male students because they encounter many challenges that may inhibit them from completing a college credential or degree (Bukoski & Hatch, 2016; Gonzalez, 2015; Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009).

We transcribed the interview recordings verbatim, read, and coded each individual transcript. We utilized open coding for each individual transcript followed by axial coding to identify primary codes from the interview data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) by using Dedoose®, a web-based software. We met as a team to further discuss and crosscheck the initial codes and subsequent themes that emerged from across the six transcripts to gain a shared meaning of the findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Finally, to confirm our findings, we applied methods of respondent validation and member-checking (Creswell, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

**Positionality of Researchers**

The researchers for this study are self-identified as Latina/o scholars who are interested in conducting research focused on Latino students in education. We conduct research on these issues to create awareness and advance the Latina/o research scholarship. Our focus represents our commitment to social justice issues that help improve the lives of the Latina/o community. We also acknowledge that our scholar identity may have influenced how the participants of this study responded to the questions and how we interpret the findings in this study.

**Research Study Limitations**

We acknowledge there are limitations to our qualitative research study. We accept this research study is limited with only six community college presidents representing one state. The presidents in this study represent community colleges that have unique institutional characteristics that may provide an understanding of presidential leadership at community colleges. Finally, we understand that interview participants may provide desirable responses about the educational success of Latino male students. Despite these potential limitations, we argue that the findings reveal insightful themes that advance the research discourse on Latino male students in community colleges.
Findings

Three primary themes emerged that described the perceptions of senior community college leaders about the educational experiences of Latino male students at their respective institutions: 1) Institutional challenges, 2) Importance of disaggregated student data, and 3) Leadership responsibilities to address institutional change.

Institutional Challenges

Some community college presidents acknowledged they faced challenges when it came to raising awareness on their campus about the low degree completion rates of Latino male students. For instance, these leaders often experienced skepticism from other administrators, faculty members, and student affair practitioners about making an institutional commitment to addressing degree completion rates of Latino male students. One community college president stated,

You know it, sometimes it is painful as a leader of an institution, even though I was fairly new, because you will hear from some of the faculty and staff who are men of color, who are in the faculty and staff administration. You have this courageous conversation and the immediate thought it, oh yeah, well what are they going to do with it. Is anything going to change? We have heard this before.

These leaders also recognized that gaining institutional support required that they develop a focused message about Latino male students. One community college president stated,

Now it becomes ignorance is bliss. It’s not—again, well-intended folks that just—if you don’t bring the subject to their area, they don’t realize it, and so we’ve created a lot of awareness on—and with y’all’s assistance and your teams of really creating an awareness that Latino males are an issue; that we don’t have enough of them on campus. Until we brought that to their attention, they had no idea.

They also recognized that the developmental education curriculum might be a structural institutional barrier for Latino male students. For example, one community college president discussed how Latino male students might become discouraged while taking developmental math courses:
You get stuck in a cycle where you’re taking three, four different levels of developmental math before you start and are eligible to take a college ready class, or a college level class, and even though you are taking the developmental classes, in college it’s just hard. We need to make sure that they see it as a milestone to be successful, and not necessarily a roadblock.

These community college presidents recognized that there are potential institutional barriers (e.g. skepticism, developmental education curriculum) that may influence the degree completion rates of Latino male students. The participants are aware they must work towards reducing skepticism about addressing challenges that Latino male students face, framing a focused message to address this issue, and addressing the potential institutional barriers that may inhibit the academic success of Latino male students.

**Importance of Disaggregated Student Data**

A primary theme that emerged was that the community college presidents were the driving force in bringing attention to the degree completion disparity of Latino male students at their institutions. For example, one community college president expressed being intentional by using the institutional data to examine disparities in degree completion rates:

I would say the first couple years it was what data we need to look at and how to get it. What we did make a commitment to in that is a priority of eliminating the disparity. So that is a core commitment in our Achieving the Dream in our data collection and all of the efforts we do. We are in the process now of establishing targets.

Another community college president shared the same sentiment of the importance of using disaggregated institutional data to target specific student groups, “How much are we [institution] going to improve across all ethnicities, gender, and so forth.” Finally, some community college presidents used this type of student data to understand student enrollment patterns. For example, a community college president learned an interesting enrollment pattern, “We did that deliberately [disaggregating the data] that the data shows that those students who enrolled last were the first to fail and the first to drop out.”

Some community college presidents explained the significance of utilizing institutional data to gain support from the institution to advance their leadership efforts and organizational
changes. For instance, one community college president suggested that institutional change occurs when they leverage student data. This president described this process as,

Data democracy, which means you gotta get the information, but you gotta share the information. If data democracy allows everyone to have access to information and activism at every level, it’s only true and credible to the people who are closest to the learning, closest to the students, actually see the data and use the data.

Another community college president also supported the inherent value of student data:

It’s good to understand what the data show, because then you can’t say, hey. This is all anecdotal. To look at the data and to wonder what does this mean, and not to let the data drive us but to inform us. What are we doing well? What can we do more of?

The narratives from these leaders suggested that they valued institutional data to understand the degree completion rates of different student groups. That is, they recognized that disaggregated data is the first step of organizational change to address degree completion rates of Latino male students. Moreover, they recognized the importance of detailed student data to inform institutional decisions about planning and policies.

**Leadership Responsibilities to Address Institutional Change**

Although these presidents understood organizational change would occur gradually, they also recognized the importance of their leadership responsibilities. For example, one community college president expressed their commitment to this issue by stating, “One thing I realized, you can’t change anything overnight. If it is worth doing, it’s going to take some time. You just have to make a commitment to try and make a difference.” Another president conveyed the importance of their leadership to address organizational change:

I think you have to talk that in front of the faculty and the staff. You have to let them know that this is what we need to be and to highlight those areas that are doing it really well and give them outward praise so that we see when we’re a college like this we serve the student better, we have better outcomes. I think that is the job of the president.
They also discussed their responsibility to improve the hiring of more racially and ethnically diverse faculty members to reflect the student population at their institution. For instance, one community college president stated,

You know, then you look at, if you want to help men of color, people of color, then who is in the classroom, who are the administrators, who are the counselors, who are the advisors? Do they look like us? So you have to make sure that, that is ever present in the front of your mind as you are filling positions at all levels.

Some presidents provided insights on leadership strategies for organizational change. For example, one community college president discussed their leadership role to create a new organizational culture:

To continue to model my positive behavior, but also be more intentional in what we can do to help our students and employees. The easier it is to help our employees be successful, the easier it is for them to do their job, and so to make sure that we not only hire the people that enhance the culture here, but also provide professional development for the people that are here, support that, and also for the people who are coming in.

Finally, another president discussed their leadership role as a way to address how institutional policies may discriminate or hurt specific student groups:

We held a conversation with all the leadership team... and we brought them together for a series of workshops and conversations on eliminating institutional racism. And we really got into some of the way we perceive we are doing the right thing and the end result is we hurt somebody because we created a policy, procedure, or process, that we thought was the right thing and you look at it downstream and it caused harm to people, so that conversation stirred up a lot of emotion.

These community college presidents recognized the importance of their leadership role to achieve organizational change to improve degree completion rates of Latino male students. They also acknowledged that they need to advocate for organizational change, encourage the hiring of diverse faculty and professional staff, provide professional development for faculty and
professional staff, and address institutional racism to improve the educational experiences of Latino male students.

Discussion

This article aimed to explore how Texas community college presidents perceived the awareness and commitment of their institution to improve degree completion rates of Latino male students. The findings provided unique insights from these leaders that highlighted the challenges of working with their institution to achieve this goal. The themes revealed a complex portrait of how these leaders create greater institutional awareness to address this challenging educational issue. These themes also highlighted that the presidents accepted that their institutions must take on the responsibility of helping Latino male students succeed.

First, these community college presidents recognized that some institutional members expressed skepticism that their institution should make a commitment to helping Latino male students. The presidents commented that they have experienced some institutional resistance about the need to focus specifically on the educational outcomes of Latino males. For example, there is a growing concern among scholars that institutional agents are often unaware of the significance and purpose of HSIs (Núñez, 2015; Perrakis & Hagedorn, 2010). Some scholars suggest we must look beyond this institutional designation and shift our attention towards how these institutions advance their efforts to improve educational outcomes for Hispanic students (Contreras et al., 2008; Núñez, 2015; Núñez et al., 2011).

Relying on the theoretical lens of the cultural model to explain organizational change, institutional leaders play a critical role in reframing how community colleges must change its organizational culture to meet the educational needs of Latino male students. In this study, the community college presidents demonstrated that they must be unapologetic about making the institution committed to Latino male students. Unfortunately, some institutions lack a commitment to address the disparities in educational outcomes. Scholars have stated, “It is often the burden of the student to make the most of his/her collegiate experience with little commitment from the institution” (Ingram & Gonzalez-Matthews, 2013, p. 647). Community college presidents demonstrate their unwavering commitment to Latino male students by critically examining institutional policies. Some presidents recognized that they must improve the delivery of the developmental education curriculum. For example, community college
faculty members who teach in developmental education courses could develop better cultural competency skills via professional development workshops to help their relationships with Latino male students. Scholars have noted community colleges that provide positive experiences to Latino male students ensures their educational success (Ingram & Gonzalez-Matthews, 2013).

Next, these leaders discussed the importance of using disaggregated institutional student data to highlight differences in educational outcomes by gender and race. Scholars have found that Latino male students compared to their other racial and ethnic male peers are not completing community college degrees at similar rates (Baber & Graham, 2015) and they have different completion rates between Hispanic sub-ethnic groups (e.g. Mexican vs. Cuban) (Ponjuan, Palomin, & Calise, 2015). Perhaps these leaders could use this detailed institutional student data as empirical evidence to highlight Latino males who do not earn a community college certificate or degree. Therefore, collaboration between presidents and their institutional research office is a critical element to make informed institutional decisions (Calderon & Mathies, 2013; Swing & Ross, 2016).

These community college presidents recognized that institutional student data provides empirical evidence to raise awareness and to focus their institution’s attention on students who are not succeeding academically. These findings also underscore the importance for these leaders to leverage this data to make organizational changes. That is, applying the theoretical lens of the social-cognition model to understand organizational change, these leaders could use the disaggregated institutional data to create cognitive dissonance among institutional members to force them to reconcile the misalignment between the institution’s mission and the gender disparities in degree completion rates. Scholars have found that HSIs mission statements were often misaligned with its purpose (Contreras et al., 2008). In addition, the institutional data may create cognitive dissonance for some community members, which may result in a new organizational frame of mind, which is necessary as a precursor to organizational change.

These leaders recognized their important role of leading their institution to focus specifically on improving degree completion rates for Latino male students. Scholars have noted that community college presidents must dedicate appropriate institutional resources and engage faculty and staff, in order to have institutional change (Mayer, Cerna, Cullinan, Fong, Rutschow, & Jenkins, 2014; Rutschow et al., 2011). Our study found that community college
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presidents still face similar issues with not having enough representation of faculty members of color and professional staff in their institutions. Over a decade ago, a study found that HSIs presidents faced challenges of having a diverse faculty (Alfredo & Gerardo, 2003). However, scholars highlight that Latina/o faculty members still remain underrepresented in higher education (Brown, McHatton, & Scott, 2017; Turner, González, & Wood, 2008; Urrieta & Chavez, 2010). These community college presidents recognized the need to have more racially and ethnically diverse faculty members to help improve the academic experiences of Latino male students at their institutions. Increasing the representation of Latina/o personnel at these institutions may help to improve degree completion rates of Latino male students and the overall institutional climate (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Ponjuan, 2011; Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2011).

Applying the theoretical lens of the cultural model to understand organizational change, these leaders believed that hiring faculty of color would be a catalyst for institutional change. As a result, new Latino faculty members would compel the institution to focus on improving the academic success of Latino male students. These institutional changes are not easy or happen quickly, but these presidents recognized that they must be patient and develop a sustained institutional commitment on this issue.

In conclusion, community college presidents are important to guiding community college organizational change in order to improve degree completion outcomes of students of color (Kezar & Eckel, 2007). This study advances the research literature by exploring how community college presidents describe their institution’s awareness and commitment to improving degree completion outcomes of Latino male students. We argue that these leaders must continue being courageous and unapologetic in helping these students academically succeed.
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A Critical Look at Perspectives of Access and Mission at High Latinx-Enrolling Urban Universities

Desiree D. Zerquera
University of San Francisco

Tracy Arámbula Ballysingh
University of Vermont

Emerald Templeton
University of San Francisco

Abstract

This article examines administrators’ perspectives related to embracing and fulfilling a diversity- and access-centered mission at urban-serving universities with high Latinx enrollment. Considering today’s context of higher education—whereby access and opportunities for Latinx and other marginalized populations has become increasingly stratified—this timely work seeks to foster dialogue regarding how to best uphold an access-centered mission. To achieve this, we framed the study using a critical lens that defines leadership for access as a leadership model that must focus on transformation for the greater good. Our critical lens also critically interrogates the meaning and implementation of “diversity” agendas on America’s college campuses. Organizational sensemaking offers an analytical frame to situate administrators’ accounts and trigger sensemaking processes, particularly with respect to identity and enactment of the environment. The study analyzes interviews with 21 administrators across four urban campuses within the same state and examines the administrators’ commitment to and fulfillment of an access- and diversity-centered mission. The study categorizes the administrators’ perspectives into three key areas: 1) diversity as an assumed identity as a by-product of situation within a diverse region; 2) diversity as a double-edged sword; and 3) enactment of a diversity- and access-centered mission.

Keywords: access, leadership, higher education, mission management

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.24974/amae.11.3.367
Introduction

The U.S. system of higher education is a “driver of the nation’s economy…an engine of social mobility…a key contributor to this nation’s commitment to democratic values” (Bowen, Kurzweil, & Tobin, 2005, p. 259). While a college degree is in many ways essential to attain lifelong social benefits for individuals and society at large, structural inequalities disproportionately preclude access to higher education opportunities for large segments of our nation’s population. Though access to higher education in the U.S. has expanded significantly in recent decades (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Musu-Gillette et al., 2016), opportunity across the system has been stratified by race and ability to pay (Bastedo & Gumport, 2003; Carnevale & Strohl, 2013; Posselt, Jaquette, Bielby, & Bastedo, 2012). Attainment gaps persist along these same demographics, as institutions fail to retain and graduate Black (41%) and Latinx1 (53%) students at the same rates as other students (59% for all students, 63% for White students) (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). For Latinx students in particular, while enrollment has increased, stratification into open access institutions and lagging success rates are of great concern (Krogstad, 2016), with nearly half of all Latinx college students enrolled in the community college (Excelencia in Education, 2015).

As our most selective institutions have become increasingly inaccessible to students of color (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013; Haycock, Lynch, & Engle, 2010; Posselt, Jaquette, Bielby, & Bastedo, 2012) and as tuition has increased at an alarming rate (Baum & Ma, 2013), opportunities for students from marginalized backgrounds have been primarily provided by a particular set of institutions, i.e., community colleges, Minority-Serving Institutions, and Urban-Serving universities. Consequently, these institutions serve our nation’s most marginalized students at disproportionate rates. As a key example, Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) have been conceived as those that serve large Latinx proportions of undergraduates (25% or more of student population). Though HSIs comprise just 13% of all U.S. colleges and universities, they enroll over 60% of all Latinx undergraduates, with the majority of these institutions situated within regions that have dense Latinx populations (Excelencia in Education, 2017). Though a number of these institutions have committed to supporting Latinx student success through

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1 The term Latinx is used throughout this manuscript in line with a movement for usage of more gender-inclusive terminology for how we refer to those typically called Latina/o, Latino, Latin@, or Hispanic. Please see this volume’s introduction for a more robust discussion on the utilization of Latinx.
Critical Look at Perspectives of Access and Mission

their admissions, programs, curricula, and services (Andrade & Lundberg, 2016; Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015; Torres & Zerquera, 2012), the extent to which many institutions are actually serving Latinx students versus merely passively enrolling them has been questioned by scholars (e.g., Andrade & Lundberg, 2016; Malcolm, Bensimon, & Dávila, 2010; Santiago, 2012; Torres & Zerquera, 2012). Similarly, Urban-Serving Research Universities (USRUs) are institutions that have a historical mission to serve their surrounding cities, including via mechanisms of access (Lynton & Elman, 1987; Zerquera, 2016). Questions about their commitment to this mission have been raised (e.g., Doran, 2015; Zerquera, 2014) given a context of diminished resources for higher education (State Higher Education Executive Officers, 2014) and shifts in state policies that reward institutions based on measures that may unintentionally contradict access (Umbricht, Fernandez, & Ortagus, 2015). Thus, while an espoused commitment to serving Latinx students is present within these institutions relegated to do so by higher education opportunity structures, close attention to the ways in which these types of institutions perceive and enact their diversity- and access-centered missions is needed.

Higher education leaders play an important role in upholding equitable access, in fostering campus environments that are inclusive of students from diverse backgrounds, and in promoting success for historically marginalized groups. As captured by Bensimon (2005), “institutional actors, as a consequence of their beliefs, expectations, values, and practices, create or perpetuate unequal outcomes” (p. 101). While an espoused commitment to access and diversity is important, upholding this mission must go beyond simple recognition and be embedded in the mission, policies, and practices of an institution (Bell, 2004; Bensimon, 2005). University leaders often passionately highlight diversity measures while simultaneously supporting traditional markers and measures that exclude students of color and impede their success, resulting in “too much love and not enough justice” (Reider, 2004, p. 6). In reality, higher education today sorely needs more creative approaches to ensure an enacted mission that supports marginalized students while navigating the aforementioned context.

It is within these tensions and needs that we situate the current work. The purpose of this study is to critically examine leadership perspectives related to embracing and fulfilling a diversity- and access-centered mission, particularly as it pertains to serving Latinx students. By offering a social justice-focused lens to the accounts from administrators and other leaders within HSIs, we hope to contribute to the literature by offering a more in-depth understanding.
of the approaches to this mission and how perceptions of these notions are shaped. To do so, we focus on urban-serving universities within the shifting higher education context, which as described includes stratification of opportunity for students of color, diminished resources, and pressures from ranking systems to conform to metrics misaligned with an urban-serving mission. Urban-serving universities provide an important context as a whole, as these institutions serve large proportions of students of color in their cities and states. To achieve this, we draw from interviews with 21 administrators from four urban-serving universities within the same state. These institutions each play a large role in educating the Latinx population in their state, with undergraduate Latinx enrollment of over 20 to nearly 70%. As such, two of these institutions meet criteria to be HSI and the two others meet criteria as emerging HSI (eHSI)—institutions with Latinx undergraduate populations of 15-24% and which may potentially become HSI in the next few years (Santiago, 2010). The findings from this study are important for informing the policies and practices of those committed to an access and diversity-centered mission, but also for those who may struggle to enact that commitment. These findings are also important for informing leaders of HSI and other institutions committed to serving Latinx populations. We advance this work with the hope that this understanding will foster a creative imagination regarding how to work towards greater equity, particularly within the institutions facing the most urgent call to uphold opportunity for Latinxs in higher education.

**Conceptual Framework**

Leadership committed to diversity has the potential to shape an institution, affecting all aspects of higher education—students and faculty experiences, administrator recruitment, curricular reform, academic support, and institutional mission (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999; Smith, Turner, Osei-Kofi, & Richards, 2004). As we focus on perspectives of leaders and their own challenges in navigating their diversity-centered missions, we draw from the rich body of research pertaining to leadership in higher education focused on change for the greater good. Sensemaking in organizations is used to frame and connect these ideas to better understand these administrators’ commitment to upholding an institutional commitment to access and diversity.
Transformational Leadership for Diverse Missions

Numerous studies underscore the benefits of fostering diversity in higher education, even among various institutional types (Chesler, Lewis, & Crowfoot, 2005; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Allen, 1999) yet the actual and potential role of leadership in fostering diversity remains elusive. Opinions regarding the definition of effective leadership in higher education vary widely among individuals along racial, class, and gender lines, shaping the perceptions and experiences of those in leadership roles (Bray, 2003; Minor & Tierney, 2005). Definitions of leadership also vary amongst students, staff, faculty, and administrators (Bensimon, 1989a, 1989b; Bensimon, Neumann, & Birnbaum, 1989; Tierney, 1989) as well as by institutional type (Rosser, Johnsrud, & Heck, 2003). While varying roles and identities may offer different perspectives, DiTomaso and Hooijberg (1996) suggest leadership for diversity is "mostly about developing awareness of difference, rather than about leadership skills from the perspective of diversity" (p. 164). Turner (2007) argues that presidents that share certain identities can leverage their influence to serve underserved communities and nurture their educational institutions to achieve access and equity goals. Therefore, emphasizing the awareness that leaders have of diverse others as well as one's social identity as a leader is important.

In a classical but progressive defining of higher education leadership, Trow (1985) described leadership as taking “effective action to shape the character and direction of a college or university, presumably for the better” (p. 45). However, higher education leaders do not generally pursue their roles in the name of social justice (Birnbaum, 1988; Green, 1988). Even when administrators articulate a value for diverse and accessible campuses, they rarely support efforts that enact these values. For example, a survey of administrators in colleges and universities by Rothman, Lipset, and Nevitte (2002) suggests that while 39% supported the availability of courses on the experience of racial minorities, only 17% indicated they would actually require those courses to be taught. Aguirre Jr. and Martinez (2006) posit that the challenges facing higher education demand new conceptual framings and practices in leadership to adapt to an increasingly diverse environment, yet they also admit that "...diversity is pregnant with turmoil when it challenges societal institutions to alter their structure" (p. 1). Thus, alternative perspectives of leadership are needed to advance leadership that works for the complex difficulties that diverse campuses present.
Leadership for diversity requires leadership beyond typical framing of administrative roles emphasizing management. As explained by Aguirre and Martinez (2006), "managing uses power and privilege to get people to subscribe to organizational expectations regarding performance, whereas leading promotes change as a vehicle for organizational members to transform organizations as a collective enterprise" (p. 72). They further argue that true leadership for diversity is "highly multidimensional and complex...about the intergroup dynamics that characterize colleges and universities in both structure and culture...nested in organizational roles and practices that promote changes in higher education’s organizational culture" (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006, p. 39).

While others have advanced notions of transformational leadership within higher education (e.g., Hill, Green, & Eckel, 2001; Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006), Aguirre and Martinez (2006) center equity, defining transformational leadership as leadership that attempts to alter the values of exclusionary organizational cultures to better serve diverse populations. Transformational leadership requires higher education to respond to recognizable changes in society (Astin & Astin, 2000; Hartley, 2004). As argued by Aguirre and Martinez (2006):

Transformation, unlike social change in general, is radical fundamental change that is the result of deliberate efforts by leaders and followers. As a result, transformational leadership is conceived as a type of leadership needed by organizations to respond and adapt to environmental change, that is, demographic and cultural diversity (p. 35).

Nonetheless, leadership for diversity as a means to achieve organizational transformation is often lacking (Mitchell & Kumar, 2001) and too few perceive leadership as an opportunity to enact organizational transformation (Diamond, 2002; Hill et al., 2001). In that, leadership becomes a mechanism to perpetuate traditional practices within an institution or institution piece-meal change, without enacting a perspective that fundamentally changes the values and policies that inform the practices of an organization.

Transformational leadership is enacted throughout the organization, including the cultures within and in the defining and enactment of an institution’s mission. An organizational culture that is guided by a valued mission is the glue that binds an institution. While mission statements themselves often play a normative role rather than a functional one (Davies, 1986; Morphew & Hartley, 2006), some argue that mission statements may help organizations convey...
a shared sense of purpose across an entire institution (Hartley, 2002). As such, mission statements both describe the current state of things and also what institutions strive to embody (Lang & Lopers-Sweetman, 1991), which may have little to do with written documents (Goodsell, 2011). In this way, they operate more so as the notion of an institution’s purpose and functions.

A commitment to diversity must be enacted by a leader through the various channels of an institution. Transformational leadership has the potential to incorporate diversity into organizational culture holistically as a core value that extends throughout an institution (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006; Chang, 2002). More is needed to better understand the ways in which leaders enact diverse missions in their work.

Co-Optive and Color-Blind Approaches to Diversity Management

While transformational leadership invaluably enable campuses to serve diverse missions, many institutions fail to acknowledge diversity as an important attribute of their organizations (Jacobs, Cintron, & Canton, 2002; Smith, Altbach, & Lomotey, 2002; Turner & Myers, 2000), forcing diversity to the margins of institutions of higher education as a valued practice. Some have described this process as co-optive. Selznick (1949) describes a “co-optive” approach as a "process of absorbing new elements into the leadership or policy determining structure of an organization as a means of averting threats to its stability or existence" (p. 34). Building upon this notion, Aguirre and Martinez (2006) argue that higher education has not embraced diversity as a core value but instead employs co-optive strategies that add diversity dimensions to the existing organizational culture. These qualifying tactics preclude the need for fundamental organizational change. Examples of this include: the addition of minoritized faculty, a focus on multiculturalism, and the provision of role models for minoritized students. These co-optive methods result in leadership that treats diversity as institutional window dressing.

Similarly, Contreras (1998) argued that tokenism in higher education incorporates demographic diversity into the existing normative and authoritative structure as a means to demonstrate that the organization values diversity. This minimizes threat without requiring true organizational transformation as diverse institutions. Brayboy (2003) likewise asserts that meaningful leadership for diversity is challenging because “predominantly white institutions of higher education often view diversity as a freestanding policy...that diversity is something that
can be implemented without necessarily changing the underlying structure of the institution and its day-to-day operations” (p. 73). In contrast, institutions of higher education must seek to integrate diversity by wholeheartedly transforming their organizational structures and thereby, their organizational cultures. Without doing so, these approaches devalue the complexity involved in upholding a diversity- and access-centered mission and simplify it to an additive outcome.

In other instances, color-blindness is utilized as an enticing but idealized approach to diversity leadership. However, color-blindness fails to acknowledge certain critical “societal phases and stages” by which the dominant group works to overcome bias, accept others as equals, and “systematically dismantle” inequitable social structures. Evolution toward a color-blind society requires that the perspectives and interests of other groups are considered when seeking solutions to societal and institutional problems (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006, p. 74).

Color-blind ideology has been critiqued for allowing oppression to persist via the guise of good intentions and equality. Bonilla-Silva (2009, 2014) describes four ideological frames that people use to explain racial outcomes (e.g., standardized test scores of Black students or graduation rates for Latinxs). Briefly, these frames include: abstract liberalism, which argues that equal opportunity exists and that individualism can explain racial differences; naturalism, which attributes racial inequalities to inevitable and natural occurrences; cultural racism, which justifies racial inequality by attributing outcomes to cultural attributes and generalizations about groups of people; and minimization, in which racism and discrimination are ignored and claimed to be nonexistent. Bonilla-Silva (2014) argues that these frames serve to rationalize policies and practices that cause inequitable outcomes for people of color. Leaders must not focus merely on the “old racism” (Bonilla-Silva, 2014, p. 62) but instead they must consider the ways held ideology “otherizes softly” (Bonilla-Silva, 2009, p. 3). This perspective deepens the complexity involved in examining perceptions of diversity, but offers a necessary critical lens to understanding leaders’ perspectives of access within their institutions. We include the framing of both co-optive and color-blind approaches to diversity to help interrogate more general descriptions of diversity that were offered by administrators in this study.
Sensemaking in Organizations

Combined with the perspectives presented above, the work of Weick (1995) and colleagues (2005) provides both theoretical and analytical frameworks for this study. Described as the “black box” between inputs and outcomes (Maitlis, 2005), sensemaking centers on the ongoing understandings that are created and interpreted through a co-constructed view of an organization. The concept of sensemaking builds upon several principles (Weick, 1995): all meaning is made of actions that have already occurred, sensemaking reflects what an organization considers itself to be, is ongoing and not static, depends on organizational members’ own socialization processes and values, and is based upon plausibility and sufficiency rather than a sense of absolute truth.

While sensemaking processes occur within the organization, they are connected to a process of enacting the environment—engaging with the environment in light of a change in effort to adjust to the changes being imposed (Jennings & Greenwood, 2003). In the process of enactment, actions taken often reinforce previously held understandings of the organization’s identity and reflect individual values and preconceptions (Jennings & Greenwood, 2003). Leaders play a significant role in driving sensemaking, particularly through the identification of the conditions that necessitate enactment (Pye, 2005).

Thus, through the lens provided by sensemaking and the perspectives of leadership and diversity presented above, the continuous engagement with the external environment plays an important role in reifying an institution’s self-proclaimed identity and how that identity is enacted. This identity might be shaped by an espoused or understood mission which is largely upheld by leadership. As it pertains to a mission centered upon diversity and access, with our explicit focus on how this interacts with serving Latinx students in particular, careful consideration of the complexities involved is needed. When combined, these perspectives provide a critical organizational lens through which to analyze the perspectives of administrators and thereby, to better understand how their institutions consider access in light of their core institutional missions. This framing will aid our understanding of organizational members’ perceptions of their own universities and enable us to better situate individual perspectives within the broader organizational context.
Methodology

This article seeks to critically examine leadership perspectives related to embracing and fulfilling a diversity- and access-centered mission within the context of Latinx-serving universities in light of changing higher education contexts. This work draws from a larger study that examined the perceptions of administrators from four Urban-Serving Research Universities (USRUs) across the same state, each located within large metropolitan regions and serving large proportions of Latinxs and other students of color. Twenty-one administrators from across four universities participated (see Table 1). The majority were White (12) and male (12), with a number of People of Color and female administrator participants also participating. Administrators were recruited via email based upon their position titles at their respective institutions. Participants represent the functional areas of student affairs, academic administration, admissions, and public relations.

Table 1

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Participants were interviewed and asked to describe their perceptions of the following: 1) mission and identity, 2) excellence, and 3) challenges to mission fulfillment within their institution. Interviews were conducted either in person during campus site visits with one conducted via telephone and the other video conferencing. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes to an hour and a half. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed utilizing the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The data were initially analyzed using open coding for a preliminary review. A series of research team discussions informed by our conceptual framework helped to refine our codes, with particular attention dedicated to transformational leadership processes, co-optive and color-blind values of diversity, and enactment around identity, in particular. We conducted a second round of more selective coding for the manuscript at hand. Although we considered all interview data during this second round of coding, we focused in particular on those data that had been coded during the first round under the categories of access, diversity, and institutional identity. These engaged research team discussions ensured trustworthiness in the data. As our manuscript considered administrators’ perspectives within the broader context of the demand for and barriers to access and diversity in higher education, our analysis focused on the common narratives emerging from these campus leaders, as opposed to consideration of differences between them. Though surely differences are present between narratives, it is beyond the scope of this article to center on examining these differences. We instead underscore the shared themes in these administrators’ experiences. Following further research team discussions, three dominant themes emerged and are presented in the following section.

Findings

The perspectives of the administrators in this study centered upon three key areas: diversity as an assumed identity, diversity as a double-edged sword, and the enactment of a diversity- and access-centered mission.

Diversity as an Assumed Identity

Emerging as one of the primary themes across the institutions, participants discussed diversity as integral to their institutional identities. Diversity was described primarily with regards to students: as an institutional charge (e.g., we serve diversity), as a description of the
student body (e.g., our students are diverse), and as a goal to be achieved (e.g., we strive for diversity). Racial and ethnic descriptions were rarely used to define diversity, but participants used euphemisms such as: first-generation, low-income, urban, and international to depict the faces of diversity that comprised their student body.

Still, these descriptions widely centered diversity as a defining characteristic of the institution at all of the campuses. For example, in answering the question, what makes your campus special?, participants responded:

*Campus A:* I think it’s also the rich diversity of our student body too. We’re about I think 42% now ethnic, you know in terms of racial diversity...

*Campus C:* I think the number one thing that makes [this campus] special is our diversity. We’re at approximately 56% minority student population, which is one of the highest in the State… and one of the highest in the nation.

*Campus D:* I mean, one thing is obviously where we are and who we are...I don’t think there are a lot of places that really have this mix of students...

These excerpts demonstrate how the diversity of the student body was often heralded as a key feature of their institutions, simultaneously acknowledging the overall lack of diversity within higher education as well as their unique institutional identity within that organizational milieu.

Some institutions explicitly emphasized this commitment. For instance, one participant shared their own perception of a commitment to access at their institution: “I kind of say it’s in our DNA.” Participants described practices that demonstrate that commitment, such as community partnerships, recruitment and support efforts focused on access and diversity. In contrast, others suggested that the diversity on their campuses was not necessarily tied to intentional efforts by the institution, but rather a function of how they were externally perceived or geographically situated, as reflected in the comment above by the participant on Campus D. Participants described their institution’s surrounding communities to connote parity in characteristics with their student body. Concurrently, participants noted admission growth trends for student populations from outside of the surrounding community as well as efforts to support their recruitment. Therein, these descriptions reflect an embedded notion of diversity as an assumed identity resulting from an institutional mission that may actually be shifting.
Diversity as a Double-Edged Sword

Discussions of access and diversity reflected a widely-shared perception that upholding diversity may work for and at times against an institution. As captured in the comments above, it provides an institutional rallying point for these institutions, a central ethos that guides the collective understanding of the work they do. It was sometimes described as a recruitment tool for students and faculty alike, and provided connection points with the surrounding community, particularly helpful for political leverage with that community.

Despite the celebration of a mission centered on access and diversity, the diversity of the institution frequently was depicted as approximate to a liability, and for some, as something they actively worked to circumvent. These discussions were almost entirely motivated by resources. As one participant stated, “‘Sin azucar no hay pais’ [without sugar there is no country]. So, I would like to translate that into money: without the necessary funding, we cannot realize [our] mission, or we can only realize part of [our] mission.” The dependence upon resources is viewed, at least partly, as a necessity for implementing the access and diversity mission these institutions espouse.

According to participants, resources came in two forms: monetary currency from state appropriations but also from prestige pursuits. These differing but similar perspectives are exemplified in the following:

Campus B: What I mean by the students that we’re admitting, we are striving for AAU so that means our academic profile continues to increase.

Campus D: We’re going to have to start to say no to some people. We just are... Performance metrics [the base funding connected to performance relative to other institutions in the state] can be scary...Fortunately, the urban institutions are still faring okay, but at a certain point we’re all going to be at the bottom.

In both of these accounts, participants reflected an understanding that the values within these resource streams were in direct conflict to an access- and diversity-centered mission, or more specifically, to the students served by it. These specific accounts further reflect a prevalent sense that the status quo for institutional mission enactment had been adjusted or was expected to face an inevitable shift.
Enactment of a Diversity- and Access-Centered Mission

While depictions of diversity were somewhat constant, leaders across campuses demonstrated varying understandings regarding how their missions were understood and enacted. At the most fundamental level, mission appeared to be grounded in serving the needs of students on their campuses. For example, administrators heralded their institutional commitment to hiring faculty and staff who more closely reflected the diversity of the student body.

However, there were clear distinctions implied by accounts of administrators regarding their approaches to serving diverse students and to serving students who were not necessarily within their access focus. Consider the following two accounts of services provided on campus:

Campus B: We’re admitting students who are already academically prepared, but those students are also very involved before they come here, so they want to be involved when they get here. We are now more intentional…in making sure that we have programming throughout the semester and that we’re looking at the population of students that we’re serving to make sure that we’re programming to those student needs.

Campus C: [W]e have a high number of underrepresented students here, but the attrition rate tends to be higher from the represented students…This program is sort of a holistic approach…and it’s very, very intentional. It’s taking services to students, or students to the services, versus ‘these are all your resources, if you need them, go get them.’ Because we know that these students won’t actively seek some out and if they do, they tend to do it at a point where they’ve sort of already fallen through the cracks, or it’s too late to try to assist them. It’s a very intentional approach that we take in order to be sure that the student has those support systems and opportunities to seek out engagement.

Both administrators frame their thinking in terms of serving students’ needs. However, while newly-served populations of students were offered opportunities based upon enriching the student experience within a traditional paradigm of student engagement, whereas the diverse students’ needs were approached through a need-based, but possibly deficit-oriented lens.

Furthermore, and related to the points previously raised, serving diverse students while honoring a diversity mission at times necessitated strategic navigation. This represented a
circumventing strategy that was not reflected in discussions of, for example, providing more on-campus housing facilities for out-of-state students. That is, serving diverse students was something that institutions needed to creatively approach; whereas providing resources that serve high-achieving students could be done more explicitly. One participant described such a strategy: “We continue to invest in National Merit Scholars even though people wonder ‘how do you do that with access in the mission?’ but doing that allows us to bring in more students at a lower level.” This works because performance levels offset class scores to improve the scores of the institutions incoming class. Another widely-cited approach included transfer programs that defers university applicants to nearby community colleges to admit at a later date. One participant illustrated this phenomenon when she described spring as the “access term.” This reflects greater institutional flexibility in the range of students who can be admitted outside of the traditional incoming first-year fall class. All of these efforts, however, were described as approaches that enacted a diversity-centered mission, reflecting an awareness of the challenges inherent therein.

Discussion and Implications

This work set out to examine the perspectives of leaders working within institutions that have historically espoused a diversity-serving mission. Given the context of higher education today, whereby access has become increasingly stratified and opportunities limited for Latinx populations and other marginalized groups, this work is intended to foster and contribute to conversation regarding how to best uphold an access-centered mission to benefit outcomes for all students, particularly within these institutions that serve such large proportions of Latinx students. To do so, we framed this study through a critical lens that defined leadership for access as one which must focus on transformation for the greater good and critically interrogates the meaning and implementation of a diversity agenda. Organizational sensemaking was used as an analytical frame to situate the accounts by administrators and trigger sensemaking processes, particularly regarding identity and enactment of the environment.
Role of Collective Sensemaking

As noted earlier in this manuscript, collective sensemaking by an organization upholds the ideas an organization embraces regarding itself. In that lens, it is difficult for an organization to face their limitations when it comes to notions of racial equity. A shared narrative centered upon a historical mission inhibited leaders from viewing their own contradictions regarding how they described, approached, and enacted diversity-centered missions. This played out within our findings.

For many participants, enactment processes, such as consideration of external pressures and comparisons to peer institutions, drew upon sensemaking to reaffirm a particularly-held narrative rather than drawing a critical eye inwards. For instance, while administrators widely lauded the significance of diversity and access, mixed messages were frequently conveyed that conflicted with this mission. Though some offered critique, it was coupled with rationalization of practices or descriptions of circumventing strategies. Though some of the strategies and initiatives described equity-centered goals in their consideration, they seem to fall short of providing the transformational power needed to re-shift sensemaking around mission enactment, pointing to significant misalignments between espoused commitments and their fulfillment.

Diversity in the Age of Color-Blind Racism

The institutions in this study are distinct in that they make explicit their commitments to upholding diversity in higher education. However, the findings of this study point to pervasive dominant ideologies regarding diverse students and how to fulfill a diversity-centered mission in light of environmental pressures that may impede the accomplishment of these significant goals. In many ways, diversity was described as a commodity—a thing of value that can be exchanged. However, like all commodities, the value of diversity to an institution, as depicted by participants in this study, fluctuates. This somewhat co-optive approach to diversity (Aguirre & Martinez, 2002, 2006) raises questions about the ways in which market-based values have permeated the way we think about who is deserving of higher education.

In particular, some of the administrator comments were deficit-oriented and pejorative towards the diverse students they espoused to serve. This likely did not represent the internal values of the leaders to whom we spoke, but rather, reflects the dominant ideologies of the
higher education system. This was particularly reflected in the descriptions of serving students. Serving Students of Color was viewed as a costly endeavor in need of circumvention. In contrast, serving high-achieving students did not require such a strategy. These representations reflect the pervasiveness of color-blind ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2009, 2014). Though institutions of higher education in the U.S. no longer uphold explicit policies barring admission by race, it is clear from these findings that the ways in which “racism lite” (Bonilla-Silva, 2009, p. 3) manifests itself vis-a-vis the rationalization of oppressive frameworks. These points raise important recommendations regarding what leaders and researchers can do to better challenge these systems and foster more equity in higher education.

**Recommendations for Research and Practice**

As higher education opportunities become increasingly stratified in light of rising costs and policy-making that favors particular models of higher education (Bastedo & Gumport, 2003; Carnevale & Strohl, 2013), institutions with this shared commitment to a diversity-centered mission must be supported to achieve their missions. Furthermore, their leaders must be prepared to enact these goals. The restrictive context of funding provides real challenges to these higher education organizations and their leaders; research has shown us the potential and realized implications of these constraints in various areas of institutional activity (e.g., Fowles, 2014; Jaeger & Thornton, 2005; Jaquette & Curs, 2015; Jaquette, Curs, & Posselt, 2016). The US system of higher education can, and must, do better.

Greater preparation of higher education leaders focused on cultivating critical and transformational leaders is needed. This preparation, both within formal education and professional spaces, should focus on fostering skills in facilitating difficult conversations regarding what it means to cultivate environments grounded in the foundations of inclusive excellence and equitable access. This would further require more complicated conceptions of diversity and access cultivated through centering and challenging deficit notions of communities of color and unpackaging the ideologies of what Bonilla-Silva (2009) calls the new racism. True transformational leaders centered on upholding an access and diversity mission within their universities must be able to be more than co-optive and color-blind but forge ahead to better serve our Latinx and other marginalized students.
In doing so, leaders could take an active role in challenging dominant sensemaking processes to shift them for greater awareness of the expansive reach of inequity. This means intervening during the collective sensemaking processes that occur, for instance, during strategic planning sessions. These engagements require deep consideration of who the institution is and who it aims to be (Hinton, 2012). Reaching these shared ideas must involve critical reflection as well on the ways these types of efforts do more to rationalize and reflect dominant ideologies (i.e., color-blindness) than to push the vision of an institution towards one that better upholds equity. Research can support these efforts by extending more critical conceptions of organizations. As sensemaking centers upon how and what we see and understand, without cognitive frames that support critical consciousness, sensemaking falls short of its potential to shift the range of possibilities of action for leaders and researchers alike. Organizational literature should forge sensemaking that challenges organizations' actions rather than rationalizing them, and position that process upon achieving equity in society.

Additionally, the findings here point to the chronic and complex relationship between diversity and resources, adding qualitative insights into ways these relationships are complicated by dominant ideologies regarding diversity. Institutions that espouse commitments to diversity and access, like HSIs, in particular are subject to pressures for prestige (Daly & Dee, 2006; Zerquera, 2016). Particularly within the changing context of higher education in which resources for public education have declined, and institutions have adapted to a new normal of funding (State Higher Education Executive Officers, 2014), considering prestige pursuits at these institutions is imperative as it may potentially exacerbate stratification of opportunity for students of color. This is particularly alarming within institutional contexts like those of our study which either by mission or default enroll large proportions of Latinx students. More research and collaboration between researchers and policy-makers is needed to advance strategic and critical ways of upholding access and diversity.

Conclusion

As our nation becomes increasingly diverse, our institutions of higher learning must mirror, celebrate, and embrace that diversity or risk facing institutional upheaval that is characteristic of so many campuses across our country today. Though many institutions and administrators espouse a commitment to serving Latinx students, close attention to the ways in
which these types of institutions perceive and enact their diversity- and access-centered missions is needed. The accounts of these administrators reflect belief in their espoused missions and a genuine commitment to the diverse students they serve. However, the ideologies regarding these missions and students illuminate challenges in upholding these service commitments. If we are to better serve our Latinx and marginalized populations, more must be done to push beyond our current frame of what is possible and to forge ahead with new ways of thinking and action.
References


Funding for this research was provided by the Jesuit Foundation of the University of San Francisco.
Latino Faculty in Hispanic-Serving Institutions:  
Where is the Diversity?

Frances Contreras  
University of California, San Diego

Abstract

Diversity in higher education with respect to faculty composition and executive leadership remains an elusive goal for many institutions of higher education. Over thirty years of research on faculty of color in academe has found that the pipeline for faculty of color still remains a significant challenge across higher education institutions and sectors (Turner, Gonzalez, & Wood, & 2008). For Hispanic-Serving Institutions, that possess a diverse base of students, faculty diversity, and the presence of Latino faculty, plays a critical role in academic excellence, mentorship and overall climate (Milem, 2003; Santos & Acevedo-Gil, 2013). This study examined two systems of higher education in California to explore the trends in Latino faculty diversity, given the critical mass of Latino undergraduates at both the community college and California State University systems of higher education. Findings suggest a disconnect between student diversity and tenure line faculty diversity exists. For HSI systems, like those present in California, faculty diversity may play an even greater role in raising Latino college completion, ultimately transforming the next generation of Latinos in California.

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.24974/amae.11.3.368
Introduction

Faculty diversity in higher education, particularly in Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) and Minority Serving Institutions, (MSIs) is considered an important component of academic excellence, particularly for public institutions that have an additional layer of responsibility to educate and serve the state population. HSIs play a distinct role in educating large numbers of Latinx students, and are increasingly seen as avenues for raising Latinx college completion rates by policy making bodies and higher education institutions. Faculty play a critical role in fostering students with the critical thinking, writing, and analytical skills in higher education (Gurin, 1999; Milem, 2003). And diverse faculty consider mentoring the next generation of students of color and first generations as a personal responsibility, given their experiences in the academy, often being “the first” or “only faculty member” in their respective departments (Turner & Gonzalez, 2014).

Faculty diversity plays a key role in providing students with access to mentors, role models, diverse perspectives and approaches to pedagogy in college which helps to challenge the world views of college students and helps them to develop their critical thinking and analytical skills (Hurtado, 2001; Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012, Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2015; Umbach, 2006; Turner, 2015). Diverse faculty are more likely to mentor students of color, have larger advising loads than their peers, are more engaged with student organizations, and are called to service more often than non-diverse faculty (Baez, 2000; Griffin, 2012; Lopez Figueroa & Rodriguez, 2015; Turner, 2015). Lopez Figueroa and Rodriguez (2015) for example, present a new framework for the mentoring, acknowledging how “mentoring is a racially and culturally mediated experience, instead of a race neutral, objective interaction” (p. 23). That is, for students of color operating in the meritocratic hierarchical academy of higher education, mentoring is often happenstance, and less targeted for students of color. We see this when students of color lack mentors from their fields due to the dearth of Latino or faculty of color in their departments, where they are left to find mentors on their own, often from different fields of study (Lopez Figueroa & Rodriguez, 2015). Exposure to diverse mentors is an important element to academic success, post graduate aspirations and preparation.

Since college for many undergraduate students also represents a critical stage in student identity formation and goal setting, having access to diverse faculty plays an even greater role in exposing students to multiple perspectives, expertise, and potentially a shared experience,
culture or language (Turner et al., 2015). However, postsecondary institutions and systems typically have struggled with increasing and sustaining underrepresented faculty diversity, even if the student body has become increasingly diverse over time, as is the case for the two-year Community College system and the four-year California State University system in California.

For Hispanic-Serving Institutions, much of the attention is being placed on student services and outcomes rather than the infrastructure that exists to support student academic success. That is, it is equally critical to examine the infrastructural elements within colleges and universities that may better support historically underrepresented, first-generation Latino students to succeed in college. Faculty diversity (among tenure line faculty) has been noted as an important feature within postsecondary institutions (Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012; Turner, Gonzalez, & Wood, 2008; Turner et al., 2015) for student support through diverse pedagogies, perspectives, and course content, which is integrally intertwined with promoting academic excellence (Hurtado, 2001).

This article presents an examination of faculty diversity in two large systems of higher education in California, specifically the California Community Colleges and the California State University systems which serve the majority of Latino college students in the state of California. While each institutional sector has unique priorities and overarching missions, the dearth of Latinos in tenure line faculty positions is a common feature across these institutional contexts, particularly given the unprecedented demographic growth of Latino students in these respective systems in the past fifteen years. Because California is home to 152 Hispanic-Serving Institutions (Excelencia in Education, 2016), the limited representation of Latinos in tenure line faculty positions suggests the need for greater succession planning efforts that specifically addresses diversity. It is even more critical for such systems to reflect on the infrastructure that exists to better serve Latino students to ensure they are not commodified for enrollment numbers (Contreras-McGavin, 2009), rather Chicano/Latinx students are strategically invested in and cultivated for academic success, graduation and graduate school enrollment. For HSI systems, like those present in California, faculty diversity may play an even greater role in raising Latino college completion and transform the next generation of Latinos in California (Contreras & Contreras, 2015).
Relevant Literature

Research related faculty diversity has been applied to higher education generally (See Turner, Gonzalez, & Wood, 2008), and less so to Hispanic-Serving Institutions with respect the the limited pool of Latinos in administrative and executive positions (Santos & Acevedo-Gil, 2013). Faculty diversity has been noted as an important feature of academic excellence in postsecondary institutions because it enhances the overall learning experience of college students through the classroom environment, research experiences, and campus climate (Hurtado, 2001; Gurin et al., 2002). Particularly for underrepresented students in higher education, faculty of color play a pivotal role in mentorship and research apprenticeship, as they are more likely than their peers to mentor historically underrepresented students (Milem, 2003). Faculty diversity also has the potential to provide a pathway for diverse campus leadership and Latinos in administrative positions (Haro & Lara, 2003; Santos & Acevedo-Gil, 2013) within higher education institutions and systems.

Impact on Student Success

Literature related to the impact of faculty diversity on student outcomes and success has been limited (Jacobi, 1991; Umbach, 2006; Sedlacek et al., 2007). Umbach (2006) conducted a national study of 13,499 faculty at 134 colleges where he explored the role of faculty of color on select student outcomes. He found that faculty of color contribute to the education of their students in important ways, including utilizing diverse pedagogical approaches with their students, providing broader course offerings to students, and they were more likely to interact with their students more frequently than their white counterparts (Umbach, 2006). Umbach argues that “greater structural diversity leads to an increased use of effective educational practices” with their students. This study represents one of the first attempts to quantify faculty practices and levels of engagement with their students, noting distinct approaches by racial and ethnic background as well as gender.

Hurtado and Ruiz-Alvarado (2015) also examined the role that instructors within HSIs play in utilizing a student centered approaches to pedagogy that better engaged Latino students, including reflective writing practices, critical discussions, group projects and journaling practices (Hurtado & Ruiz, 2015). Their study further strengthens earlier arguments made in the higher education literature on the value of diverse faculty as having an impact on student outcomes.
Latino Faculty in Hispanic-Serving Institutions

(Umbach, 2006). Therefore, HSIs play a critical role in providing a more engaging academic context that supports student learning and represents tangible approaches to “serving” Latino students. Núñez (2015) notes the existence of empirical evidence to suggest that Hispanic-Serving Institutions do in fact make distinctive efforts to “serve” their Latino students. However, the retention and graduation rates, longer completion rates, also suggest that a greater critical mass of Latino faculty and faculty of color might greatly improve the ability of HSIs in optimally serving their growing Latino student bodies (Contreras & Contreras, 2015).

In one of the most relevant studies related to the impact of faculty diversity on student outcomes, Tran, Gaetane, Powers, Bell, and Sanders (2016) examines the role that faculty play in the success of graduate students (n=198) as their work toward their graduate degrees. Using survey data from graduate students on the role of institutional resources and agents in supporting their degree completion, Latino students were more likely to acknowledge that faculty mentors played a significant role in their academic success compared to their peers. The study further found that because Latinx students do not possess comparable levels of social capital to their peers and are largely first-generation college students, faculty play an even greater role in supporting their academic pathway and success because they helped to facilitate social capital (Tran et al., 2016, p. 5). This study conveys the critical role that faculty mentorship plays in the pathways and lives of Latinx graduate students attending graduate programs in an Hispanic-Serving Institution and the potential that exists for such efforts to facilitate graduate degree completion, doctoral degree enrollment and ultimately transition to faculty roles in HSIs.

Systemic diversity

In an extensive critical literature review of faculty of color in Academia, Turner et al. (2008) examined twenty years of literature related to the experiences, supports and challenges that faculty of color encountered at the departmental, institutional and national contexts (Turner et al., 2008). This work sheds light on the challenges and supports necessary to increase faculty diversity in higher education. The central challenges identified through this rigorous literature review were primarily related to the documented barriers to promotion and tenure among faculty of color, such as tokenism, institutional racism, navigating departmental politics, and salary inequities. The article further noted best practices that had measurable
impact on faculty of color who where successful in academia, including the importance of mentorship, institutional policies and merit practices that recognized contributions to diversity, and salary equity.

For the few studies related to faculty diversity within HSIs, the unit of analysis for these studies has been on the institutional leaders, noting the needs that exist within HSIs (De Los Santos & De Los Santos, 2003; de Los Santos & Vega, 2008) or the trends in the dearth of faculty and leaders as it applies to four-year institutions (Santos & Acevedo-Gil, 2013). For example, De Los Santos Jr. and De Los Santos (2003) conducted a study of Chancellors, Presidents, and CEOs of Hispanic-Serving Institutions using a survey that explored the central issues and challenges they faced as leaders within their institutions. With a sample of 91 university Presidents and CEOs, De Los Santos Jr, and De Los Santos (2003) found that HSI leaders noted funding, technology, and faculty as their top three concerns in managing their institutions. Faculty diversity, specifically “the ability to attract qualified faculty—especially Hispanic and other underrepresented groups” was raised as a key challenge within the HSI leaders surveyed (De Los Santos, Jr., & De Los Santos, 2003, p. 385).

Hurtado and Ruiz (2008) provide an important yet critical overview of Hispanic-Serving Institutions and offer a new framework for understanding this institutional type. They note in particular that there are “multiple aspects of institutional identity and transformation” that have been difficult to identify given the ever changing nature of Hispanic-Serving Institutions and the degree to which the HSI identity is adopted by postsecondary institutions (Hurtado & Ruiz, 2008, p. 9). That is, colleges may have a critical mass of Latino students, the 25% required to be labeled and HSI, however, in practice may not have full adopted this identity with respect to tailoring essential services for Latino students to be academically successful (Contreras, Malcom, & Benison, 2008; Hurtado & Ruiz, 2008). Rightfully, Hurtado and Ruiz (2008) acknowledge that the HSI identity is an “evolving concept” (p. 9).

Finally, in a report card on Latina/o Leadership in California’s public universities, Santos and Acevedo-Gil (2013) take a systemic approach in examining Latino faculty, students and executives, in the CSU and UC systems. However, this analysis was focused on Latino faculty within two systems, not necessarily the HSIs within these respective systems. They explored the overall status of diversity across these subgroups of stakeholders in these two public systems of higher education and found that the UC system and CSU system has a sizable gap in
the number of Latino executives and faculty in both systems, requiring them to better plan for the continued demographic shifts California will witness among the pool of prospective college students. This article extends the work of Santos and Acevedo-Gil (2013), by concentrating on the California State University system, that I consider to be a largely HSI system, with over 78% of its colleges officially reaching the HSI designation over the past 20 years. However, since the majority of Latino students that transition to college in California begin their postsecondary path in the community college system, this study also examines the two-year public education system that has also transformed into an “HSI system” in the past twenty years in California.

Challenges to Latinx Faculty: The Postsecondary Pipeline

There are several reasons for smaller pools of Chicano/Latinx faculty across fields compared to their peers. Well documented issues of persistence help to explain the limited number of Chicanx/Latinx faculty across the United States, including: academic challenges based on attending low resource schools in K-12, high levels of remediation, being first-generation without a clear understanding of college options, expectations and competitive environments, limited access and knowledge of academic supports, and working more than 20 hours per week (Contreras, 2011; Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Perna, 2010; Reyes & Nora 2005). Another well documented phenomenon for Latinx students in higher education is the pipeline, or pool of students that diminishes as students’ progress through higher education. Overall, the trends of Latinx students enrolling in four-year institutions immediately after high schools has been lower than their peers, as noted in Figure 1. Since 1976, Latinx progress in four-year degree enrollment has remained largely flat until recent years (Gandara & Contreras, 2009).
Figure 1. Percent of students in four-year postsecondary institutions by race/ethnicity, select years 1976-2014. Adapted from NCES (2016).

Figure 2. College completion rates by race ethnicity, students entering college 2010. Adapted from National Clearinghouse Research Center (2017).
One of the most critical challenges is the lower college completion rates among Latinx students compared to their peers. If students are not completing their undergraduate degrees, then transition to post baccalaureate degrees influences are also limited. HSIs for example, while possessing critical masses of Latino students, struggle with college transfer and completion rates for the myriad of reasons noted above (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). Figure 2 shows the national completion rates for Latinx students enrolled in four-year colleges. Shapiro et al. (2017) found the lowest overall four-year completion rates among Latino and African American students and higher proportions of Latinx students no longer enrolled in college after a six-year period. These data also convey higher departure rates for Latino and African American students compared to all other groups examined.

It is not surprising then, why a limited pool of students exists at the doctoral level, and graduate degree production is limited. Table 1 shows the percentage of doctorate degrees conferred in the aggregate by race/ethnicity from 1976 through 2015. The national data confirms the majority of students earning doctorate degrees in the United States remains individuals from White backgrounds, while Latinos remain less than 8% of all doctorate degrees conferred since 1976. Concerted efforts therefore are critical to improving doctorate degree production for Latinx students in order to increase faculty diversity in postsecondary institutions.
Table 1
Doctor’s Degrees Conferred by Postsecondary Institutions, by Race/Ethnicity and Sex of Student: Selected Years, 1976-77 through 2014-15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Latino</th>
<th>Asian/Pacific Islander</th>
<th>American Indian/Alaska Native</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1976-77</td>
<td>91.9</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-81</td>
<td>90.9</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-91</td>
<td>86.2</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998-99</td>
<td>78.3</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999-2000</td>
<td>77.9</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-01</td>
<td>77.0</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-02</td>
<td>76.5</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-03</td>
<td>76.2</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>75.8</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>75.8</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
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<td>7.1</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>11.4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>74.8</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>74.6</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>74.4</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>73.2</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>72.5</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>71.6</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-14</td>
<td>70.4</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014-15</td>
<td>69.3</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Adapted from NCES, Table 324.20.
Hispanic-Serving Institutions in California

California is home to one of the most diverse base of residents in the nation largely due to the ongoing demographic growth of the Mexican American/Latinx community. Latinos in California represented 39% of the state’s population in 2015, surpassing the White population, which constituted 37% of the state’s residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). California is unique in that it has surpassed the White population and now represents a state where Latinos, African Americans, Asian Americans, American Indians, and Mixed-Race residents together, constitute the majority of the state’s residents. As a result of this tremendous diversity, the composition of K-12 schools has also changed, with Latino students comprising over 54% of K-12 students in 2016. Latino students are a large base of students that institutions of higher education will need to recruit as they work to secure their undergraduate enrollments.

The community college system in California is the largest two-year college system in the United States, with 113 institutions serving 2.1 million students in 2016 (CSU Chancellor’s Office, 2016). The mission of the California Community Colleges, like other two-year college systems, is to provide open access to postsecondary institutions for the state’s residents. The Community College system in California is also the most diverse, with over half percent of its students from historically underrepresented backgrounds. In addition, 42.5% of the students attending California’s community colleges in 2015 were Chicano/Latino. The community college system in the state however, has long struggled with two-year completion and transfer to the four-year sector for its underrepresented students. Because the community college system in California is so robust, understanding how to better serve the critical mass of Latino students in this system, is increasingly relevant for the system to explore and take action.

The California State University serves over 473,000 students system-wide, and is extremely diverse, with Latinos constituting 37% of the CSU system in 2015. White students comprise the second largest group attending the CSU system, with 25.7% in 2015. In addition, eighteen out of the twenty-three CSU campuses are designated as Hispanic-Serving Institutions. The CSU system is also widely known for preparing California’s teacher workforce, with the majority of CSUs offering teacher credentials and special certifications to teach at the K-12 level.
Postsecondary Policy Context

In 2012, the California legislature passed the Student Success Act of 2012, which attempted to restructure student success and establish a framework to improve the overall outcomes of community college students in the state. This act provides a framework for assessment for all community colleges, and placed an emphasis on raising the completion rates for historically underrepresented students in the community college system. However, previous research challenges the efficacy of the rubrics used by the scorecard, given that the model is largely focused on a full time student population. Yet, the majority of students of color are enrolled part-time in the community college system which presents challenges for accurately accounting for their time-to-degree, hours spent working, and time-to-transfer rates (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). The Bill does however, provide additional infrastructure and assessment support for the Community Colleges and attention to this population with respect to student achievement and outcomes. However, assessment that replicates and outdated model, one that doesn’t fully acknowledge the student population it serves, limits the overall picture and our understanding of student progress and academic success (Contreras & Contreras, 2015).

The CSU system also has a college completion initiative, called the CSU Graduation Initiative, GI 2025 Initiative, mandated in part, through Assembly Bill 1602 in 2016. The Bill was passed as part of the Budget act “The Library Services Act of 2016” and provides a one-time $35 million grant funding for all campuses within the CSU system to focus on increasing graduation rates, develop and adopt a graduation rate improvement plan. Specifically, by 2025, all CSUs are expected to raise their four-year college completion rate to 40% and their six-year graduation rate to 70%, and eliminate all achievement gaps that exist for special populations (e.g., Pell Eligible, First-generation, etc.) (CSU Graduation Initiative, 2025). This ambitious policy framework responds to the ongoing criticism of the system for its graduation rates, particularly among Latino and underrepresented students.
Methods

For the purpose of this article, systemic data were utilized to assess student and faculty trends, including historical data from CPEC (California Postsecondary Education Commission), Data Mart from the California Community College system and the Office of Analytic Studies from the CSU system. For the Community College system in California, data was used to analyze faculty diversity over a fifteen-year period. Disaggregated faculty data by race/ethnicity and student level data were acquired from Datamart, a secondary data system managed and overseen by the California Community College Chancellor’s Office. Student diversity was also analyzed to provide valuable context for the transformation that has occurred within the California two-year system to becoming an HSI system. Descriptive statistics and analyses are relevant to understanding the baseline for faculty diversity as well as trends over time.

For the California State University System, data was analyzed using the secondary data reported by the Office of Analytic Studies for the CSU system, which collects data from all 23 CSU campuses with respect to enrollment, graduation, staffing and select outcomes like retention and graduation. In addition, secondary data and reports produced by the California Faculty Association were utilized for this analysis. Finally, historical data from the California Postsecondary Education Commission also complemented the Office of Analytic studies for both the community college and CSU systems for historical trend data.

Analysis

This analysis highlights and expands upon previous work that notes the disconnect between rapid demographic shifts in higher education in California, with sizable proportions of Latino students entering the two-year Community College and four-year CSU systems, and the limited growth of Latino tenure line faculty in these respective systems (Santos & Acevedo-Gil, 2013; Contreras & Contreras, 2015). At the same time, the CSU system and the community college systems have their own respective completion initiatives, have garnered financial support from the California legislature, and have developed metrics focusing solely on student outcomes rather than also assessing the infrastructural changes necessary to sustain academic support and degree completion.

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1 Data however from CPEC was unavailable as of 2010 when the commission was closed due to funding.
Student enrollments over a fifteen-year period in the California community college system for example, shows Chicano/Latinx student enrollments have steadily increased. The fact that 95% of the community colleges can be considered Hispanic-Serving Institutions (84%), based on their Latino student enrollment greater than 25%, the system can largely be considered an HSI system. No other system of higher education in the United States has the level of student diversity that exists in the California community college system. However, as noted in previous research on HSIs, access alone does not necessarily translate into student success (Contreras et al., 2008) nor an institutional mission, identity, and effort to raise Latino student academic outcomes. Figure 3 shows the growing and steady gap in student enrollment between Latinos and Whites, a phenomenon that continues to widen. Chicano/Latino students constitute the single largest ethnic group enrolling California community colleges.

![Community College Enrollment, 2000-2015](image_url)

*Figure 3. Trends in Community College Enrollment in California, Latinos & Whites, 2000-2015. Adapted from California Postsecondary Education Commission.*

The faculty data for the California community colleges across select years since Fall 2000, show a very different story from the student enrollment growth seen in Figure 1, one of ongoing underrepresentation of Latino faculty across the same years examined. While modest improvement over a fifteen-year period has occurred, it has not kept pace with the sheer
volume of Latino students entering the community colleges in California. And the largest growth in faculty members has occurred among the lecturer pool of faculty, a less secure line of faculty employment, and with varying levels of access to voting rights within academic departments. Given the demographic transformation of the community college system over the past twenty years, it is increasingly important to examine the faculty diversity trends, given the benefits having a diverse faculty has on students of color in higher education.

A few trends in the community college faculty data in Table 1 are important to note. First, that the Latino faculty pool has witnessed growth, however, there remains a significant gap between the proportion of tenure line faculty and students across the community college system. In fact, the majority of Latinos in faculty positions, with respect to critical mass, are seen in the temporary pool of instructors since 2000 with 2,994 Latinos in this pool compared to 75% (n=27,131) of White instructors in the temporary pool in 2000; and 5,004 of Latinos compared to 26,185 of White temporary faculty in 2015. The greatest percentage growth, five percent between 2000-2015, also occurred among this pool of temporary community college instructors growing from 45.2% of instructors in 2000 to 47.5% in 2015. It is important to note that the data are limited in understanding whether the faculty that began teaching in the system as temporary faculty actually acquired more permanent positions within the system. However, it suggests that the greatest faculty investment being made by the State’s community college system is in the temporary pool of faculty members rather than tenure line faculty.

Tenured faculty in academic positions from 2000-2015 showed a decline overall, going from 20.8% in 2000 of faculty to 19.9% in 2015. In terms of overall staff in the community college system, the temporary pool of faculty, as seen in Table 2, comprise the largest proportion of employees (48% in 2015) across the system. The challenge with having temporary faculty is the limited ownership these faculty members possess to contributing to curriculum expectations and standards, lack of office space and comparable voting rights to tenured faculty members and overall lack of integration to the academic department and overall campus climate.

The community college tenure line faculty pool is important to monitor for a number of reasons. First, students of color are in need of academic connections when they are on campus. Having role models who share a common experience, culture, language, or history provides students with a tangible connection to their college environment. Second, faculty of color are
more likely to mentor students of color and take on a sizable advising and mentorship load, ranging from undergraduate research projects, to serving as mentors (i.e., Puente Mentors) or faculty (Milem, 2003; Turner, 2015; Contreras & Gandara, 2006). Third, tenured line faculty members become part of the pool poised to become department and institutional leaders. The educational administrator data for example, showed Latinos at 17.2% in 2015 compared to 54.8% of Whites in this same leadership category. Having diversity in the tenured faculty pool establishes a base and primer for institutional leadership and diversity to be cultivated and developed (Haro & Lara, 2003; Santos & Acevedo-Gil, 2013). For these reasons, having faculty members that are tenured rather than occupying the broad pool of contingent/temporary faculty is critical to creating an infrastructure that supports academic development, support and ultimately institutional success.

The temporary pool is also important to assess given the larger critical mass of this group. These are the instructors that are more likely to teach the students in need of development courses, rather than the tenure faculty in a given community college setting. A significant challenge exists within community colleges, with respect to motivating more senior and seasoned faculty to teach the students in need of the greatest academic support (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). As a result, temporary faculty are more likely to teach the students with the highest level of academic support needs while the tenure line faculty possess greater input on their course schedules. Community college faculty are often quick to place the onus of achievement on students rather than critically explore the role of faculty in student failure rates in remedial track courses. In addition, tutoring and academic supports are first noted as the solution, rather than assigning tenured faculty members to teach the developmental courses where students in need of highly skilled instructors first enroll (Contreras & Contreras, 2015).

The California State University System
The CSU system is also one of the largest public higher education systems in California, serving close to half a million students. The greatest growth in the number of students in the CSU system has occurred among the Chicano/Latino student population while other groups have remained relatively flat or declined in student enrollment from 2006-2015. As more Latino students constitute the K-12 system in California (55% in 2016), and seek postsecondary
Table 2
California Community College Faculty by Race/Ethnicity & Level, 2000-2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fall 2000</th>
<th>Fall 2005</th>
<th>Fall 2010</th>
<th>Fall 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>State of California Total</strong></td>
<td>80,377</td>
<td>86,791</td>
<td>89,033</td>
<td>89,104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Administrator Total</td>
<td>1,818</td>
<td>1,932</td>
<td>2,031</td>
<td>2,025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaskan Native</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>348</td>
</tr>
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<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.21%</td>
<td>5.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>1,195</td>
<td>1,215</td>
<td>1,226</td>
<td>1,110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic, Tenured/Tenure Track Total</strong></td>
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<td>17,594</td>
<td>18,086</td>
<td>17,709</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>1,072</td>
<td>1,100</td>
<td>1,110</td>
<td>1,032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaskan Native</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1,184</td>
<td>1,412</td>
<td>1,501</td>
<td>1,681</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>1,742</td>
<td>2,009</td>
<td>2,320</td>
<td>2,650</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.53%</td>
<td>1.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0.17%</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>0.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>1.59%</td>
<td>434</td>
<td>2.47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>12,214</td>
<td>73.19%</td>
<td>12,403</td>
<td>70.50%</td>
</tr>
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<td>Academic, Temporary Total</td>
<td>36,335</td>
<td>45.21%</td>
<td>40,122</td>
<td>46.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>1,762</td>
<td>4.85%</td>
<td>1,930</td>
<td>4.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaskan Native</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>0.88%</td>
<td>317</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2,363</td>
<td>6.50%</td>
<td>3,158</td>
<td>7.87%</td>
</tr>
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<td>2,994</td>
<td>8.24%</td>
<td>3,815</td>
<td>9.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Ethnicity</td>
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<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>0.23%</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>0.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1,682</td>
<td>4.63%</td>
<td>1,979</td>
<td>4.93%</td>
</tr>
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<td>White Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>27,131</td>
<td>74.67%</td>
<td>28,809</td>
<td>71.80%</td>
</tr>
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<td>Classified Total</td>
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<td>31.27%</td>
</tr>
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<td>African-American</td>
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<td>10.73%</td>
<td>2,556</td>
<td>9.42%</td>
</tr>
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<td>307</td>
<td>1.20%</td>
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<td>1.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>11.79%</td>
</tr>
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<td>4,974</td>
<td>19.48%</td>
<td>6,167</td>
<td>22.72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>0.42%</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>0.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>756</td>
<td>2.96%</td>
<td>837</td>
<td>3.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>14,126</td>
<td>55.32%</td>
<td>13,951</td>
<td>51.40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Adapted from California Community College Data Mart.
options close to home (Perez & McDonough, 2008; Turley, 2006) the CSU system is a viable option for students transitioning to college.

These trends illustrate how the system has transformed into an HSI system given the ongoing growth trends in Latino student enrollment. Chicano/Latinx students are attending the CSU system in large numbers, given the strong preference of Latinx students to remain closer to home or live at home during their undergraduate years (Desmond & Turley, 2009; Hurtado, 1997). Latinx students are therefore more likely than their college going peers to only apply to regional institutions. Thus, in a state like California, this segment is likely to become even more diverse, as more Latinx students graduate high school and transition to college.

![Figure 4](image-url)  
*Figure 4. Enrollment in California State University system by race/ethnicity 2006-2015. Adapted from California Faculty Association (2016).*

Figure 5 further shows the difference between faculty diversity and student enrollment by race/ethnicity across CSU campuses. The percentage of Latino faculty is almost three times less than the critical mass of Latino students in the CSU system. While few would argue that faculty parity with the student demographic composition is a requirement for student success or outcomes (Jacobi, 1991), having access to Latino and diverse faculty that has been documented in the field of higher education as having a strong commitment to mentoring, a greater likelihood of mentoring students of color, offer more regular and critical feedback, and
engage in diverse modes of pedagogical delivery are factors that faculty of color contribute toward in postsecondary institutions (Lopez Figueroa & Rodriguez, 2015; Milem, 2003; Turner, 2015; Turner & Gonzalez, 2014).

Figure 5. Faculty diversity compared to students, 2015. Adapted from California Faculty Association (2016).

In addition to understanding the composition of faculty diversity compared to students, it is also important to assess faculty diversity by rank. Table 3 delineates the percent of CSU faculty by race/ethnicity in Fall 2015. The data show similar trends to the CC system in California, with the Latino Lecturer pool comprising the largest proportion of faculty in the system at 10.4% compared to 8.3% of professors, and 9.1% of Assistant Professors. Latino faculty are the least likely to be in the Full Professor Rank, and Associate Professor (tenured) ranks compared to Assistant Professors and Lecturers. Conversely, the greatest proportion of White faculty in the CSU system are at the rank of Full Professor (68.4%) and Associate Professor at 59.2%. Across All categories of faculty in the CSU system, White faculty are the majority by a sizable proportion. The challenge and opportunity for these respective public higher education systems is to move beyond acknowledging the limited diversity of their respective professoriates, and to also establish tangible efforts to alter the composition of their faculty by expanding the pools of FTE faculty and mentoring Latinx and diverse faculty hires to cultivate their success within the institution and system. The limited proportion of Latino full professors suggest a limited likelihood of tenure and security of employment beyond the
Assistant Professor rank. Literature on this drop off from the Assistant level to Full Professor has pointed to the level of racial privilege that exists in the Professoriate nationally (Contreras & Gandara, 2006; Haro & Lara, 2003; Jayakuma et al., 2009).

Table 3
Percentage of CSU Faculty by Race/Ethnicity & Rank (Percent), Fall 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Full Professor</th>
<th>Associate Professor</th>
<th>Assistant Professor</th>
<th>Lecturer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>68.4</td>
<td>59.2</td>
<td>54.3</td>
<td>64.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina/x</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Adapted from California Faculty Association (2016).*

Because lecturers are a group of non-tenure line faculty that has expanded over the past two decades in the CSU system, it is important to also examine this pool of faculty within the CSU system. Lecturers represent a pool with less job security and autonomy within the CSU system, and their employment is contingent upon the demand for courses within a given department, existing faculty loads, and content knowledge/expertise of the lecturer. They also do not have the same departmental standing as tenure line faculty members within a given department. However, empirical evidence related to the impact of contingent faculty on undergraduate education remains difficult to assess (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Jacobi, 1991; Umbach, 2006).

The CSU lecturer data shows the majority of Latino faculty designated as Lecturer A, which is the entry level lecturer, and less likely to be at Level D, the highest level of Lecturers within the CSU system. While this is snapshot data for the Fall 2015, the data clearly conveys the opposite for White lecturers in the CSU system. The majority (81.4%) of lecturers in level
D are White, and the smallest percentage are classified as lecturer A. However, White lecturers represent the majority across all of the lecturer levels represented. Given that in recent years in the CSU system (California Faculty Association, 2016), the greatest growth in

Table 4
Percentage of CSU Lecturers by Race/Ethnicity & Rank (Percent), Fall 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Lecturer A</th>
<th>Lecturer B</th>
<th>Lecturer C</th>
<th>Lecturer D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>65.8</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td>81.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina/x</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>.7</td>
<td>.8</td>
<td>.4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Adapted from California Faculty Association. (2016).

faculty positions has occurred among the lecturer pool, it is important to note that faculty diversity is a challenge for this pool of faculty members in the CSU system. A stronger infrastructure to cultivate the lecturer pool that tends to be more diverse than the tenured line faculty, is one approach to ensure greater diversity across all lecturer classifications, including level D.

**Recommendations**

The following recommendations are intended to provide additional considerations for postsecondary systems that are evolving into Hispanic-Serving Systems, in an effort to assist colleges and universities move from Latino enrolling to serving Latino students (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Malcom, 2010). States like Texas, Florida, Arizona, New York, and New Mexico, that have sizable Latino populations that continue to constitute a larger proportion of the K-12 sector, have a vested interest in strategically planning for the wave of Latino students that will transition to college in California and across the country.
1. **Better data systems to support cross segment analysis and ongoing critical research on faculty trends.**

   Data systems are not seamless in California and the state lacks an integrated system of data collection that researchers and campuses can use for comparative analyses. CPEC, for example in California, which housed data from all systems of higher education, at one time was a highly valuable resource for cross segment comparisons, and added an additional layer of accountability for data accuracy in reporting. However, it was defunded in 2011, leaving the valuable infrastructure built to serve the state in the hands of each respective system of higher education. As a result, each system has its own data collection approach, portals, websites and interfaces that are not directly comparable and have to literally be developed by each entity that engages in conducting cross segment analysis.

2. **Research on contingent faculty and their role in supporting undergraduate students in Hispanic-Serving Institutions (in both the two-year and four-year sectors).**

   It is important to understand the shifts in contingent faculty that have occurred in HSI systems, as well as the drop off over time that has occurred among faculty attempting to move to secure lecturer levels and positions within two-year and four-year systems. The current model inhibits a foundation for relationship building and mentorship among students, due to the limited stability contingent faculty experience in academic departments. Thus, it is increasingly important to understand how to create a network and infrastructure that supports temporary and contingent faculty, while questioning the value, utility and trade-offs for having a less stable and financially rewarded faculty pool provide a sizable teaching role in HSI systems.

3. **Research on the relationship between faculty diversity and student engagement, mentorship practices, departmental climates, within HSIs.**

   There needs to be greater research and academic discussion on the relationship between faculty diversity and the GI 2025 initiative. That is, how might faculty of color support the Graduation Initiatives in the CSU system as well as the strategic goals of the community college success act of 2012. As noted in this article, the research
documenting student academic outcomes and faculty diversity is limited (Jacobi, 1991; Sedlacek et al., 2007) in part due to the evaluation processes by campus that varies greatly. It is important to understand the impact of programs or initiatives on practices within the infrastructures of these respective systems and ultimately the outcomes of these higher education policies.

4. **Examine the infrastructure that exists for non-tenured (but tenure track) Assistant Professors.**

Examine and create an infrastructure for support among faculty of color at the Assistant professor level that actively invests in their career and positive transition to tenure at the Associate Professor level. It is important for HSI systems to cultivate a critical mass of faculty that have a track record of giving back through being mentors to undergraduates, supervising research and are engaged with the local Latino and diverse communities surrounding HSIs.

5. **Establish and utilize Offices of Diversity and Equity to support, develop and monitor faculty recruitments and retention efforts.**

It is critically important to educate faculty on the importance of recognizing and combatting implicit bias that inhibits hiring diverse candidates in searches (See Turner, 2002). While Diversity Offices in higher education institutions are not new to the postsecondary sector, not all campuses in the CSU or CC systems have these offices, and responsibilities vary, with a primary focus on student services, campus diversity and campus climate. Greater effort and attention is necessary to better understand the role faculty play in establishing a climate of inclusiveness, engagement, civility, and critical consciousness within HSIs and HSI systems.

**Conclusion**

Parallels exist between the CSU and California community college system with respect to a greater reliance on temporary or contingent faculty, fewer Latinos in the tenured pool of faculty, and limited mobility for Latino faculty in the lecturer pools. The data presented shows an upward trend for both HSI systems as well, with Latino enrollment steadily increasing over the past fifteen years examined. However, student enrollment growth has not translated into greater levels of faculty diversity, despite what we know about the benefits of having role
models and instructors that are more likely to serve as mentors and provide research opportunities to students of color in postsecondary contexts.

Taking a systemic approach to postsecondary sectors that have become HSI systems is a critical aspect of raising Latino college transfer and completion, which ultimately has the potential to expand the pool of graduate students and future faculty members. Systemic policies that call for increasing faculty diversity in tenure line positions, examining supports for assistant professors in tenure track lines, support for contingent faculty, and building a strong infrastructure that includes best practices for Latino student success, are critical for HSI systems as they work to better serve their critical mass of Latino students. As more Latinx students transition to public postsecondary colleges, their success is intertwined with the economic sustainability of California. Greater faculty diversity can serve as a catalyst for increasing college completion and empowering Latinos to further contribute to the social, economic and political fabric of communities, states and this nation.
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Hispanic-Serving Institution Scholars and Administrators¹ on Improving Latina/Latino/Latinx/Hispanic² Teacher Pipelines: Critical Junctures along Career Pathways

Caroline S. Turner, Pedro X. Cosmé, Laura Dinehart, Raquel Martí, David McDonald, Martin Ramirez, Lester Sandres Rápalo, and Juana Zamora³

Abstract

This article emerges from the collaborative work of Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) scholars and administrators. From their perspectives as acting HSI leaders, the authors examine research/programs/practices [relevant to their institutions] pertaining to attracting, preparing, employing, and retaining Latina/o/x/Hispanic teachers. Research and programs noted here identify challenges, facilitators, and recommendations for improving Latina/o/x/Hispanic

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¹ The U.S. Department of Education’s Office of the Under Secretary, the Hispanic Serving Institution Division, and the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics hosted a 2016 convenings of education deans from Hispanic-serving institutions across the country to brainstorm ideas for getting more Latinos into the teaching profession. Addressing this topic, a committee of HSI administrators authored “White Paper: Improving Diverse and Inclusive Teacher Pipelines with a Focus on Latinas/Latinos/Hispanics” (Turner et al., 2017). We appreciated the opportunity to work with one another and support efforts to promote future such convening. This article emerges from that work and presents co-author perspectives only.

² This article uses the terms Latina/Latino/Latinx/Hispanic. Latina/o encompasses both female and male individuals; Latinx is a gender inclusive term. Writing in 1991, Nieves-Squires (1991) used the designator “Hispanic” to refer to people of Cuban, Mexican, Mexican American, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish ancestry or descent. Hispanic is also the term used in several datasets referred to in this article. Terminology used by researchers is not changed. Niemann (2002) notes that “like the term Hispanic, the label Latina/o is inclusive of all persons of Spanish-speaking descent” (p. xii). González and Gándara (2005) write that many call themselves Latinas to “acknowledge their non-European heritage while affirming their dignity and expressing confidence in their growing political importance” (p. 398). Niemann (2002) reminds us, however, that “a label does not define a woman or her ideology and that labels are fluid and, for many women, interchangeable” (p. xii).

³ Co-author names and affiliations:
Caroline S. Turner, Professor & Former Interim Dean, College of Education, California State University, Sacramento
Pedro X. Cosmé, Associate Professor of Psychology-Sociology, Union County College, Member of MENSA
Elizabeth Campus, Elizabeth, NJ
Laura Dinehart, Executive Director School of Education and Human Development, Professor College of Arts, Sciences & Education, Florida International University, Miami, FL
Raquel Martí, Director, Title V Cooperative Project, Office of Development, UPR-Carolina
David McDonald, Associate Vice President for Public Affairs and Strategic Initiatives, Western Oregon University, Monmouth OR
Martin Ramirez, HSI-STEM, SESI Project Director, Sacramento City College & Former Assistant Principal, Rosa Parks K-8 School, Sacramento City Unified School District, Sacramento, CA
Lester Sandres Rápalo, Dean of Social Sciences, Business & History, Interim Dean of American Honors, Union County College, Cranford, NJ
Juana Zamora, Director, California Mini-Corps, Butte County Office of Education, Sacramento, CA

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.24974/amae.11.3.369
educational outcomes and for increasing the number of Latina/o/x/Hispanic teachers. Increasing the number of Latina/o/x/Hispanic teachers involves processes that are circular and iterative; encompassing their educational pathways from early schooling experiences to the more advanced stage of the teaching workplace.

**Introduction**

While the representation of Latina/o/x/Hispanic teachers has increased in recent years to nearly 8% of the teacher workforce, this growth has not kept pace with corresponding student demographic shifts. Currently, 82% of public school teachers identify as White, and primarily are women. Meanwhile, approximately 25% of students in U.S. public schools identified as Hispanic (National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), 2011-2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2016, p. 1). In 2011, 23.9% of pre-K–12 students in U.S. public schools were Latina/o/x/Hispanic (Fry & Lopez, 2012). To further sound the alarm, retention rates are lower among Latina/o/x/Hispanic teachers compared with retention rates for White teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, p. 4). Educational leadership, i.e., K-12 principals and superintendents, is also predominantly White. In 2011-12, 20% of public school principals were people of color (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Furthermore, according to Sleeter (2016), the lack of faculty diversity in teacher preparation programs creates contexts that permit trends to continue with little, if any, change on the horizon. HSIs with teacher preparation programs can play an integral role in improving this situation. Núñez et al. (2015) note that HSIs graduate 40% of Latina/Latino baccalaureates in the U.S. and, despite challenges they face, these institutions “have great potential to ultimately reduce the gaps in U.S. educational and economic inequality” (p. 5).

Despite this, the majority of extant research focuses on the educational pathways of minoritized teachers generally rather than specifically on Latinas/os/xs/Hispanics within HSIs. Much more research must to be done to examine HSIs and their teacher preparation programs. Findings from the literature presented here have implications for the Latina/o/x/Hispanic teaching career pathway. Ocasio (2014) and Gándara et al. (2013) note that Latinas/os/xs/Hispanics progress through critical junctures in the teacher pipeline: pre-school experiences, high school graduation, college access and persistence, attaining a teaching
credential, and securing a job as a classroom teacher. This article presents aspects of the nation’s teaching workforce throughout the K-12 system focusing on the research and practice literature related to attracting, preparing, employing and retaining Latina/o/x/Hispanic teachers. Many of the example programs and practices referenced in this article were provided by the co-authors who are working as scholars and administrators within HSIs. Increasing Latina/o/x/Hispanic teachers involves processes that are circular and iterative, and they encompass early schooling experiences and those in the teaching workplace. Highlighted are facilitating factors, challenges, and recommendations to diversify the teaching workforce.

This article addresses the following topics: 1) The importance of representation in the classroom; 2) Attracting Latinas/os/xs/Hispanics to the teaching profession; 3) Critical junctures along the Latina/o/x/Hispanic teacher pipeline, including preparation, attaining a position, and persistence; and 4) Recommendations to address critical issues of Latina/o/x/Hispanic teacher representation.

The Importance of Representation in the Classroom

Irizarry and Donaldson (2012) underscore that while there are non-Hispanic teachers who effectively teach Hispanic youth, studies provide evidence that suggest 1) academic, psychological, and social benefits are cultivated when students of color are taught by teachers of color; 2) teachers of color are more likely to value the knowledge and cultural frames of reference students “bring to school”; 3) teachers of color tend to hold higher expectations for minoritized students; 4) teachers’ perceptions influence student aspirations and likely achievement; and 5) teachers of color typically enter the profession with a heightened awareness of the sociopolitical contexts in which students of color are educated (p. 156). For Latina/o/x/Hispanic student success, students need teachers peppered throughout their educational experience who know and value their community’s inherent assets, who understand and can communicate with parents, and who serve as role models.

Other research suggests the racial diversity of teachers can provide significant benefits to students. Cherng and Halpin (2016) conclude that “students, particularly minority students, perceive minority teachers more favorably than White teachers” (p. 407). These perceptions motivate youth to strive for academic excellence (p. 408). Their article also presents previous studies indicating that “race matching between teachers and students is also linked to other
academic and social outcomes, such as...lower rates of student absenteeism and suspension” (Cherng & Halpin, 2016, p. 408). “Minority teachers are said to be able to relate more easily with minority youth...by drawing from their own experiences navigating society as nondominant persons” (Cherng & Halpin, 2016, p. 412). Cherng and Halprin (2016) state the importance of having a diverse teaching force to help “close longstanding racial achievement gaps,” “to form strong ties with students,” and “to empower youth of all racial/ethnic identities” (p. 417). In their extensive review of the literature, Villegas and Irvine (2010) provide empirical studies supporting the assertion that “students of color accrue academic benefits when taught by a same-race teacher or when exposed to a teaching force...that is racially/ethnically representative of the student population” (p. 180). They further assert that “teachers of color use their insider knowledge about language, culture, and life experiences of students of color to improve their academic outcomes and school experiences” (Villegas & Irvine, 2010, p. 185).

On the other hand, Villegas, Strom, and Lucas (2012) warn their readers that a focus on increasing the presence of minority teachers must not “place the full responsibility for successfully educating students of color on teachers of color. Efforts to diversify the teaching force should be seen as only one component...in a broad and comprehensive policy designed to ensure that children who historically have been marginalized in schools receive the high quality of education they deserve” (p. 298). All involved in education must take on this responsibility.

The authors of this article discussed what might attract Latinas/os/xs/Hispanics to consider the teaching profession. In the process, they also shared what attracted them to become teachers and educators.

**Attracting Latinas/Latinos/Latinxs/Hispanics to the Teaching Profession**

**Teachers as Change Agents**

Weisman and Hansen (2008) found that many Latina/o/x/Hispanic teachers feel that they are change agents within their community. They often choose to teach in largely Latino-dominated schools and are able to relate to students and families in ways that non-Latino teachers cannot. This connection to students and families, as well as a desire to serve as role models, are important narratives within their roles as classroom teachers (Ocascio, 2014, p.
According to Fullan (1993), teaching at its core is a moral profession. Teachers play key roles in realizing successful changes in education. At the University of Toronto (Fullan, 1993), an examination of why people enter the teaching profession reported that the most frequent answer was “to make a difference in the lives of students.” Opportunities to do the following were found to promote an interest in teaching:

1. Working with all students in an equitable, effective, and caring manner by respecting diversity in relation to ethnicity, race, gender, and special needs of each learner;
2. Being active learners who continuously seek, assess, apply, and communicate knowledge as reflective practitioners throughout their careers;
3. Developing and applying knowledge of curriculum, instruction, principles of learning, and evaluation needed to implement and monitor effective and evolving programs for all learners;
4. Initiating, valuing, and practicing collaboration and partnerships with students, colleagues, parents, community, government, social and business agencies;
5. Appreciating and practicing the principles, ethics, and legal responsibilities of teaching as a profession;
6. Developing a personal philosophy of teaching informed by and contributing to the organizational, community, societal, and global context of education

**Teachers as Cultural Workers**

The teaching profession provides an opportunity for future Latina/o/x/Hispanic teachers to become cultural workers who can inform students about historical injustices and current challenges that may not be emphasized in their school curriculum (Friere, 2005). Teachers can use justice-oriented critical pedagogies to engage students and use statistical data tools to make students aware of the status for Latinas/os/xs/Hispanics within K-12 and higher education. This knowledge can empower youth to become responsible for their learning. Teaching provides a great opportunity for future Latina/o/x/Hispanic educators to promote systemic transformation. For example, as Tillet (2015) underscores in her work, “The attempt to bring black girlhood to the forefront of public consciousness at a time when organizing, theorizing, and imagining black girlhood are still invisible to the vast majority of policymakers, academics, and activists is my form of cultural work” (p. 482).
To be successful in the classroom and within their communities, educators aim to instill hope for change. Duncan-Andrade (2009) explains that this must be critical hope encompassing many characteristics including: teaching that connects students to networks, teaching that supports the development of courage, and educator willingness to self-sacrifice. It is important to underscore here that if Latina/o/x/Hispanic students have a positive school experience, they are more likely to consider a career in teaching. In “Making Education Work for Latinas in the U.S.,” Gándara et al. (2013) provide an analysis which demonstrates that Latinas are more likely to go to college if they have Latino teachers. Unfortunately, due to biases and stereotypes, many Latina/o/x/Hispanic students do not experience a positive education during their early schooling years. As a result, they are not frequently inspired to pursue higher education. For example, Sáenz and Ponjuan (2009) note the effect on Latino boys: “The dissonant learning styles between boys and girls in the early schooling years have other consequences that may serve to redirect boys away from traditional educational pathways” (p. 60).

**Teachers Touch Eternity**

Tom Barone’s *Touching Eternity: The Enduring Outcomes of Teaching* (2001) explores how teachers can make a long-term impact on the lives of their students. Examples of how teachers can inspire and promote passions (that can touch eternity) for Latina/o/x/Hispanic students can be shared with potential Latina/o/x/Hispanic teachers. Irizarry and Donaldson (2012) report that many Latinas/os enter teaching wanting to give back to their community, ideally in their home communities, by serving students of color and low-income students. They also express a desire to transform schools and create more positive learning environments for students like themselves (p. 183).

**Teachers are Role Models**

Several articles detail the importance of Latina/o/x/Hispanic teachers as role models across institutions including at the elementary, secondary, and community college levels (post-secondary). Laura Dinehart, one of the article co-authors, noted how important it was not only for Latinos/Hispanics to have Latino/Hispanic teachers but also for others to interact with Latino/Hispanic teachers. The question was posed: What can others who are not Latino/Hispanic learn from a Latino/Hispanic teacher? She stressed the need for Latino/Hispanic
teachers to remain in their communities and to go outside of the community as well.

Frankenberg (2009) contends that teachers of color “bring knowledge, insights, and perspectives to schools that otherwise would not be there, including raising issues of structural inequality present in schools and society” (p. 4).

One recommendation for this representation to be realized was through exchange programs. How people can be attracted to teaching at different phases of one’s life was also discussed. For example, Latinas/os/xs/Hispanics in other professions or who are retired may wish to change their career paths and, if interested, could be recruited to a teacher preparation program. Litow (2008) addresses the lack of Latinas/os in STEM as teachers and in other professions; a reality that could compromise the future of the U.S. economy. He recommends second-career Latina/o teachers be recruited from the ranks of current math and science professionals, urging the collaboration of private and public sectors to develop financial incentives for tuition, in-service professional development, and competitive salaries.

**Critical Junctures along the Latina/Latino/Latinx/Hispanic Teacher Pipeline: Preparation, Attaining a Position, and Persistence**

As noted earlier, publications address how Latinas/os/xs/Hispanics progress through critical junctures in the teacher pipeline: high school graduation, college access and persistence, obtaining a teaching degree, and securing a job as a classroom teacher. These publications provide insight regarding the challenges and opportunities they face as they pursue teaching careers. Findings suggest that the Latina/o/x/Hispanic teacher pipeline is unique and often nontraditional. The critical junctures along this pathway that are particularly challenging for students are explored and opportunities for growth are noted. Most of these articles do not examine the HSI context and are not specific to the Latina/o/x/Hispanic teacher pipeline, but they are instructive and have implications for HSI teacher preparation.

**Recruiting Potential Latina/Latino/Latinx/Hispanic Teacher Candidates**

Gándara et al. (2013) provide evidence that Latina recruitment to the teaching profession, which could also be relevant for the recruitment of Latinos, must focus on elements contributing to their success from pre-school experiences through the attainment of a teaching credential. To that end, scholars note several points in time for improving Latina educational
outcomes, emphasizing the creation of a sense of belonging throughout their educational pathways.

Related to the identification of potential candidate pools, Gándara (2016), reports that twenty-two states, including California and Washington, D.C. offer the Seal of Biliteracy. In California alone, there are more than 125,000 high school graduates who have received the Seal of Biliteracy and they are overwhelmingly Spanish speakers. Gándara (2016) recommends that if a pathway to become teachers is created and incentivized for them, this may be an ideal candidate pool. Gándara (2016) states that “one important distinction with Latino teachers is that they are more likely to speak the language of the students and their parents, a critically important asset that many of these teachers have.”

Challenges to a strong teacher candidate pool include the passage of laws such as Proposition 227 in California, and similar laws in Arizona and Massachusetts. Such laws require all children to be taught in English and have prompted precipitous drops in bilingual teacher production. In 2016, California passed Proposition 58, which allowed the development of multilingual programs and a pathway for the increased production of bilingual teachers (Kong, 2016; Ulloa, 2016). An additional challenge to increasing Latina/o/x/Hispanic teachers is the introduction of new exams for certification and teaching entry (Ingersoll & May, 2011; Mader, 2016). Passing the exam and the additional time and money these exams require may present barriers for minoritized teacher candidates.

Additionally, Diverse Issues in Higher Education (2016) publishes lists of the top 100 producers of degrees awarded to underrepresented students. Not surprisingly, most of the colleges and universities listed are HSIs. For example, the 2016 Hispanic Heritage Month issue listed the top producers of Hispanics graduating with bachelor’s and master’s degrees in Education. The same data can also be found for Hispanics graduating from Business Administration, Engineering, and the Social Sciences.

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4 The Seal of Biliteracy is an award given by a school, district, or state in recognition of students who have studied and attained proficiency in two or more languages by high school graduation. http://sealofbiliteracy.org/
Persistence of Latina/Latino/Latinx/Hispanic Teachers in Teacher Preparation Programs

Latinas/os who successfully progressed through the teacher pipeline found ways to counteract barriers with support systems and thereby cope with negative factors and challenges (Ocascio, 2014, p. x). Potential negative factors included: racial discrimination, financial barriers, multiple life roles (issue of time), and a lack of support and resources (Ocascio, 2014, p. 144). This ability to persevere can inform those aspiring to become teachers coming up behind them.

As noted above, Latina/o/x/Hispanic students who have positive school experiences are more likely to consider a career in teaching. Upon entering teacher preparation programs, mentors and role models further inspire them to persist. Latinas/os/xs/Hispanics thrive in programs which include a culturally-relevant curriculum and cultural role models who can support and encourage Latina/o/x/Hispanic career aspirations and connect them with resources such as the funding opportunities necessary to navigate the pipeline (Ocascio, 2014, p.141). Offering classes and programming outside of the traditional 9 to 5 weekday timeframe is important to meet the needs of this population of educators (Ocascio, 2014, p.147). One pathway, or “bridge” to teaching for Latinas/os interviewed by Ocascio (2014) was the “Master’s degree + teacher certification” route to teaching (p. 143). Further exploration and development of “grow your own” programs, alternative certification, and other models of teacher preparation within colleges and universities will offer more opportunities for Latinas/os/xs/Hispanics to become teachers. Examples of “grow your own” programs are provided in the recommendations section of this article.

Persistence of Latina/Latino/Latinx/Hispanic Teachers in the Classroom

As previously noted, most of the extant literature is focused on minoritized students/teachers as a monolithic group. Relatively few studies focus specifically on Latinas/os/xs/Hispanics.

Ingersoll and May (2011) found that while efforts to recruit new minority teachers have been successful, retaining them has not. Teacher retention rates are higher among Whites than Black and Hispanic teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Studies examining the persistence of minoritized teachers (Ingersoll & May, 2011; Mader, 2016) point to the need to improve workplace conditions. Mader (2016) notes that the “number of Hispanic, Black, Asian
and Native American teachers has more than doubled...minority teachers are more likely than their non-minority colleagues to work in hard-to-staff schools, and to leave these schools or the teaching field overall” (p. 1). However, Mader (2016) contends that minority teachers placed in schools serving disadvantaged students do not leave for this reason. Rather, they leave due to undesirable workplace environments. According to Ingersoll and May (2011), minoritized teacher turnover is strongly associated with lack of teacher classroom autonomy and few opportunities to contribute to school wide decision-making. Improving teacher working conditions by providing more autonomy in the classroom, providing more supplies and resources, and giving teachers more of a say in school-wide decisions could contribute to the retention of minoritized teachers (Mader, 2016). Such findings underscore the importance of school organization, management, and leadership to address these issues.

Flores (2011) examined the workplace experiences of Latina elementary school teachers in two contexts. The first was a Latina dominant school (Kindred) with over 70% of teachers with a Latino background. The second was a predominantly White school (Citrine) where over 80% of the teachers were White women. Both schools serve low-income Latino families. In these diverse school sites, Latina teachers described vastly different experiences with their work. Latina teachers in a predominantly White context encountered subtle forms of racism where they felt the need to minimize the expression of their culture and were burdened by heavier workloads. They described experiencing feelings of disadvantage and disempowerment. In the predominantly Latina school, teachers described positive relationships with co-workers, freedom to express their culture through their dress and use of Spanish, and through celebrations of cultural holidays. Even if anti-immigrant sentiments were expressed in the school or in society, Latinas described an overall environment that was supportive and cohesive in the predominantly Latina school (Flores, 2011, p. 331). In these examples, it seems that informed and supportive leadership could shape environments to be more inclusive and welcoming. Doing so would contribute to the creation of a sense of belonging for Latina teachers (Gándara et al., 2013).

Flores’ (2011) work focused on Latina teachers in elementary schools. Recent work is emerging on recruiting Black and Hispanic/Latino men to the teaching profession (Networked Improvement Community (NIC) sponsored by AACTE, 2015) and examines the experiences of Latinos once they attain a teaching position (Lara & Franquiz, 2015). Lara and Franquiz (2015)
note that Latino and Black men teachers are approximately two percent of the total teaching population. They also state that in a highly feminized profession, Latino men may be viewed with suspicion and/or be used to curb student misconduct. Their study concludes that Latino men must be positioned as belonging in classrooms. In their unpublished paper, Sandres-Rápalo and Cosmé echo the experience of Latino men and point to the importance of mentorship and addressing implicit biases described as “often subconscious stereotypes that guide our expectations and interactions with people” (Turner, 2016) along the educational pathway for all minorities (see also Egalite, Kisida, & Winters, 2015; Grissom & Redding, 2016). Sandres-Rápalo and Cosmé also emphasize the diversity within the Hispanic population, which is important when considering policy. They report that the Hispanic population, as categorized in the U.S. Census, is comprised of individuals of Mexican, Central and South American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican, and of other Hispanic origins.

Ahmad and Boser (2014) report that teachers of color leave the profession, in part, due to low salaries and difficult working conditions. These authors also present a set of policy recommendations to increase the pool of effective teachers of color. At the federal government level, creation of a national public-private partnership teacher corps and congressional authorization of grants to teacher preparation programs at minority serving institutions is proposed. At the state and district level, they propose providing pathways from 2- and 4-year colleges, providing scholarships, changing compensation packages, and promoting statewide initiatives that attract Hispanics to teaching (Ahmad & Boser, 2014, p. 18-20). They conclude their article by describing the circular nature of the teacher of color pipeline, stating that “when we have more teachers of color in the classroom, they will encourage students of color to aspire to be educators and help them to realize that they too can become teachers of color” (Ahmad & Boser, 2014, p. 21). Bireda and Chait (2011) underscore this conclusion: “Teachers of color provide real-life examples to minority students of future career paths...increasing the number of current teachers of color may be instrumental to increasing the number of future teachers of color...there are effective teachers of many races, teachers of color have demonstrated success in increasing academic achievement by engaging students of similar backgrounds” (Bireda & Chait, 2011, p. 1-2).
Recommendations to Address Critical Issues of Latina/Latino/Latinx/Hispanic Teacher Representation

Recruitment and retention of Latina/o/x/Hispanic teachers are critical issues to address. Ocascio (2014) states that, “This conversation needs to take place alongside the discussion of what high-quality, culturally-responsive Latino teachers look like. This will ensure that the future teacher workforce is equipped with high quality, culturally-responsive Latino teachers who can serve as mentors and role models for future generations of Latino (and non-Latino) youth” (p. 153). Such concerns are also addressed by Valenzuela (2016) in her edited book, Growing Critically Conscious Teachers. Nieto (2016) describes this book as “for Latino/a and non-Latino/a teachers alike, and for the university faculty and school and community-based facilitators who help prepare them” (p. ix).

Below are policy and research recommendations that have emerged from the literature presented above and from discussions among HSI educators. Following this section is a list of references and, in the appendix, a partial listing of HSI best practices currently implemented toward building a Latina/o/x/Hispanic teacher pipeline.

Recommendations: Improving Latina/Latino/Latinx/Hispanic Teacher Pipelines

The recommendations below may be relevant for Latina/o/x/Hispanic teacher education pathways from early schooling experiences to the more advanced stage of the teaching workplace. Most examples provided are located within the context of postsecondary HSIs.

Continued investment in Latina/o/x/Hispanic teacher preparation efforts at HSIs. Because HSIs graduate 40% of Latina/o/x/Hispanic baccalaureates in the U.S., federal, state, and institutional investment in HSI teacher preparation programs would do much to support the recruitment and development of future Latina/o/x/Hispanic teachers. For example, in 2017, three HSIs in the California State University System (CSUS) were awarded more than $8 million in grants from the U.S. Department of Education. The grants were granted to support the development of the Latina/o/x/Hispanic teacher pipeline within CSU Sacramento, Sonoma, and Long Beach. A Sacramento State Newsletter stated that the “Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions Program funding will help empower Hispanic and bilingual students pursuing a teaching credential with the tools they need to succeed and graduate” (http://www.csus.edu/news/articles/2017/10/11/grant-helps-recruit-more-latinos-teachers.shtml)
In 2015, in commemoration of the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics 25th anniversary, the initiative released a national call for Commitments to Action, encouraging public, private, and nonprofit investments in the creation and/or expansion of quality education programming throughout the nation serving Hispanics (Gross, 2017). Several of these high impact, long-term Commitments to Action focused on Latina/o/x/Hispanic teacher recruitment at HSIs. For example, Felician College in Lodi, NJ, committed a minimum of one-half million dollars to improve the academic success, persistence, and graduation rates of their Hispanic students by 5% each year. This will be accomplished through initiatives ameliorating challenges faced by the students, scholarships for Teacher Education Bachelor's Degree Completion, and Experiential Learning Internships linking fields of study with future careers for our Hispanic students over the next 5 years. Institutional partners included: Washington Elementary School, Statewide Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey, Latinas in STEM Foundation, and Volunteer Center of Bergen County, Inc. The focus of this initiative is on postsecondary completion and Latino Teacher Recruitment (http://www.ewa.org/blog-latino-ed-beat/whats-next-white-house-initiative-educational-excellence-hispanics).

While the above initiatives are not deemed as “grow your own” programs, two of the article co-authors describe their programs as such and recommended that states and institutions create more such programs.

**Implement more “grow your own” partnership programs.** David McDonald (2016) describes below the Western Oregon University Bilingual Teacher Scholars Program, a successful “grow your own” initiative on his campus: Latinas/os comprise nearly one-quarter of Oregon’s students, but only four percent of licensed teachers. Within this context, the Western Oregon University Bilingual Teacher Scholars Program offers an innovative partnership. Western Oregon University (WOU), two of Oregon’s largest school districts, two local smaller districts, Oregon’s most diverse school district, and a community college have created a partnership that will seek to address the chronic and growing disparities between the number of K-12 Latino students and the number of Latino and Spanish speaking teachers. The Bilingual Teacher Scholars Program provides students with three foundational pillars (academic, financial, and co-curricular) needed for college success and effective preparation for a teaching career. The fourth pillar—student motivation—is identified by working with high school-based future teacher tracks and the pre-education program with the community college.
Academic work includes completion of the rigorous WOU teacher education curriculum, including the courses required to receive the Bilingual Teacher Endorsement. Spanish language requirements of the program recognize the distinctions between heritage speakers and those who learned Spanish as a second language. Content courses in US History and teaching pedagogy are taught in Spanish to model effective instruction in Spanish. Scholars receive a generous financial support package that is built upon federal and state aid. The university provides at least $4,000 per-year in scholarship support and partner school districts hire students each summer to work as tutors or classroom assistants. The cohorts meet monthly for professional development and social activities designed to maintain student progress towards degree completion and the commencement of a successful teaching career. Every scholar is placed into one of three existing WOU support programs to help students create additional pieces of their university networks. The lack of additional scholarship funding prevents this program from scaling up to serve more school districts (http://www.wou.edu/teachered/bilingual-teacher-scholars/).

Juana Zamora, Director of California Mini-Corps, describes her award-winning program funded by the California Department of Education in the following paragraphs:

The California Mini-Corps Program is an example of a successful teacher pipeline model that has been in existence since 1967. The program is federally funded through the California Department of Education, under the auspices of the Butte County Office of Education (California Mini-Corps, 2016). In August 2016, Mini-Corps was recognized through its two satellite programs at California State University, Fresno as a “Bright Spot in Education” by the White House (Ceja, 2016; Salazar, 2015). It currently has over 400 bilingual culturally proficient tutors working in K-12 settings in California. The California Mini-Corps’ mission is to develop bilingual teachers and to increase the academic achievement of migrant students. The program hires college tutors who are mostly Latinos/as and data show that 80% of the tutors go on to obtain a teaching credential or some type of teaching permit (California Mini-Corps, 2016, p. 5; Gonzalez, 2012). By the time Mini-Corps tutors enter a credentialing program and step into their first classroom as teachers, they already have an impressive record of working in the classroom with students. Tutors also receive ongoing supervision, coaching, and mentoring by a program coordinator who observes them bi-weekly in the classroom.
and provides verbal and written feedback during debriefing sessions. The coordinator is a certificated teacher who provides six hours per-month of professional development in core content areas and shares best teaching practices to their cohort of 18-20 tutors. The tutors are full-time college students and part-time tutors. Their compensation for tutorial work supports them financially while enabling them to focus on their career goal of becoming a teacher (Gonzalez, 2012). Program coordinators monitor tutors’ grades, and program data suggest that tutors’ average GPA is 3.0 or greater (California Mini-Corps, 2016).

Mini-Corps uses the aforementioned "grow our own" approach: the program graduates migrant high school students who are recruited to work as college tutors. As evidence of the effectiveness of this “grow your own” model, numerous California Mini-Corps alumni hold positions as district and county superintendents, college presidents, professors, principals, teachers and central office administrators (Association of California School Administrators, 2016). The California Mini-Corps program has received three resolutions for exemplary performance by members of the California Legislature. As part of the "grow our own" model, Mini-Corps incorporates collaboration with 22 higher education institutions, some of which are HSIs, approximately 50% are community colleges, and the rest are universities. This network supports the transfer of tutors from community colleges to 4-year institutions and the recruitment of tutors into the credential programs. While in college, Mini-Corps tutors work in 161 school districts throughout the state and within the 20 migrant regions (California Mini-Corps, 2016). Since tutors are collegians with roots in the migrant community, they demonstrate a greater understanding of the challenges migrant students face as well as their remarkable potential (Gonzalez, 2012; Sepúlveda, 2011).

Increase Financial Support to Latina/o/x/Hispanic Students. There are several ways this might be accomplished, including strengthening federal financial aid support, by offering scholarships and programming for low-income Latina/o/x/Hispanic students entering the teaching field. In addition, statewide initiatives might be created to fund teacher preparation programs aimed at low-income and Latina/o/x/Hispanic teachers. Reducing the cost of becoming a teacher could be more feasible by creating additional avenues to enter the field and

5 https://bcoe.org/cms/one.aspx?portalId=757608&pageload=1011618
by increasing the number of qualified credentialing organizations. Current populations could be incentivized as part of a teacher recruitment strategy. These populations might include second-career teachers and those high school graduates who earned a Seal of Biliteracy. Second-career teachers could be recruited from the ranks of current math and science professionals and could be supported through collaboration between private and public sectors. This might include offering financial incentives for tuition, in-service professional development, and competitive salaries (Litow, 2008). Most of the students who earn the Seal of Biliteracy are Spanish speakers and could be a rich potential teacher pool. Creating pathways and financial infrastructure for this group would contribute to the production of future Latina/o/x/Hispanic teachers (Gándara, 2016).

**Emphasize the importance of leadership.** As they create inclusive and welcoming learning environments, the significance of school and college/university leadership cannot be overstated. In addition to promoting contexts supportive of Latina/o/x/Hispanic student achievement, on-site leadership can also promote the satisfaction of Latina/o/x/Hispanic teachers and address workplace difficulties as they arise. For example, district/school leadership can provide teacher support, include teachers in decision making, promote teacher classroom autonomy, create on-site networks to counter feelings of isolation, and advocate for higher salaries. Furthermore, based upon research presented here and the observations of the authors of this article, educational leaders have opportunities to: 1) affirm that “students of all backgrounds deserve teachers of all backgrounds” (Boser, 2011, p. 11); 2) highlight the value Latina/o/x/Hispanic teachers and “their potential for improving the quality of education for Latina/o/x/Hispanic…youth” (Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012, p. 184); 3) include in their institutional mission that “the diversity of the teacher force …[is a] central component of any policy initiative intended to provide a high quality education to all students, not just some” (Villegas & Irvine, 2010, p. 188); and 4) hire teachers who understand the power of teacher expectations to influence Latina/o/x/Hispanic student success (Gershenson & Papageorge, 2017). Educational leaders can also work with other policy makers to create expanded networks to attract and retain Latina/o/x/Hispanic teachers. Finally, they can work together toward reducing teacher bias, diversifying the teaching workforce, and retaining current Latina/o/x/Hispanic teachers. This is a circular process: the more Latina/o/x/Hispanic teachers
retained, the more Latina/o/x/Hispanic teachers will be attracted to the profession and to the schools/colleges that successfully retain them.

**Challenge implicit bias and stereotyping.** Research articles referenced here and discussions held by the co-authors of this article point to the need to recognize and challenge implicit bias and stereotyping along the entire educational pathway for Latina/o/x/Hispanic students and teachers. Negative interactions from early schooling and in teacher workplaces create a continuous cycle of distancing Latinas/os/xs/Hispanics from the field of education. Implicit bias, which creates unsafe learning environments for students and teachers, can be combated in a number of ways. These might include: 1) workshops on unconscious bias and microaggressions inside and outside the classroom; 2) professional development for teachers and classified staff regarding equity and cultural sensitivity; 3) student and teacher empowerment via culturally relevant curriculum such as Chicano/a Studies and Ethnic Studies; 4) culturally relevant/welcoming environments that promote community, belonging, and positive climate; 5) development of restorative justice disciplinary practices in place of traditional zero tolerance policies which fuel the school to prison pipeline for students of color; 6) workshops focused on growing the capacity of Latina/o/x/Hispanic students around club advising that helps to build their social and cultural capital. Club activities might include: guest professionals/motivation speakers, networking opportunities, academic conferences, community organizing, and college preparation opportunities; and 7) after-school program mentoring opportunities for Latina/o/x/Hispanic teachers to lead. Special projects might include: culturally relevant mural projects, STEM classes, robotics, debate, and math-athletes.

**Further research examining HSI Latina/o/x/Hispanic teacher preparation.** In addition to the recommendations from the literature and practice discussed above, one critical finding from this work is that few research articles focus on the study of the Latina/o/x/Hispanic

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6 For example, in Los Angeles Unified, home to nearly 470,000 Latino students, ethnic studies is now a graduation requirement. All LAUSD students, Latino or otherwise, receive a high school diploma only after gaining a foundational understanding of the experiences of Latino and other people of color. Districts that do not yet have an ethnic studies curriculum can look towards the model curriculum that the state’s Instructional Quality Commission is currently developing. The state can go the next step by supporting districts in adoption of this curriculum through training and incentives (https://west.edtrust.org/resource/the-majority-report/, p.13).

7 One example is Richmond High School in Contra Costa County instituted a restorative justice program. The school partners with Catholic Charities of the East Bay, which received funding from the city of Richmond to provide training on restorative justice for Richmond High teachers. The program has included a conflict resolution circle and a “youth court” system, and was expanded to nine additional schools in the district (https://west.edtrust.org/resource/the-majority-report/, p.11).
teacher pathways, especially within the HSI context. The authors recommend analyses of HSI student outcomes as well as the creation of program assessments and evaluations to understand the impact of interventions on student outcomes. Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research approaches should be used to capture parent, family, and community perspectives in addition to HSI student and educator perspectives for a more complete understanding of the barriers and facilitators along the Latina/o/x/Hispanic teacher pathway.

**Conclusion**

The Education Trust-West, based in Oakland, CA, recently released a report entitled “The Majority Report: Supporting the Educational Success of Latino Students in California.” This publication sums up the educational challenges Latinos in California continue to face. Based upon discussions with practitioners and the review of literature presented here, these conditions are likely common amongst Latinas/os/xs/Hispanics across the country:

Across the state, hundreds of thousands of Latino students are still denied the education they need to succeed in college, career, and beyond…Numerous hurdles stand in their way, including insufficient access to early childhood education, low expectations in school, teacher and staff biases, less access to rigorous coursework, and lack of engaging and welcoming school environments. Students with additional needs, such as English learner, migrant, and undocumented students, face an additional set of obstacles (p. 9). The report also indicates:

Our state cannot afford to fail Latino students. With an increased sense of urgency for the changes our students deserve, our educational system can prepare the future scientists, artists, economists, academics, and business and government leaders that will change the world (p. 2).

We agree, and hasten to add, that the preparation of Latina/o/x/Hispanic teachers is a critical part of the solution to address the hurdles faced by Latina/o/x/Hispanic students across the country. As documented by the report quoted above, in the literature highlighted here, and through discussions amongst HSI educators, many hurdles must be overcome to increase Latina/o/x/Hispanic representation in the teaching profession. Furthermore, HSIs are well poised to play a significant role in providing leadership and remedies.
References


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Appendix

Partial Listing of HSI Best Practices in Building a More Diverse and Inclusive Teacher Pipeline
prepared by David McDonald, Western Oregon University

(Note: Based on power points presented at the Hispanic Serving Institution Teacher Diversity
Convening on September 22-23, 2016 at The White House Eisenhower Executive
Office Building, Washington, D.C.)

1. Academic Preparation and Alignment

Dual Credit to align high school and postsecondary curriculum. Dual credit programs between
high schools and colleges and universities accomplish two significant outcomes—
increased high school graduation rates and improved matriculation rates to college.

Examples:
  • Exitos Cooperative and Title V Puentes Grant—San Antonio College, Patricia Medina
  • Willamette Promise—Western Oregon University, David McDonald
  • University of the Incarnate World, Arthur Hernandez

2. Grow your Own

Systemic programs designed to identify, nurture and graduate future teachers by creating
structured academic and professional pathways from K-12 through college.

Examples:
  • California State University, Dominguez Hills, John Kennedy Davis
  • Bilingual Teacher Scholars Program, Western Oregon University, David McDonald
  • California Mini-Corps Program, Butte County Office of Education, Juana Zamora

3. Create a compelling, accurate and continuous conversation that increases student interest
   in teaching through demystifying the negative stereotypes connected to teaching careers.

Early outreach including teacher academies with local high schools that enroll significant
numbers of diverse students (Florida International); high school advisory courses, summer
camps, focused marketing (Eastern New Mexico University); use culturally relevant
messaging in a marketing campaign that uses traditional and social media to reach potential
teachers, hold regional and statewide conferences for future teachers (Sacramento United
School District); align local efforts with national initiatives such as TRIO, GEAR UP, and Troops to Education (Lehman College, CUNY)

- Florida International University, Laura H. Dinehart
- Eastern New Mexico University, Bianca Belmonte-Sapien
- Sacramento Unified School District, Martin M. Ramirez
- Lehman College, City University of New York, Deborah Shanley
- California Mini-Corps Program, Butte County Office of Education, Juana Zamora
- Sacramento State, Caroline Turner, Stephanie Biagetti, and Karina Figueroa-Ramirez

4. Expose college students in non-teaching majors to a K-12 classroom experience to expand the pool of potential teachers.
   - Florida International University, Laura H. Dinehart

5. Teacher Preparation Programs

Offer multiple pathways to a teacher certification with a focus on taking the student from where they are and adding the necessary skills needed to be an effective classroom teacher. These alternative certification programs should be flexible enough to build on the strengths of candidates, typically content knowledge, while addressing weaker areas of preparation such as pedagogy (University of Texas, Rio Grande Valley). For states with fifth-year teacher preparation requirements, create blended (4+1) pathways that add teacher preparation content into the content specific curriculum (Sacramento State); Night and weekend certification only program offer residency programs to increase the depth of preparation of new teachers (Heritage University); create career pathways that support the movement of individuals from STEM professions into teaching (Florida International University);

- University of Texas, Rio Grande Valley, Patricia McHatton
- Sacramento State, Caroline Turner, Stephanie Biagetti, and Karina Figueroa-Ramirez
- Heritage University, Kari Terjeson
- Florida International University, Laura H. Dinehart

6. Reduce the Affordability Barrier

Reduce the affordability barrier through service grants, forgivable loans and scholarships (UT Rio Grande Valley); create a scholarship bank for students starting in middle school based
upon high performance in academic and non-cognitive behaviors linked with success in school (University of Incarnate World)

- University of Texas, Rio Grande Valley, Patricia McHatton
- University of The Incarnate World, Arthur Hernandez

7. Provide new teachers with training focused on the administrative aspects of their positions especially lesson plan development.
   - Eastern New Mexico University, Bianca Belmonte-Sapien

8. Predictive Analytics and Assessment

Develop predictive analytical tools that allow high schools and colleges to identify potential quality teachers through performance characteristics exhibited by the students. Based upon the assessment data, create an effective proactive response system that enhances student success.

- Texas A&M International University, Selina V. Mireles

9. Increase K-12 student retention and success

Develop culturally-relevant curriculum for middle and high school students, provision of summer camps, creation of professional networks for Latino K-12 administrators and teachers, and create partnerships with higher education.

- Sacramento Unified School District, Martin M. Ramirez
- California Mini-Corps, Juana Zamora

10. Enhanced preparation programs

Increase the depth of training by imbedding high need endorsements like ESOL and SPED produce teachers that are better trained to meet the educational needs of more students.

- Heritage University, Kari Terjeson
Flipping the HSI Narrative: An HSI positionality

Anne-Marie Núñez
The Ohio State University

In the landscape of higher education research and in media discourse around higher education, the study of less selective, broad access institutions too often gets lost, dominated instead by discussions of selective admissions to and affirmative action in what are thought to be the nation’s most “elite” institutions (Deil-Amen, 2015). This historical tendency obscures the contributions of less selective, broad access institutions to the country’s workforce, civic development, and knowledge production, leading Deil-Amen (2015) to characterize these institutions as the “marginalized majority,” because they in fact serve the majority of students in U.S. postsecondary education. Likewise, it might be said that HSIs play a key role among the “marginalized majority” of institutions (Núñez, 2017), because they enroll 62% of the fastest growing racial/ethnic demographic in the nation, the Latinx population (Excelencia in Education, 2016).

Historically, the predominant narrative framing HSIs is that they are monolithic and underperforming, inscribed in a false dichotomy as “Hispanic-Serving” or merely “Hispanic-Enrolling” (Núñez, Hurtado, & Calderón Galdeano, 2015). Together, these narrative threads weave a deficit perspective on HSIs that manifests itself too often, either implicitly or explicitly, when HSIs are addressed in research, policy, and practice. Unfortunately, such tendencies can result in unintended negative consequences for HSIs, including reduced institutional resources if inappropriate evaluations of institutional performance are conducted for performance funding purposes (Núñez, 2014; Núñez & Rodríguez, in press; Webber & Ehrenberg, 2009).

To authentically support HSIs and their students, researchers, policymakers, and practitioners need to flip the traditional narrative around HSIs. This does not mean superficially celebrating the accomplishments of HSIs without being critical of their limitations in serving Latinx students; it does mean conducting the most rigorous research to reveal the complex realities in which faculty, staff, and students at HSIs operate. It also means being self-reflexive about how one conducts the research and how one frames their relationship with the researched. Exercising this self-reflexivity is particularly critical for researchers at more
selective and well-resourced institutions who have had less exposure to the inner workings of HSIs.

Serving as a researcher of HSIs, as a past faculty member at an HSI, and as a public scholar engaged in policy work to support HSIs has shaped my conviction that although knowledge about HSIs is increasing, future research about HSIs needs to be more rigorous to achieve an “intimate knowledge” (Rose, 2012) of these institutions. Specifically, I argue to advance an “HSI positionality” that centers HSIs’ realities, rather than externally imposed frames, as a central departure point to infuse future research, policy, and practice concerning HSIs. This move can mitigate the epistemic injustice (Frank, 2013) that traditionally has characterized the description and recognition of HSIs through deficit perspectives that do not fully recognize the contexts and contributions of HSIs.

As research on HSIs grows, I take time here to suggest how to build dispositions to conduct equity-oriented research on HSIs. First, I outline the importance of mitigating epistemic injustice, by advancing a more socially just, holistic, and informed way of understanding HSIs. Second, I discuss the importance of distinguishing between methodology and methods in higher education research, calling on researchers to employ a transformative paradigm (Hurtado, 2015; Mertens, 2009) in studying HSIs (Núñez, Hurtado, & Calderón Galdeano, 2015). Third, I delineate how three components of a transformative paradigm—epistemology, ontology, and axiology—can constitute an HSI positionality that can shape the last component of a transformative paradigm—methodology—to be more inclusive of the perspectives of HSIs and the personnel in them. Finally, to empower HSIs from the HSI positionality and the transformative paradigm, I address how researchers can partner with faculty and staff at HSIs to flip the narrative around HSIs.

Mitigate Epistemic Injustice

When I arrived in 2007 to take my first faculty position at the second largest HSI on the U.S. mainland, the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), I had the unique opportunity to work with and serve Latinx students and faculty on issues related to equity in higher education. Upon arrival, I quickly set out to find the research on HSIs, so I could learn more about how to enhance my own research, pedagogy, and practice to promote Latinx success in HSIs. Soon it became clear that, at that time, just a handful of peer-reviewed articles, and no books, existed
on HSIs. Many of the existing pieces were by Berta Vigil Laden (e.g., Laden, 1999, 2001), who passed away in an untimely manner as she was launching this important line of scholarship, and to whom scholars of HSIs owe an enormous debt. This was before the first edited volume on MSIs, which included a subset of chapters on HSIs (Gasman, Baez, & Turner, 2008). Looking back on my own experiences, I now realize that was searching for the epistemic resources (Frank, 2013), or knowledge grounded directly in the environmental contexts of HSIs, to navigate my role as a faculty member at an HSI. Subsequently, I have spent nearly a decade aiming to contribute to the epistemic resources to understand HSIs not only from my perspective as a scholar, but as a participant-observer faculty member in an HSI.

The concept of epistemic justice (Frank, 2013) provides a useful guiding principle for researchers seeking to conduct rigorous research on HSIs. The concept of epistemic justice is based on Frank’s call to mitigate epistemic injustice, the exclusion of marginalized groups (and in this case, personnel at HSIs) from knowledge creation that has resulted in a lack of understanding of their lived realities and consequently, a lack of available knowledge resources (epistemic resources) for them to make sense of their everyday experiences. The study of HSIs has been conducted within the context of the broader landscape of higher education research that has emphasized the study of the most selective and elite institutions, rather than the “marginalized majority” (Deil-Amen, 2015) of less selective four-year or two-year institutions that enroll the most students (Núñez, 2017). In fact, only six percent of students in U.S. postsecondary education enroll in the 172 institutions considered to be the most highly selective in the country (a group that comprises just 2.5% of all postsecondary institutions) (Rodríguez 2015). Thus, the historical research trend of both explicitly and implicitly focusing on topics like selective institutions, affirmative action, and selective admissions has perpetuated epistemic injustice about institutional diversity and the experiences of diverse students in higher education. With respect to HSIs, this trend has limited the epistemic resources available to make sense of HSIs and their organizational cultures and identities.

Promoting epistemic justice means expanding the traditional concept of “diversity” in higher education to include the role of all institutions in fostering postsecondary opportunity (Deil-Amen, 2015). To reach and reflect more students from historically underserved backgrounds, the traditional notion of diversity in higher education, which tends to focus on selective admissions, ought to include institutional diversity as well as individual student diversity.
in a small subset of highly selective institutions. When considering how to broaden diversity in higher education and in the workforce, the focus on selective institutions obscures possibilities to reach the greatest number of low-income students and students of color. As Deil-Amen (2015) suggests, “…the diversity agenda [in higher education] needs to expand to recognize that privilege is structured, and equity needs shift as institutional contexts shift” (p. 145). She adds that “…there is almost no discussion of how nonselective nonprestigious four-year colleges and universities have increased their racial/ethnic minority enrollments drastically…” (p. 145). According to several annual indicators from Hispanic Outlook magazine, at least half of the top institutions that produce Latinx BAs in math and science are perenniially HSIs.

To mitigate epistemic injustice, it is important that scholars be current on scholarship on HSIs. Fortunately, epistemic resources have recently increased to understand the institutional contexts of many HSIs, as exemplified in this special issue of the Association of Mexican Educators Journal. In addition to the growth of peer-reviewed scholarship, within the past five years, the first books emerged about HSIs (e.g., Núñez, Hurtado, & Calderón Galdeano, 2015); broad access institutions (Kirst & Stevens, 2015), and comprehensive institutions (Schneider & Dean, 2015). Notably, most four-year HSIs can be characterized as broad access institutions. Such institutions can overlap, for example, in the case of non-flagship public schools in state systems that offer significant postsecondary regional access for Hispanics. Notably, the research of Vega and Martinez (2012) indicates how the non-flagship public institutions that are HSIs in Texas generally do a much better job of enrolling and graduating Hispanic students in Texas than do flagship institutions (see also Perna, Li, Walsh, & Raible, 2010). This illustrates the importance of considering access as a dimension of institutional performance in broadening demographic diversity in higher education (Deil Amen, 2015) and for more fully recognizing HSIs’ contributions.

With respect to epistemic resources on HSIs, it is critical to have a grounding in the history of HSIs. Between the years that HSIs were initially designated to receive federal funding as part of the Strengthening Institutions Act, 1994, and 2016, the number of HSIs has more than doubled, from 189 to 472 (Excelencia in Education, 2017). Moreover, HSIs have grown not only in numbers, but also in institutional diversity. While HSIs have historically been highly constituted by community colleges and less selective four-year institutions, in 2015, the University of California Santa Barbara became the first American Association of Universities
(AAU) school to become an HSI. In 2017, the University of California Irvine became the second AAU to become an HSI.

Despite this development, HSIs on the whole remain woefully under-resourced (Ortega, Frye, Nellum, Kamimura, & Vidal-Rodríguez, 2015). The entrance of such highly active research universities into the pool of HSIs poses a watershed moment for HSIs. It also poses a watershed moment for higher education, demonstrating how the provision of access to demographically diverse groups does not have to preclude high research activity, or high student retention in institutions, which are measures often associated with high institutional performance.

Notably, the two AAU institutions that have become HSIs as of 2015 and 2017, UCSB and UCI respectively, now stand in second and first place, respectively, in a 2017 national New York Times ranking of institutions that provide college access in terms of economic diversity, entitled “The Top Colleges doing the Most for the American Dream” (https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/05/25/sunday-review/opinion-pell-table.html). These HSIs are leading the way in combining excellence in and access to higher education, which too often are framed as mutually exclusive. Furthermore, this particular recognition reflects the fact that HSIs tend to provide significant access to postsecondary education not only for Latinx students, but for low-income students as well. Indeed, HSIs enroll student bodies among whom half, on average, receive Pell grants (Núñez, Crisp, & Elizondo, 2016), and enroll more African American and Native American students than Historically Black Colleges and Universities or Tribal Colleges and Universities (Núñez et al., 2015).

With respect to epistemic justice, this recent development reinforces the importance for HSI researchers of recognizing HSIs’ institutional diversity when designing studies, or situating particular HSIs within a broader context. Too often, I have heard scholars, practitioners and policymakers erroneously express the view HSIs are mostly composed of community colleges. In fact, the reality is that about half of HSIs are four-year institutions and half are community colleges (Núñez et al., 2016). While the entrance of two research universities (out of 472 HSIs) might not significantly alter the composition of a recent typology of HSIs, this development does pose questions for the organizational identities of HSIs, which have diverse missions; span the 2- and 4-year, and public and private, sectors; and are located in Puerto Rico as well as the U.S. (García, 2017, in press; Núñez, 2017; Núñez et al., 2016). For
example, administrators in less selective and less well-resourced HSIs have expressed concerns that such newly minted and relatively well-resourced HSIs may draw away funds from the institutions that serve the largest shares and numbers of Latinx students (Cortez, 2015).

In addition to recognizing HSIs’ institutional diversity, researchers seeking to promote epistemic justice on HSIs should be cognizant of how they as scholars both implicitly or explicitly compare the institutional performance of HSIs to that of other institutions, and consider the extent to which other institutions constitute an appropriate comparison group for HSIs. These researchers should be cognizant of research indicating that HSIs have lower retention rates than other institutions largely because, in comparison to other institutions, these particular institutions often enroll students who have fewer financial resources and are less well academically prepared, and because HSIs are institutionally under-resourced. That is, when student and institutional resource characteristics are statistically adjusted for, students at HSIs, compared with their counterparts at non-HSIs, have equivalent graduation rates (Rodríguez & Calderón Galdeano, 2015) and equivalent post-graduate earnings (Park, Flores, & Ryan, 2017). Furthermore, researchers who wish to advance epistemic justice on HSIs must recognize that research indicates that Latinx students at HSIs must experience multiple benefits beyond the common metric of graduation rates, including increased academic self-concept and community involvement (e.g., Cuellar, 2014). This may be related to the distinctive organizational cultures in some HSIs in which faculty and staff orient their teaching and practice toward supporting the well-being of Latinx students (e.g., García, 2017) and toward creating knowledge and fostering epistemic justice that enhances an understanding of Latinx communities (e.g., Gonzales, 2015, 2016).

Although HSIs’ numbers, institutional types, and organizational identities may be in flux, the following trends look to have future momentum. First, HSIs will continue to grow in numbers, as the Latinx population grows. Second, HSIs will continue to diversify institutionally – by sector, mission, location, or control. Third, more HSIs will be competing for less funding. Fourth, as trends in performance-based funding increase (Dougherty & Reddy, 2013), HSIs will increasingly be called on to demonstrate the adequacy of their institutional performance, both generally and specifically with respect to Latinx students (García, 2017, in press; Núñez, 2014; Núñez & Rodríguez, in press).
In the current economic, political, and social climate, and postsecondary landscape in which over 6 in 10 of Latinx students are enrolled in HSIs, rigorous and thoughtful research on HSIs has never been more critical. How can scholars advance epistemic justice and flip predominant deficit-oriented narratives about HSIs to provide more authentic portraits of these institutions? Similar to what Rose (2012) says about community colleges and broad access institutions, it can be said of HSIs that there is a “need for intimate knowledge of [such] institutions” (p. 15) and an imperative “to use methods of investigation that capture a fuller story of the institutions and the people in them” (p. 16). In the next section, I suggest how to expand research approaches to be less more institutionally inclusive and cognizant of HSIs’ complex realities.

**Employ the Transformative Paradigm**

Many researchers do not explicitly write about the distinction between methods and methodology in their work, or they may use the term interchangeably, to denote the “means by which data are collected” (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014, p. 9). Researchers may not delineate between methodology and methods because it is not the normative practice in educational research articles, possibly because of limited journal space (Jones et al., 2014). When examining historically marginalized institutional types or demographic groups, however, it is important to specify components of methodology including epistemology (assumptions about how knowledge is accessed) and ontology (assumptions about the nature of reality/what we see), because hidden assumptions can obscure oppressive power relations (Hurtado, 2015). According to Jones and colleagues (2014), methodology may be characterized as “that which guides research design” (p. 9).

In this section, I follow arguments my colleagues and I have made elsewhere (Núñez, Hurtado, & Calderón Galdeano, 2015), and argue that researchers must employ a transformative paradigm (Hurtado, 2015) in designing research on HSIs. This means scholars on HSIs must go beyond “identifying a method and its appropriateness for a question” to “clarifying their own worldview[s] and [their] implications for research and practice” (Hurtado, 2015, p. 286). Put differently, I encourage researchers to focus on methodology as well as methods. There are four components of a transformative paradigm: methodology, ontology, epistemology, and axiology (Hurtado, 2015; Mertens, 2009). In this piece, I focus on the latter three, because they
tend to receive less attention than methodology. However, together ontology, epistemology, and axiology influence the “worldview” that shapes a researcher’s methodology (Hurtado, 2015, p. 286). Thus, in this piece, I sketch a methodology that can promote epistemic injustice for HSIs, highlighting assumptions in traditional higher education research that need to be challenged. As such, I encourage higher education researchers, to challenge their existing mental models (Argyris & Schön, 1996), to lay bare the assumptions they may be making that limit research that authentically portrays the realities and contributions of HSIs.

Before exploring ontology, epistemology, and axiology, it is important to begin by noting that a historical emphasis on selective institutions has perpetuated what could be called “methodological elitism,” as adapted from Shahnajjan and Kezar’s (2013) notion of methodological nationalism, which reveals predominant, yet limited, assumptions about educational research as a domestic, rather than global, phenomenon. In response to the tendencies of methodological elitism, Deil Amen (2015) promotes a broadening of lenses for higher education researchers—moving beyond a narrow vertical, hierarchical, and elite conception of U.S. institutions to incorporate a horizontal dimension that includes the full range of institutions that provide access. For Latinx, low-income students, and other historically underrepresented groups, HSIs are critical institutions constituting that horizontal dimension that provides significant access.

A transformative paradigm as applied to the study of HSIs encourages researchers to step back, clarify, and apply a mindset, or mental model (Argyris & Schön, 1996), to enact methodological choices that seek to challenge epistemic injustice perpetuated by methodological elitism and move toward recognizing the experiences of historically marginalized institutions. This process involves attending to the following guidelines:

…an awareness of contextual and historical actors, considering forms of oppression. Multiple methods, techniques, and theories may be necessary. Relies on crystallization (multifaceted perspectives and data sources) rather than triangulation, assumptions of heterogeneity rather than homogeneity, and attention to structures of opportunity and inequality, conditional effects (specific groups are affected differently by the same practices), and cultural norms in their influence on individuals and groups. Avoids an acontextual focus on individuals [and by extension, institutions]. (Hurtado, 2015, p. 291; also see Mertens, 2009)
What does applying the transformative paradigm to the study of HSIs look like, then? Any research on HSIs must be grounded comprehensively in the growing body of peer-reviewed research that provides increasing epistemic resources to make sense of HSIs and their organizational dynamics.

This brings us to ontology as a critical dimension of the transformative paradigm. In this case, ontology might be thought of as assumptions about the working reality of HSIs, recognizing that “privilege influences what is accepted as real” (Hurtado, 2015, p. 291). Understanding the reality of HSIs includes examining the history of HSIs and how they have changed over time. In terms of considering oppression and power dynamics, it means taking into account the differential access to institutional resources that HSIs have, compared with other institutions, and, even compared with one another, as signaled by the entrance of AAU institutions into the HSI pool. In tandem, research seeking to actualize epistemic justice on HSIs should recognize the institutional diversity of HSIs. Aiming to accurately depict the reality of HSIs entails being transparent about sample selection, the characteristics of the subset of institutions one is studying, and the extent to which these institutions are representative of all HSIs. Recent typologies of HSIs based on structural and demographic characteristics (Núñez et al., 2016) and on organizational culture and identity (García, 2017) can inform dimensions of research design such as site selection and representativeness.

Another dimension of ontology with respect to HSIs is employing asset-based theoretical perspectives in understanding the contributions and organizational behavior of HSIs. For example, employing a funds of knowledge perspective (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) highlights how and faculty and students in HSIs can be positioned as knowers and thinkers who contribute to new kinds of knowledge, particularly about Latinx communities and histories (e.g., Gonzales, 2015, 2016). Employing asset-based theoretical perspectives is especially crucial, when we consider that in research and teaching grant applications, Minority-Serving Institutions and HSIs are often treated as inferior to other institutions. Specifically, they are too often positioned merely as suppliers of students to selective institutions in the educational pipeline, or required to partner with selective institutions to conduct research, as if HSIs themselves cannot foster environments in which students and faculty independently conduct innovative research.
Applying the transformative paradigm to inquiry on HSIs with respect to the dimension of epistemology, or assumptions about how knowledge is accessed through research, arguably requires immersion and contextualization. Immersion entails spending extended time in HSIs, to gain a fuller understanding of the activities, norms and behaviors in these institutions. This approach contrasts with the approach of merely conducting “drive-by” research (Hurtado, 2015) in which a scholar visits HSI campuses only briefly. The guideline of immersion is particularly salient when a scholar has never had lived experience—that is, attended or worked—in an HSI. Scholars who have not had such immersion in HSIs should be particularly conscious and self-reflexive about their positionalities when examining HSIs. As part of epistemology, such scholars should especially attend to spending time to get to know and engage personnel at HSIs directly in shaping research, policy, and practice agendas. I will return to this particular point when I discuss axiology, another component of the transformative paradigm, in the next section.

Beyond immersion, contextualization involves the assumption that understanding the broader historical, economic, and institutional contexts within which HSIs operate as organizations is essential to capturing the fuller lived realities of HSIs. The implications of immersion and contextualization are that a scholar must draw on extensive and multiple data sources, and multiple ways of gathering data, to understand the dynamics of HSIs. For example, recent research on the organizational culture and identity of HSIs has drawn on extensive immersion in HSI campuses, involving data collection through document analysis, observations, and interviews with multiple stakeholders (e.g., faculty, students, staff), in multiple units (e.g., academic affairs, student affairs) to provide a multifaceted picture of organizational identity at HSIs (e.g., García, 2017, in press). An epistemology guiding research in HSIs is assumes that there are multiple ways of knowing and consequently, of gathering and/or analyzing, data that can work toward common goals.

Apply an HSI Positionality

In addition to epistemology and ontology, axiology, or the way a researcher positions herself in relation to the object of inquiry, poses an additional dimension of the transformative paradigm (Mertens, 2009). Accordingly, axiology entails how and the extent to which a researcher is conscious of her own views and is transparent with others about those views.
regarding her study (positionality), her relationships with the individuals or institutions she researches, how and the extent to which she accounts for ethics in her work (including reciprocity with the researched), and goals for the research itself, such as empowerment and advocacy for the marginalized communities of inquiry. In the transformative paradigm, ethics of “inclusion” are followed, and goals for the research are “empowerment” for the community (Hurtado, 2015). In the transformative paradigm; scholars work directly with communities they are studying to establish and reach common goals. Consequently, not just the researcher, but both the researcher and the researched, profit from the efforts. The resulting “…continuum of engagement and impact stands in contrast to ‘drive-by’ research which takes information from marginalized communities but rarely informs research participants about the findings and much less empowers communities to create change based on the research” (Hurtado, 2015, p. 288).

Although higher education researchers rarely discuss axiology, addressing one’s positionality in relation to the object of inquiry is standard and expected in qualitative research (Jones et al., 2014). An “HSI positionality” integrates the concept of axiology in the transformative paradigm with specific dispositions to advance epistemic justice on and empowerment of HSIs. One disposition is that scholars should be “self-conscious enough to understand how our own language and framing contribute to the marginalization and continued reification of the traditional college student and traditional college-going patterns” (Deil-Amen, 2015, p. 140), and then take steps to correct these tendencies.

One such tendency is the methodological elitism referred to earlier. If it is the case that higher education researchers have traditionally focused on “elite” and selective institutions, valued the behaviors in these institutions, and worked in these institutions, they may unconsciously be carrying mental models that are incongruent with the realities of the mental models of personnel who work in HSIs. For example, researchers may unconsciously impose assumptions that HSIs operate under the same institutional capacities as those of other institutions, when the research evidence clearly illustrates that HSIs have far fewer resources (e.g., Ortega, Frye, Nellum, Kamimura, & Vidal-Rodríguez, 2015). When researchers and policymakers judge HSIs under the standards of institutions that have more resources, they can perpetuate unwarranted deficit perspectives of HSIs that can have unintended negative consequences, including reducing the resources of HSIs even further, when HSIs are evaluated on an uneven playing field (Núñez, 2014; Núñez & Rodríguez, in press).
With respect to practice, recommendations about how to better serve Latinx students must be grounded in the realities of HSIs, including the limited resources that HSIs may have. Otherwise well-intentioned recommendations that are not made in the context of such resources can have the unintended negative consequence of creating unrealistic or blame-worthy expectations for HSIs. By contrast, working alongside HSI personnel by developing new and/or building on existing innovative strategies in HSIs (e.g., Gasman & Conrad, 2016) demonstrates more possibilities to recognize the potential of these institutions, because designs that evolve from such contexts are more responsive to HSIs’ institutional realities. Put differently, it is critical, when making recommendations to guide HSIs’ institutional practice to recognize, name, account for, and challenge “structures of opportunity and inequity” (Hurtado, 2015) that affect HSIs’ capacities to serve their students, particularly those from Latinx backgrounds.

To authentically advance the interests of HSIs and their students, it is important for higher education researchers to be reflexive about the institutions they have attended and taught in, and to be cognizant of the historical predominance of scholarship in higher education, other social science fields, and the media, on selective institutions. Because I myself had attended highly selective, well-resourced, predominantly White institutions with high levels of prestige or “symbolic capital” (Bourdieu, 1986) for my degrees, working in an HSI exposed me to nature of exclusion and invisibility that too often characterize HSIs. At the same time, this experience introduced me to the distinctive impact that I could make as an equity-minded researcher (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015) in conducting more informed scholarship on and training students to promote equity in higher education. As I have described elsewhere (Núñez, Murakami, & Cuero, 2010), my students at UTSA taught me about the Latinx communities I was researching, and helped me to crystallize my findings through sharing their perspectives.

While I was presenting policy briefs to federal audiences about how narrowly framed ratings systems might have adverse consequences for HSIs (Núñez, 2014; Núñez & Rodríguez, in press), one observer pointed out virtually all of President Obama’s cabinet members had only attended Ivy League schools. Thus, the responsibility of portraying HSIs to such individuals and staffers, whose mental models likely positioned HSIs as invisible or inferior, took on particular importance. Since my mental model around HSIs prior to working at UTSA was probably like theirs, I aimed to shift their mindsets, to portray a fuller picture of the realities of HSIs,
stressing the tremendous responsibility HSIs take on for educating large shares of demographic groups who otherwise might not attend college.

Serving at an HSI also raised my awareness of the multiple talents and distinctive knowledge students at these institutions bring to higher education, following a “funds of knowledge” (Moll et al., 1992) framework that highlights how students and faculty cultivate distinctive skills that build culturally relevant frameworks to guide research, policy, and practice (Gonzales, 2016). Many students who performed less well on traditional admissions metrics (e.g., GRE scores) and who might not have been accepted to pursue graduate study at more selective graduate institutions demonstrated their talent and thrived at UTSA. Recognizing that the symbolic capital of the institution might be limited in comparison to more selective institutions, I saw that faculty at UTSA connected many students with national opportunities, and several students demonstrated that they could make distinctive contributions to the field on a national scale. Working at an HSI taught me how far hard work and motivation (ganas, in Spanish) could take a student in their studies. Some students were extremely proactive at seeking out constructive feedback and opportunities. Others worked many hours to support themselves and their families, and demonstrated incredible capacities to balance many personal and professional responsibilities. My experiences with these students have taught me the most about strengths that diverse learners bring to the classroom (Núñez, Murakami, & Cuero, 2010).

In addition to reflecting on their own direct exposure to HSIs (or lack thereof), researchers who seek to advance epistemic justice on HSIs must consider how their research will serve the communities they are studying. This entails reflecting on and enacting ethics and values that center inclusion. It requires working directly with personnel at HSIs to decide on the goals of research, establish the research questions, collect data in non-exploitative ways, and develop the research products, whether that be new scholarship, policy briefings, and/or interventions. It is important that researchers interrogate how their own individual careers benefit from their own research on HSIs, and the extent to which their own research will actually improve conditions in HSIs. That is, scholars following a transformative paradigm must consider how they will give back to the HSIs they are researching, rather than merely “drive by” (Hurtado, 2015) and ride away with all of the profits from the research. Thus, reciprocity between the researcher and the researched is a fundamental principle of an HSI positionality.
How can such reciprocity be enacted? Scholars, especially those from more selective and well-resourced institutions, should engage personnel at HSIs in designing research that supports capacity building for HSIs. Those researchers conducting qualitative case studies, for example, might work directly with personnel at these institutions to address research questions that will generate effective organizational strategies to serve Latinx students, while those conducting larger scale quantitative analyses might work directly with associations of HSIs and advocacy organizations, to advance knowledge and policies that will benefit the functioning of these institutions. One guideline to follow is to engage HSI faculty and administrators as equal partners in grant applications, to develop capacity-building grants toward pure or applied research, or toward building academic support programs for students. Such an approach contrasts to several examples I have heard from personnel at Minority-Serving Institutions, in which these personnel only learned that their institutions had been included on grants with the more selective institutions, after the grant was submitted. That is, the Minority-Serving Institution was not aware they were a “partner” in the grant until after the grant had been submitted.

Recognizing faculty, administrators, and staff at HSIs as producers of knowledge in their own right (Gonzales, 2015, 2016) and jointly engaging in intellectual work with these personnel is another way to offer reciprocity. Such intellectual work can include authoring publications as well as research grants. Facilitating contact with academic networks that may typically be closed to personnel at HSIs, through mentoring, making introductions with individuals at foundations, or other types of connections, can also help personnel at HSIs access the academic, cultural, social, and economic capital from which these institutional personnel are too often excluded, because of their institution’s comparative lack of symbolic capital and perceived prestige.

In short, rather than imposing external frameworks that do not apply to their institutional contexts, or assuming what is right for HSIs, valuing and working directly with personnel at HSIs to build professional development opportunities can most effectively engage HSIs’ faculty and staff to support Latinx students. Researchers can learn more about the contexts within which specific HSIs operate, and work with personnel at those institutions to design professional development or interventions that are based on those contexts. They can also work with HSIs to challenge what are too often deficit narratives around these institutions.
Engage HSIs to Flip the Narrative

As the accountability in higher education movement grows, it is increasingly evident that if HSIs and other higher education institutions do not tell their stories, they will have their stories told for them. Accordingly, researchers can also enact reciprocity and authentic partnership with HSIs through working with HSIs to flip the narratives in which these institutions are too often represented. By flipping, I mean developing more well-rounded narratives that are grounded in the organizational complexities of diverse HSIs. Personnel at HSIs themselves must better engage in internal conversations to review the range of activities that are going on at these institutions in order to be able to tell their stories to external constituents, such as state and local policymakers. Such conversations are not a given; Excelencia in Education annually identifies exemplary programs at HSIs, and it is not rare for leaders at these HSIs to learn about these programs for the first time, when these initiatives are celebrated by a national, external audience.

Sharing findings and applying them toward empowerment is a key dimension of the transformative paradigm, and researchers could solicit what HSI personnel perceive as helpful in making sense of their organization’s behavior as HSIs. Once, I gave a talk to leaders at one HSI, in which I presented general research on HSIs’ organizational characteristics, while also addressing diverse indicators based on that institution’s various activities, to illustrate how that institution specifically served Latinx students. The talk evolved into a more interactive conversation that began with leaders asking me about the meaning of these indicators and proposing different interpretations. This conversation continued into a lively question and answer period; even after my talk, several leaders were waiting to speak to me, wanting to make sense of their own organizational experiences as part of an HSI. This experience shaped my view that, in responding to interests articulated by HSI personnel, researchers could facilitate conversations to educate personnel about the general research on HSIs. Then they could present specific data about the institution itself, engage leaders in conversation, and coordinate common themes that emerge from the conversation. In working directly with personnel to distill these themes, scholars could support HSIs in articulating their internal and external organizational identities, and in developing strategies to better serve Latinx students at their particular institutions.
Beyond supporting single HSIs, researchers could help groups of HSIs identify and represent the commonalities of their organizations to forge a collective HSI identity. Being able to present a multi-faceted collective HSI identity could help federal policymakers and other external constituents build mental models of HSIs as organizations that serve important and distinctive functions to serve Latinx students. Such collective sense making would benefit efforts to advocate for federal and other sources of funding based on the distinctive contributions of HSIs to the nation. HSI researchers seeking to advance epistemic justice can work as true partners with HSIs to: (1) sort through the nuances, complexities, and differences in organizational behavior across institutions, (2) distill common themes across institutions, and (3) to articulate and present a “collective HSI identity” to targeted external audiences.

In short, scholars can help HSIs tell their stories, both as individual institutions and as a collective group of institutions, that are at the vanguard of advancing the educational attainment of historically underserved groups in the U.S. Employing multiple methods and multiple metrics of success (e.g., retention, academic self-concept, community engagement, return on investment) can enrich these stories, creating new narratives that are more well-rounded, attuned and compelling to multiple audiences. (See García, 2017, and in press, in this special issue, for a range of ideas on how to identify meaningful indicators.) Skillful deployments of large scale statistics, case studies, and anecdotes, complemented by details grounded in the local realities of audiences (e.g., the economic and social dynamics in a congressperson’s district) can generate more realized portraits of HSIs and help external audiences build mental models to recognize HSIs as distinctive and critical institutions.

**Conclusion**

In this article, I have drawn on extant research, my experiences as an HSI faculty member, and my experiences working in the policy arena to sketch what an HSI positionality that advances epistemic justice (Frank, 2013) and employs the transformative paradigm (Hurtado, 2015) would look like. I encourage researchers on HSIs to reflect on, expand, and transform their own mental models (Argyris & Schön, 1996) to be more responsive to and reciprocal with personnel in the HSIs they work with. Researchers can take active roles to work with HSI personnel so that these personnel can clarify their own mental models about HSIs, and extend this work to engage other external audiences in expanding their own mental
models about HSIs. Scholars who want to conduct equity-minded research can not only employ an HSI positionality in their research framing and design, but also be transparent about it in their presentations and written work to: (1) illustrate the nature of their specific relationships with HSIs, including the extent of their respect for and reciprocity with these institutions, and (2) serve as models to future researchers about how to apply the dimensions of a transformative paradigm (Hurtado, 2015; Mertens, 2009) to working with HSIs.

In sum, I call on researchers who wish to advance epistemic justice on HSIs to fully engage the emergent body of research in this area, including the articles in this special issue that are expanding this field of inquiry. Similarly, scholars should reflect on their own particular individual and institutional positionalities, to become more cognizant of how they can be most attuned to learning about, representing, and supporting the realities of HSIs. To truly support HSIs, scholars must enact reciprocity and work with HSIs and their advocates as true partners. Only by engaging in a constant cycle of informed personal and professional reflection can research, policymakers, and practitioners best serve HSIs and the students enrolled in them.
References


AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Tracy Arámbula Ballysingh
Dr. Tracy Arámbula Ballysingh is an Assistant Professor of Higher Education and Student Affairs in the Department of Leadership and Developmental Sciences at the University of Vermont. Her scholarly research is focused on college access and completion with a P16 lens, Latinx student success, the educational outcomes for boys of color, restorative practices in schools, first-generation college students, the first-year experience, and the role of Hispanic-Serving Institutions in the higher education landscape. Dr. Ballysingh has taught at multiple levels of the education pipeline from pre-k through graduate school. She has also served as an academic advisor, mentor and instructor for first-year/first-generation college students, director of student success programs, and as a policy analyst for the Texas Senate’s Higher Education Committee Chair. Dr. Ballysingh served as lead editor on this special issue and also serves on the editorial board of the Journal of the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition.

Frances Contreras
Dr. Frances Contreras is an Associate Professor in the Department of Education Studies. She most recently served as co-director of the joint doctoral program in Education Leadership at UC San Diego. Her research focuses on issues of equity and access for underrepresented students in the education pipeline and the role of public policy in ensuring student equity across a P-20 continuum. Her work has been published in leading education journals and presses. Contreras’ most recent books include: Achieving Equity for Latino Students, Expanding the Pathway to Higher Education through Public Policy (Teachers College Press) and The Latino Education Crisis (Harvard University Press) with P. Gandara.

Pedro X. Cosmé
Pedro X. Cosmé, is a tenured Associate Professor of Psychology, where he also oversees the Social Services Program at Union County College, a Hispanic Service Institution; his office is located at the Elizabeth New Jersey campus. His father moved to the Bronx from Humáco, Puerto Rico. Professor Cosmé is the first member of his family to attend and complete college. Professor Cosmé has earned the following academic credentials: M.S., Specialization in Educational Psychology, Graduation with Distinction, GPA 3.933 from Capella University, an M.A., Specialization in Social and Organizational Psychology from Columbia University-Teachers College, a B.A., Psychology from Iona College, Concentration: Experimental Design, Quantitative Research Methods and A.A., Social Sciences Westchester Community College, Graduation with Distinction; Honors Student. Prof. Cosmé is a mentor who believes in the College’s mission to “Transform one student at a time” guiding them toward academic and professional success.

Marcela Cuellar
Marcela Cuellar is an assistant professor in the School of Education at the University of California, Davis. Her research focuses on access and equity in higher education, Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), Latinx student success and campus climate. More
specifically, her research explores students’ experiences and outcomes at HSIs and emerging HSIs. She received her PhD in Education, with a focus on Higher Education and Organizational Change, at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Maritza de La Trinidad
Maritza De La Trinidad is an Assistant Professor in the Department of History and affiliate faculty in Mexican American Studies at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. She received her Ph.D. in history from the University of Arizona and teaches undergraduate and graduate courses specializing in Mexican American, U.S., and U.S.-Mexican Borderlands history. Her area of expertise includes Mexican American education in the Southwest, including the impact of educational policies, practices and programs on educational equity, the history of bilingual education, desegregation cases, educational activism Mexican American civil rights and the Chicano Movement. Other research interests include Mexican American/Chicana leadership and educational, civil rights and labor activism, and U.S.-Mexico relations and border issues.

Laura Dinehart
Dr. Laura Dinehart is the Executive Director (ED) of the School of Education and Human Development and an associate professor of Early Childhood Education at Florida International University (FIU). FIU is the nation’s largest Hispanic-serving institution. As the Executive Director, Dr. Dinehart oversees multiple education-based initiatives across the College of Arts Sciences and Education. A significant portion of her work focuses on the development and support of teacher pipelines. Dr. Dinehart’s research on the developmental and early academic outcomes of young children within the context of the early care and education environment has been well published. Her work on handwriting and fine motor skills gained national media attention in 2012 when its effects on later academic achievement were discovered. As a result, more than 3.3 million TV viewers became familiar with her work at FIU.

Erin Doran
Erin Doran is currently an Assistant Professor of Higher Education at Iowa State University. A native of El Paso, Texas, she is the proud graduate of a Hispanic-Serving Institution, the University of Texas at San Antonio. Her research interests focus on Latinx students in community colleges, especially those who place into developmental education, and Hispanic-Serving and Hispanic-enrolling institutions. Erin has presented her research at various local, regional, and national conferences including the American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education (AAHHE) and the American Educational Research Association (AERA). In 2015, she was named a Graduate Student Fellow by both the Texas Association of Chicanos in Higher Education (TACHE) and AAHHE. Her doctoral dissertation was named the 2016 Dissertation of the Year by the Council for the Study of Community Colleges (CSCC).

Kenneth P. Gonzalez
Dr. Kenneth P. Gonzalez serves as the Director of the Joint Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership. He has been an advocate and leader of higher education reform
efforts to strengthen local and regional communities for more than two decades. Previously, he served as Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs at Our Lady of the Lake University. Dr. Gonzalez also served for 15 years as a full-time faculty member at the University of San Diego, San Jose State University, and California State University Fullerton, where he received multiple national and institutional awards, including the Outstanding Teaching Award in 1999, 2003, and 2010. His scholarly work appears in the Journal of College Student Development, Urban Education, the Journal of the First Year Experience, and the Journal of Hispanic Higher Education (JHHE). His article, “Understanding the Role of Social Capital in Access to College for Latinas” has been the number one cited article in JHHE for more than ten years. Dr. Gonzalez’ book (with R.V. Padilla), “Doing the Public Good: Latino Faculty and Civic Engagement,” examines the challenges and strategies of Latinos in aligning their faculty work with local social justice initiatives.

Gina Ann García
Gina Ann García is an assistant professor in the department of Administrative and Policy Studies at the University of Pittsburgh. Her research centers on issues of equity and diversity in higher education with an emphasis on understanding how Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) embrace and enact an organizational identity for serving minoritized populations. She also seeks to understand the experiences of administrators, faculty and staff within HSIs and the outcomes of Latinx college students attending these institutions. Finally, her research looks at the ways in which race and racism have shaped the experiences of minoritized groups in higher education.

Francisco Guajardo
Francisco Guajardo is founding Executive Director of the B3 and Professor of Organization and School Leadership at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV). The B3 Institute is a university-wide initiative that facilitates the transformation of UTRGV into a bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate institution. While teaching at Edcouch-Elsa High School, his alma mater, he co-founded the Llano Grande Center for Research and Development in the mid 1990s. At the University of Texas Pan American, UTRGV’s legacy institution, Guajardo co-founded the Center for Bilingual Studies. Nationally, he co-founded the Community Learning Exchange with school and community partners from across the country. Guajardo co-edited Ecologies of Engaged Scholarship (2017), is co-author of Reframing Community Partnerships in Education (2016) and Weaving Stronger Communities (2010), and publishes regularly on school and community leadership, Latino epistemologies, and bilingual education. Guajardo earned a Ph.D. in Educational Administration from the University of Texas at Austin.

Susana Hernández
Susana Hernández is a graduate research assistant (GRA) and Ph.D. student at Texas A&M University (TAMU) in the Department of Educational Administration and Human Resource Development with an emphasis in Higher Education Administration. As a GRA, she works on the external evaluation team for the Texas Education Consortium for Male Students of Color, a state-wide collaboration focused on improving Latino and African American male student success across Texas. Prior to TAMU, Susana worked
five years as the Assistant Director for Intercultural Student Services at the University of Houston-Clear Lake. Her research interests include the access and retention of underrepresented student populations (e.g. students of color, undocumented students), and the impact of higher education policies on students and faculty of color. Susana earned her B.A. in Criminal Justice with minors in Sociology and Chicana/o Studies from the University of Wyoming and M.Ed. in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies from Iowa State University.

**Peter Kranz**

Peter Kranz received his B.A degree in Psychology from Grinnell College and his M.S. and Ph.D. degree in Psychology from Utah State University. He has published over 85 articles in national/international refereed journals and given over 190 presentations. His teaching and publications in the area of Race Relations has received national media attention in such outlets as The Wall Street Journal, the Lehrer News Hour, National Public Radio, and as recently a number of South Texas newspapers, etc.

**Patricia Marin**

Dr. Patricia Marin is Assistant Professor in Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education (HALE) at Michigan State University. Her work bridges issues of access, equity, diversity, and policy in higher education. Her research foci include the changing nature of Hispanic Serving Institutions, admissions policies and affirmative action, Latino students in higher education, diversity in college classrooms, and the use of research. Dr. Marin's published work includes two co-edited books: Realizing Bakke’s Legacy: Affirmative Action, Equal Opportunity, and Access to Higher Education and Higher Education and the Color Line: College Access, Racial Equity, and Social Change. Before joining the MSU faculty she served as Associate Director of the University of California Educational Evaluation Center. She also worked for The Civil Rights Project (CRP) at Harvard University and the American Council on Education in Washington, DC.

**David McDonald**

David McDonald is the Associate Vice President for Public Affairs and Strategic Initiatives at Western Oregon University (WOU). He joined the university in 2004 and has led campus initiatives in diversity and student success. During his tenure at WOU the university has received national acclaim for its graduation rates for Latino and low-income students. Under his leadership, innovative student-focused programs such as the Willamette Promise, the Bilingual Teacher Scholars Program, and the Western Tuition Promise have been developed. Prior to joining WOU, McDonald was a senior administrator at the Oregon University System where he was responsible for enrollment and student success policies. McDonald also served as the Assistant Dean in the Office of Graduate Studies and Research at the University of California, San Diego. His research interests focus on effective policy and practice that support student access, success, and completion.
Øscar Medina
Øscar Medina, originally from Chicago, is currently a Gus T. Ridgel Fellow and doctoral student at the University of Missouri Columbia. His research examines the experiences of Latinx students in higher education using a special lens. Øscar’s current research project explores the experiences of four Latina graduate students at two predominately white institutions. In 2017, he was named a Graduate Fellow by the American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education (AAHHE). His work has also appeared in Social Education.

Yvonne Muñoz
Yvonne Muñoz is a California Assembly Fellow. She received her M.A. in the School of Education at the University of California, Davis. Her research interests are in examining issues and policies pertaining to Latinx student access, transfer and retention in public postsecondary institutions. As a former Ronald E. McNair Scholar, she aspires to continue her education and earn a doctorate degree in Higher Education.

Anne-Marie Nuñez
Anne-Marie Nuñez is an associate professor of Higher Education and Student Affairs Program in the Department of Educational Studies. Her research explores how to broaden participation for historically underrepresented groups, including students and faculty, in postsecondary education. One line of her scholarship has focused on the higher education experiences and trajectories of Latino, first-generation, and migrant students. Another has emphasized institutional diversity in the United States, including the role of Hispanic-Serving Institutions in promoting college access and success. Her research has been published in several journals, including Educational Researcher, Harvard Educational Review, and the American Educational Research Journal.

Leticia Palomín
Leticia Palomín is a doctoral student in the Educational Administration & Human Resource Development program with an emphasis in Higher Education Administration at Texas A&M University. She is currently a graduate research assistant for the Texas Education Consortium for Male Students of Color Consortium. This Consortium is a state-wide collaboration with Texas Independent School Districts, community colleges, and universities focused on improving educational outcomes for Hispanic and African American male students. Prior to being a graduate research assistant, she worked in the Office of Scholarships and Financial Aid at Texas A&M University. She was a financial aid advisor and assisted with student academic success programs focused on first-generation undergraduate students, specifically from the Rio Grande Valley. Leticia’s research interests include the educational experiences of first-generation undergraduate and graduate students of color at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs), financial aid literacy among low income students, and Latina/o familial involvement in higher education.
Prisicilla Pereschica
Prisicilla Pereschica is a doctoral candidate in the Gevirtz Graduate School of Education at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her academic interests focus on issues of access, equity, and persistence for underrepresented populations in higher education. Her research is on Latino/a students’ college experiences and outcomes and Hispanic-Serving Institutions.

Luis Ponjuán
Dr. Luis Ponjuán is an Associate Professor in Higher Education Administration in the Department of Educational Administration and Human Resource Development at Texas A&M University. He is a co-founder of Project MALES and the Texas Education Consortium for Male Students of Color. His research focuses on male students of color academic success and college degree completion, first-generation students’ access into higher education, and faculty members of color. He has received over $1.6 million in external and internal research funding from the TG Foundation, Greater Texas Foundation, the National Science Foundation and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. He has published peer-reviewed journal articles, an edited book, and national policy briefs. Dr. Ponjuán earned his Ph.D. in Higher Education from the University of Michigan, Master’s degree from the Florida State University, and Bachelor’s degree in Psychology from the University of New Orleans. He is a first-generation Cuban immigrant and college graduate.

Lester Sandres Rápalo
Lester Sandres Rápalo serves as Dean of Social Sciences, Business and History at Union County College. He co-authored a report on diversity in the workforce presented at the U.S. Department of Education’s “The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce” under the Obama Administration. He received his Ph.D. from Nova Southeastern University, Fort Lauderdale, Florida in Higher Education Leadership.

Victor B. Sáenz
Victor B. Sáenz, Ph.D. is Chair of the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Texas at Austin. He is also an Associate Professor in the Program in Higher Education Leadership and he holds courtesy appointments with the UT Center for Mexican American Studies and the Department of Mexican American and Latino Studies. Dr. Sáenz has published in numerous peer-reviewed journals and recently published two books, including one on Latino males in higher education (Stylus Publishing, 2016). In 2010 Dr. Sáenz founded an award-winning initiative called Project MALES (Mentoring to Achieve Latino Educational Success), a multi-pronged effort focused on Latino males along the education pipeline. Dr. Sáenz earned his Ph.D. in Higher Education and Organizational Change in 2005 from UCLA. He also earned a Master’s degree in Public Affairs (1999, LBJ School of Public Affairs) and a Bachelor’s degree in Mathematics (1996, College of Natural Sciences) from the University of Texas at Austin.
Vanessa Segundo
Vanessa is a fourth-year Ph.D. student in Education with a Language, Literacy, and Culture emphasis at the University of California, Davis. She is the principal investigator of the UC MEXSUS grant-funded research study, “Mission Graduation: Understanding how Latina/o Student Leverage Co-Curricular Involvement to Navigate the Educational Pipeline,” that examines Latinx student persistence through Chicana Feminist epistemologies. She presented her theory, “Chingona Mindset” at the ACPA, AAHHE, NASPA, and AERA 2016 national conferences. Vanessa’s eight years of professional experience in education spans high school, community college, and university levels. She has served in the capacity of advising, teaching, and administration all which informs her research and service. She holds a M.S.Ed. in Adult and Higher Education and B.A. in Political Science.

Emerald Templeton
Emerald is a doctoral candidate in the Organization and Leadership program at the University of San Francisco. Her research interests include race and equity in higher education, access and outcomes, and the institutional logics of diversity and inclusion.

Caroline S. V. Turner
Caroline Sotello Viernes Turner is Professor for the Doctorate in Educational Leadership Program and served as Interim Dean for the College of Education at California State University, Sacramento. She is Past President of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE). Previously, she served as Lincoln Professor of Higher Education and Ethics at Arizona State University (ASU) and as Professor of Educational Policy & Administration at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. Her numerous recognitions include the University of California, Davis School of Education Distinguished Alumna Award, the Yolo County Mexican American Concilio Pilar Andrade Award for community service, the ASU Chicano Latino Faculty Award for Research and Creative Activity, and the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Scholars of Color in Education Career Contribution Award. Turner received her undergraduate and master’s degrees from the University of California, Davis and her Ph.D. from Stanford University.

Juana Zamora
Juana Zamora has served as Assistant Superintendent of Butte County Office of Education and is the State Director of the California Mini-Corps Program under the auspices of Butte County Office of Education. Juana grew up as an interstate migrant student. The opportunity to work for California Mini-Corps (CMC) as an instructional tutor was her first job out of the fields and enabled her to be the first person in her family to obtain a university degree from Sonoma State University where she was able to study abroad in Madrid, Spain. Juana has a Master of Arts degree in Educational Leadership through CSU, Sacramento. Recently, the CMC Fresno program was recognized by the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics and Juana represented the CMC program in Washington D.C. as a successful bilingual
teacher pipeline model. Under her leadership, the CMC program was awarded the CABE (California Association of Bilingual Education) Board Award, 2017 and it was also recognized in The Majority Report by The Education Trust – West, as a promising practice in helping to attract a diverse teacher workforce.

**Desiree Zerquera**
Desiree Zerquera is an Assistant Professor for Higher Education and Student Affairs in the Department of Leadership Studies at the University of San Francisco. Her research focuses on how inequalities structure the experiences of underrepresented students in accessing and succeeding in higher education, with expertise in the areas of organizational theory, public policy, financial aid, research methodology, and Latinx student experiences. Current research projects examine ways urban-serving research universities navigate their positioning within higher education policies and contexts. She has worked as a researcher, student affairs practitioner, and higher education administrator. She holds a PhD in Higher Education and Student Affairs from Indiana University.