

**LATINOS AND HIGHER EDUCATION:
SNAPSHOTS FROM THE ACADEMIC LITERATURE**

The Educational Context of Latinos

Within the United States, Hispanic¹ students have fared poorly as compared to other racial and ethnic groups in terms of educational attainment. While the U.S. Hispanic population has more than doubled since 1980 (Hobbs and Stoops, 2002), the number of Hispanics participating in college has only grown by 5 percent during the same time period, far less than the participation growth experienced by whites (14%) and African Americans (11%) during the same time period (Harvey, 2003). According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Mexicans/Chicanos² comprise the largest subset of Hispanics in the United States at 58.5 percent of the U.S. Hispanic population and 7.3 percent of the total U.S. population (Guzmán, 2001). After Chicanos, Puerto Ricans are the second largest subset of the Hispanic population, representing 9.6 percent of U.S. Hispanics, followed by Central Americans (4.8%), South Americans (3.8%), Cubans (3.5%) and Dominicans (2.2%). The most recent U.S. Census figures place the total Hispanic population living in the U.S. at 42.7 million, representing 14.4 percent of the total U.S. population (U.S. Census, 2005).

¹ The term ‘Hispanic’ is used by the U.S. Census Bureau to categorize individuals who originate from Spanish-speaking countries. As the terms ‘Hispanic’ and ‘Latino’ are often used interchangeably to capture groups from many Spanish-speaking countries, I refer to the terms Hispanic, Latino and other sub-categories as they are referred to by their respective data sources.

² The terms ‘Mexican’ and ‘Chicano’ are used interchangeably in this report. For the purposes of this report, Chicano is defined as individuals of Mexican origin living in the U.S.

Research on Latinos in the aggregate as well as on the Chicano subpopulation reveals that their representation in post-secondary education has lagged behind that of other racial and ethnic populations in the United States. For many years, Chicanos have been considered to be the most unlikely racial/ethnic group to finish high school, to attend college, and to graduate (Delgado Bernal, 1999; Gándara, 1994; Chapa, 1991). More recent data, however, suggest that within the Latino population, Puerto Ricans are the least likely Latino group to enroll in college. Among 18-24 year old high school graduates, 30 percent of Puerto Ricans are enrolled in college, followed by Mexicans (33%) and Cubans, who are the most likely to enroll in college with nearly 45 percent of the population enrolled (Fry, 2002). There has been some progress with regard to college participation, though, as data spanning 1991-2001 illustrate that college enrollment among Hispanic students increased by 75 percent to more than 1.4 million students, with most of the growth reflected in increasing enrollments at 2-year institutions (Harvey and Anderson, 2005). However, while the college enrollment of Hispanic students is on the rise, a study of 1996-2001 undergraduate data shows that Hispanics are half as likely as their white peers to complete a bachelor's degree (Fry, 2005a).

Recent data also reveal that the 5-year college completion rate of Hispanic students declined slightly during the 1990s. Among degree-seeking Hispanic students who enrolled in college during the 1989-1990 academic year, 44 percent completed a bachelor's degree after five years; among the Hispanics who enrolled in college during the 1995-96 academic year, 42 percent completed a bachelor's degree after five years, a decline of two percentage points (Harvey and Anderson, 2005). When examining the

entire U.S. adult population, Hispanics continue to be the least likely of any ethnic group to have earned a bachelor's degree. The percentage of Hispanics in 2000 aged 25 or older with at least a bachelor's degree was 10.4 percent, slightly lower than American Indians (11.5%), lower than Blacks (14.3%) and considerably lower than whites (26.1%) and Asian/Pacific Islanders (44.1%) (NCES, 2003). By comparison, 24.4 percent of the total U.S. population in 2000 held at least a bachelor's degree (ibid).

High School Preparation

Overall Preparation and Coursework

By several measures, Latino high school students tend to be less well prepared academically than their counterparts of other racial and ethnic backgrounds. Utilizing National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) data coupled with a college qualification index developed by Berkner and Chavez (1997), a study by Swail and colleagues (2004) found that nearly 59 percent of Latino students were characterized as “not qualified” for postsecondary education, as compared to 41 percent of white students and 32 percent of Asian American students (Swail et al, 2004). Only African American students, at 63 percent, had a higher percentage of students that were characterized as “not qualified” for college.

The high school coursework completed by Latino students tends to be less rigorous than the coursework completed by their peers. Within the mathematics discipline, for example, over 58 percent of Latino students finished their math education with geometry, as compared to 41 percent of white students and 44 percent of all students (ibid). Studies

of academic tracking have found that Latinos are more likely to be placed into lower academic tracks throughout their secondary schooling, which in turn affects their level of achievement and preparation for college enrollment (Oakes, 2005; Aguirre and Martinez, 1993). In addition, Latinos are overrepresented in several academic risk areas, including having a GPA of C or lower, being held back in school, and changing schools, (Swail et al, 2004). Latinos' lower level of preparedness and overrepresentation in academic risk areas has negative consequences on both college enrollment and, for those who enroll in college, retention and degree completion.

Standardized Testing

On average, the standardized test scores of Latino students, along with those of African American students, are found to be consistently lower than the test scores of white and Asian students, and the reasons for this test score gap have been long debated by educational leaders and researchers (Schmidt and Camara, 2004; Jencks and Phillips, 1998). As standardized tests are used to a varying degree as one factor among several in selective college admissions, the ability of such test scores to predict academic success in college has been closely examined by researchers and practitioners alike. A review by Young (2004) examining 25 years of research on the predictive validity of the SAT by race and gender ultimately concludes that the predictive validity of the SAT coupled with high school GPA for Hispanics and African-American students is somewhat lower than it is for white and Asian American students. He also finds that the freshman grades of Hispanic and African American students are overpredicted by regression equations containing SAT scores and high school GPA; in other words, the predicted freshman

GPA's are higher than the actual freshman GPA's earned by Hispanic and African American students. As a result, Young suggests that these findings may be used as a reason to give less weight to the test scores of Hispanic and African American students in college admissions decisions. A comparison of the SAT Reasoning Test and the SAT Subject Tests (SAT I and SAT II) by Kobrin and colleagues (2004) found that Hispanics score higher on the SAT Subject Tests than on the SAT Reasoning Test, regardless of whether a language SAT Subject Test is taken. Furthermore, an SAT Subject Test – either by itself or in combination with high school GPA – has a marginally greater predictive validity than the SAT Reasoning Test for Hispanic students.

High Schools Attended

An examination of school level traits finds that Latinos are disproportionately enrolled at disadvantaged, low-achieving k-12 schools (Fry, 2005b; Aguirre and Martinez, 1993), and are more likely than Blacks and whites to attend the largest high schools in the country (Fry, 2005b). They are also more likely to attend high schools that have student-to-teacher ratios of 22 to 1, a category into which only 10 percent of our nation's public high schools fall. By comparison, the average student/teacher ratio in U.S. public high schools is 16 to 1 (ibid). On the whole, the high schools attended by Hispanic students possess fewer resources that promote college enrollment (Perna and Titus, 2005).

Pre-College Intervention Programs

Numerous intervention programs have been developed to address the particular needs of Latino high school students and increase their odds of post-secondary enrollment.

Several comprehensive reviews have been conducted on the effectiveness and replicability of various intervention programs to improve the educational outcomes for Latino and disadvantaged youth (Santiago and Brown, 2004; Wainer, 2004; Swail and Perna, 2002; Gándara and Bial, 2001; Swail, 2000; Fashola and Slavin, 1997; DeAcosta, 1996). The extent to which such intervention programs are successful is debated, but the common themes among the most effective intervention programs tend to include, but are not limited to, myriad forms of targeted academic enrichment, mentoring, student recognition, education on college opportunities, cultural sensitivity and parent involvement.

College Choice

While many factors influencing Latino students' college enrollment decisions mirror the factors considered important by students of other racial and ethnic groups, it is evident that the informational resources available to Latino students in their college choice process are often compromised and limited (Tornatzky et al 2002; Nevarez, 2001; Perna, 2000; Carnevale, 1999). The traits of the high schools attended by Latino students as well as the Latino family context each play a considerable role in the extent to which college information is available to Latinos and, ultimately, in the college choice decisions of Latino students.

The high schools at which Latino students are enrolled tend to possess different traits than the schools attended by students of other racial backgrounds, which in turn impacts college choice. 49 percent of Hispanics attend schools in the lowest quartile of parental

education as compared with 17 percent of Whites, 16 percent of Asians and 37 percent of Blacks (Perna and Titus, 2005). As discussed earlier, Hispanic students are also more likely to attend schools that are disadvantaged and possess fewer resources that promote college enrollment (Perna and Titus, 2005; Fry, 2005b). Furthermore, the likelihood of enrolling in a two-year college increases with the percentage of Hispanics in the high school's student body (Perna and Titus, 2005). Each of these school-related traits plays a role in not only the decision to attend college, but also in the choice of which college to attend.

Researchers have explored the role of parents and siblings as sources of college knowledge in the college choice process. It is known that the home, particularly for students whose parents attended college, is an important source of information for students who are in the midst of the college choice process (McDonough, 1997). For some Chicano and Latino students, however, the home plays a more limited role in providing college knowledge. While Chicano parents tend to be very supportive of their children's pursuit of higher education, these parents often have limited information to share with their children about college because many of them did not attend college (Ceja, 2004; González et al, 2003; Tornatzky et al 2002; Gándara, 1995). Among Latinos, immigrant parents who are unfamiliar with the U.S. educational system along with parents who are unable to speak English face additional challenges accessing college knowledge for their children (Tornatzky et al, 2002). When parents are unavailable to provide college knowledge, older siblings, particularly those that have enrolled in college, are shown to play an important role in the college choice process for many

Chicano students (Ceja 2006, 2004; González et al, 2003). Despite any gaps in college knowledge possessed by Latino parents, parental involvement in the college choice process plays an important role in promoting the college enrollment of Latino students (Perna and Titus, 2005).

College Costs and Financial Aid

The cost of college is shown to be among the greatest concerns for college-bound Latinos (e.g., The Sallie Mae Fund, 2005; Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation, 2004). Within the realm of college costs and financial aid, three key issues emerge in the academic literature as being especially pertinent to the Latino college-bound population. First, Latinos are extremely sensitive to tuition rates; rising tuition costs has a disproportionately detrimental effect on Latino students. Second, Latino students and their families lack knowledge of financial aid programs and availability, further placing them at a disadvantage in terms of accessing college. Third, Latino students often have greater responsibility than their white counterparts for financially contributing to their families. As Latino students are more likely than others to come from low-income families (Santiago and Cunningham, 2005; Swail, Cabrera and Lee, 2004; Gándara, 1995; Aguirre and Martinez, 1993), issues of price sensitivity, lack of financial aid information, and greater financial responsibilities at home each have tremendous consequences for Latino college access.

Studies indicate that Latinos are extremely price sensitive when it comes to college tuition. In one study of the effects of tuition and state financial aid on public college

enrollment, Hispanic students were found to be more sensitive to tuition increases than white and Black students (Heller, 1999). While some state higher education systems have turned to a “high tuition/high aid” model, this model appears to have a detrimental effect on minority students, particularly Hispanic students. Based on economic modeling of tuition and grant increases, the enrollment of Hispanic and Asian college students would decline more than other racial groups, both at 2-year and 4-year public colleges (ibid). As such, the provision of increased financial aid in the context of increasing tuition may not, on its own, be enough to maintain or positively impact Latino enrollments. This work supports prior research finding that the availability of grants is unrelated to the college enrollment rates of Hispanic, African American and White students (Perna, 2000) and that financial aid alone may not be sufficient to positively affect college enrollments (Mumper, 1998).

Additional research supports the finding that Latinos are particularly price sensitive when it comes to college tuition. First, Latinos are more likely than other students to attend colleges with lower average tuition charges (Santiago and Cunningham, 2005; Swail, Cabrera and Lee, 2004). One national study found that Latinos attend colleges costing an average of \$3,978, while the national sample of students attend colleges that cost \$5,646 on average (Swail et al, 2004). Furthermore, a substantial body of research suggests that low-income students across race are extremely sensitive to college tuition and financial aid levels (e.g. Heller, 1997; Hossler, Hu and Schmit, 1998), and that low-income and minority students are more likely to persist in college when they receive grant aid versus loans (Swail, Redd and Perna, 2003). Given the significant concentration of Latino

students who come from low-income backgrounds (Santiago and Cunningham, 2005; Gándara, 1995; Aguirre and Martinez, 1993), and the fact that 42 percent of Latino undergraduates (versus 30 percent of all undergraduates) have expected family contributions to their college tuition of \$1,000 or less (Santiago and Cunningham, 2005), such research on low-income students should be noted as bearing relevance to the Latino college-bound population.

Many Latino students also lack a great deal of information with regard to financial aid (Tornatzky et al 2002; Nevarez, 2001; Carnevale, 1999). Not only do students lack information, the limited information that they do possess is often inaccurate. One study of 400 18-24 year old Latinos in California – 79 percent of whom had completed high school – revealed that less than 20 percent of respondents have an accurate perception of attendance costs at the University of California or the California State University systems, with most of the respondents overestimating the attendance costs (The Sallie Mae Fund, 2005). Ultimately, as a result of misinformation or a lack of information, many Latino students make poorly informed decisions about where they can afford to attend college and do not maximize their potential (Fry, 2004). Several studies cite the importance of providing financial aid information to Chicano students and their families, given the higher likelihood of Chicano students to come from low-income backgrounds and have parents who did not attend college (Tornatzky et al, 2002; Nora, 1990).

Similar to the issues faced when accessing overall college knowledge, immigrant parents who are unfamiliar with the U.S. educational system as well as parents who are unable to

speaking English face greater challenges accessing information regarding financial aid (Tornatzky et al, 2002)

Family financial responsibility is another key issue that affects many Latino students in their college enrollment decisions. (Fry, 2004). In one nationwide study, over three-fourths of surveyed Latinos cited a need to work and earn money as one of the top reasons why they did not enroll in college or, for those who did enroll, why they did not complete college (Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation, 2004). Another study cites the need of Latino students to contribute financially to their families as one explanation for why relatively few Latinos enroll in college full-time (Fry, 2002).

The Role of Two-Year Colleges in the Education of Latinos

In terms of the distribution of enrollment across two- and four-year institutions, college-enrolled Hispanics are more likely to attend two-year colleges than any other ethnic group (Table 1). Among Hispanics enrolled in college in the year 2000, nearly 58 percent were enrolled at two-year institutions; by comparison, every other ethnic group had less than 50 percent of their college-enrolled population attending two-year colleges.

TABLE 1

Total U.S. fall enrollment in degree-granting institutions, by type of institution and race/ethnicity of student: 2000					
	Enrollment in thousands			% Distribution of Enrollment	
	Total	4-year	2-year	4-year	2-year
White	10,462.10	6,658.00	3,804.10	63.6	36.40
Black	1,730.30	995.4	734.9	57.5	42.5
Hispanic	1,461.80	617.9	843.9	42.3	57.7
Asian	978.20	576.3	401.9	58.9	41.1
Am.Indian	151.20	76.5	74.7	50.6	49.4
Nonresidents	528.70	439.7	89	83.2	16.8
Total	15,312.30	9,363.80	5,948.50	61.2	38.8

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics 2002

The high number of Hispanics at two-year institutions has been shown to have negative ramifications on degree completion, as several studies find a correlation between two-year college enrollment and lower bachelor's degree completion rates for Hispanics (Fry, 2002; Saenz, 2002; Rendón and Garza, 1996). When comparing Hispanic and white two-year college entrants that are "minimally qualified" for college, whites are far more likely than Hispanics to successfully complete a bachelor's degree, with 16 percent of whites completing versus only 7 percent of Hispanics (Fry, 2004). Looking within the Latino population, Mexicans are considerably more likely than Puerto Ricans and Cubans to enroll in two-year colleges; among 18-24 year olds, 48 percent of Mexican

undergraduates attend two year colleges as compared to approximately 32 percent of Puerto Ricans and 31 percent of Cubans (Fry, 2003, 2002). Not only are Mexicans more likely than other Latinos to enroll in two-year colleges, they are also more likely attend two-year colleges that have lower levels of completion and transfer rates to four-year colleges (Aguirre and Martinez, 1993). As national studies have found that students across racial groups who enroll in a 4-year college immediately after graduating from high school are significantly more likely than two-year college enrollees to earn a bachelor's degree (Fry, 2005a; Kane and Rouse, 1999), the fact that Hispanics are more likely to enroll at two-year colleges presents significant challenges to increasing bachelor's degree completion rates among Hispanics.

The Four-Year College Pathways of Latinos

Among the Latinos that enroll in four-year colleges, the college pathways that they pursue also diverge from other racial and ethnic groups within the four-year college enrollment cohort. A recent study of six states with large Hispanic populations found that Hispanic freshman at four-year colleges are far less likely to enroll at selective colleges³ than white freshmen (Fry, 2005a). The study found that despite enrollment increases in actual numbers among Hispanics and whites at selective colleges, the proportion of white freshmen at selective colleges in California, New York, New Jersey and Texas was nearly twice as high as the proportion of Latino freshmen at selective colleges. Only two of the examined states, Florida and Illinois, had a greater proportion

³ "Selective" four-year colleges and universities are defined by Fry (2005a) as the three most competitive categories as identified by *Barron's* ranking of four year colleges: most competitive, highly competitive and very competitive. The level of competition for admission defines the college's level of competitiveness.

of Hispanic freshman enrolling at selective colleges than white freshman. Although the very small, select number of Latinos who enroll at the most selective institutions enroll at a rate similar to their white peers (Fry, 2004), research on Latino college enrollment consistently points to an overall lesser likelihood of Latinos to enroll at selective institutions (Swail, Cabrera and Lee, 2004; Fry, 2004).

Consistent with the finding that Latinos are less likely than others to enroll at selective institutions, Latinos are more likely to enroll at non-selective or ‘open-door’ 4-year colleges than similarly prepared students of other racial and ethnic backgrounds (Fry, 2004). Among students in the top quintile of high school academic achievement, nearly 60 percent of Latinos attend non-selective colleges and universities as compared with 52 percent of top quintile white students; among those in the second, third and fourth quintile of high school academic achievement, nearly 66 percent of Latino students initially enroll at open-door institutions as compared to 45 percent of similarly prepared white students (ibid). As students across racial backgrounds that initially enroll at less selective institutions are less likely to complete a college degree (Kane, 1998), it is critical to note the tendency of Latinos to enroll at non-selective, open-door institutions as this impacts their college completion rates

College Enrollment Trends Across Institutional Type

Gender

Consistent with trends of the entire U.S. population, Hispanic females outpace Hispanic males in terms of college enrollment and degree conferral. In 2002, nearly 36 percent of

18-24 year old Hispanic females enrolled in college, as compared to 28 percent of Hispanic males (Harvey and Anderson, 2005). While both Hispanic females and males have experienced increases in the number of bachelor's degrees conferred, the number of Hispanic females conferring degrees has increased at a more rapid rate and represents a larger portion of Hispanic degree recipients. During the 2001-2002 academic year, females represented slightly above 60 percent of the bachelor's degree recipients among Hispanics (ibid). These national statistics illustrating the manner in which Latinas have outpaced Latinos in post-secondary enrollment and completion run counter to the idea that Latinas are more constrained by traditional gender-based roles that would lessen their likelihood of attending college. Among the relatively small percentage of Latinos that leave home to attend college, it is evident that the Latinas experience particular tensions in their decisions to leave home and in their parents' concerns over who would take care of them (Gonzalez et al, 2003).

Native-Born Latinos versus Latino Immigrants

Latino immigrants are less likely than their native-born counterparts to enroll in college. A study by Richard Fry (2002) utilizing Current Population Survey data from the U.S. Census Bureau found that among 18-24 year old high school graduates, approximately 42 percent of second generation Latinos (defined as the U.S. born children of Latino immigrants) are attending college, as compared to 26 percent of first generation Latinos (those born outside of the U.S.). While third generation Latinos (the U.S.-born children of U.S.-born Latino parents) fared better than Latino immigrants in terms of college

enrollment, they fared slightly worse than second generation Latinos, with an enrollment rate of nearly 36 percent.

Fry's study found that these figures differ considerably from those of 18-24 year old high school graduates of Asian origin, as 58 percent of both native-born Asians and Asian immigrants enroll in college. An examination of F-1 student visas suggests that foreign-born Latino youth may be more likely to come to the U.S. to pursue work opportunities rather than to pursue an undergraduate education. Among the F-1 student visas admitted during 1999, over half went to students from Asian countries, whereas students from Latin America represented just 15 percent of the F-1 visa recipients. Additional reasons cited in the study as contributing to the lower college enrollment rates of foreign-born Latinos includes a lesser likelihood of English proficiency and reduced exposure to U.S. schools and culture.

Household Income Levels

Latino students are more likely than other undergraduates to come from relatively low-income backgrounds (Santiago and Cunningham, 2005; Swail, Cabrera and Lee, 2004; Gándara, 1995; Aguirre and Martinez, 1993). A study of college enrolled students during the 2003-2004 academic year found that 25 percent of dependent Latinos – as compared to 16 percent of all undergraduates – come from households earning less than \$40,000 per year (Santiago and Cunningham, 2005). Another recent study utilizing data from the year 2000 follow up of the NELS 1988 8th grade cohort suggests the number of Latinos coming from lower income backgrounds to be significantly higher, citing that

over half of Latino students came from families with incomes less than \$25,000, as compared to 23 percent of white students who came from similar income backgrounds (Swail, Cabrera and Lee, 2004). Furthermore, Latinos are half as likely to come from higher income households as other students; 8 percent of Latino college students come from households with family incomes of \$80,000 or more, as compared to 16 percent of all undergraduates who come from such households (Santiago and Cunningham, 2005).

First Generation to Attend College

Latino students are more likely to be first generation college students (Santiago and Cunningham, 2005; Swail, Cabrera and Lee, 2004). Data drawn from NELS reveals that only half of Latino students had a parent who had attended college and that only 14.1 percent had a parent who had received a bachelor's degree or higher, half the rate of the national average (Swail, Cabrera and Lee, 2004). During the 2003-2004 academic year, nearly half of all Latino undergraduates were first generation college students as compared to approximately one-third of all undergraduates (Santiago and Cunningham, 2005).

Full-Time versus Part-Time Enrollment

Hispanic students are less likely than students of other racial backgrounds to be enrolled in college full-time. Among 18-24 year olds, 85 percent of white and African American students are enrolled full time, whereas 74 percent of Latino students are enrolled full-time (Fry, 2003). Within the Latino population, Cubans are a notable exception in that nearly 90 percent of Cubans are enrolled in college full-time, more than any other racial

or ethnic group (Fry, 2002). Results differ in another study utilizing NELS data, which found that nearly 52 percent of Latino students were enrolled part-time, as compared to almost 39 percent of the total college enrolled cohort (Swail, Cabrera and Lee, 2004), yet still point to the greater likelihood of Latinos to be enrolled part-time. As students enrolled full-time are more likely to complete a bachelor's degree (Fry, 2002), Hispanic students' lower likelihood of enrolling in college full-time is another factor related to lower rates of degree completion among the Hispanic population.

Distance from Home

Proximity to home and family is shown to be a greater factor in Latino students' college enrollment decision than for students of other backgrounds. One study found that number of Latino adults (33%) for whom proximity to home was a factor in their college enrollment decision is double the number of white adults for whom home proximity was a factor (Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation, 2004). It is not surprising, then, that Latino students are more likely than their peers to live at home while enrolled in college. According to recent data from the 2003-2004 academic year, one-third of Latino undergraduates live with their parents, as compared to less than a quarter of all undergraduates nationally (Santiago and Cunningham, 2005). Another study utilizing 1999-2000 academic year data from NELS places the number of Hispanics enrolled at four-year colleges living with their parents to be much higher at nearly 49 percent as compared to just 19 percent of white students (Fry, 2004). In addition, Latino students are half as likely to live on campus as their undergraduate counterparts; 7 percent of

Latinos live in on-campus housing as compared to 14 percent of all undergraduates (Santiago and Cunningham, 2005).

Delayed College Enrollment

Latino students are somewhat more likely than students of other backgrounds to delay their entry into college. Twenty three percent of Latinos delayed their entry into a post-secondary institution after high school, as compared to 19 percent of all undergraduates nationwide (Swail, Cabrera and Lee, 2004). Among four-year college entrants, 19 percent of Hispanics waited more than a year after high school graduation to begin college, as compared to 12 percent of white four-year undergraduates (Fry, 2004). As immediate entry into college is shown to have a positive effect on degree completion (Fry, 2004; 2003), Latino students' tendency to delay entry into college is likely to contribute to lower levels of college completion.

Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs)

Within the post-secondary institutional landscape are also colleges that have been identified as Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), public and private two-year and four-year colleges and universities with a Latino full-time student enrollment of at least 25 percent (Dayton et al, 2004, Laden, 2004). The number of HSIs identified in the continental U.S. and Puerto Rico has increased from 117 HSIs in 1992 to 231 HSIs in the year 2000, and while HSIs account for just 5 percent of all higher educational institutions in the U.S., 49 percent of college enrolled Hispanics attend them (HACU, 2000). Given the growing number of HSIs, the growth of the Latino college-bound population and the

attention and funding that HSIs devote to the Latino population, HSIs will continue to play an increasingly important role in the education of Latino students.

Post-Secondary Institutional Climate

The literature on postsecondary campus climate and its link to student retention suggests that students perceive campus climate differently by race, and that a negative climate can have detrimental consequences on student feelings of alienation, academic achievement and college completion. Research indicates that the academic achievement of college students of color can be negatively impacted on campuses characterized by a hostile racial climate (Hurtado et al, 1999; Allen and Solorzano 2001). Consequently, is it important to be aware of campus climate and its potential impact on the retention of Latinos and other students of color in higher education.

A study of minority freshman at predominately white institutions found that minority students experience unique stressors that affect their adjustment to college (Smedley et al, 1993). Among the issues identified by minority students as significantly contributing to their stress levels and adjustment include: the presence of few students and few professors of my race; the racist policies and practices of the university; difficulties with having white friends; being treated rudely or unfairly because of my race; people close to me think I'm acting "White;" doubts about my ability to succeed in college; and feeling less intelligent or less capable than others. Such stressors increase both the academic and psychological vulnerability of minority frosh as they adjust to college.

Additional studies inform the manner in which Latino students experience the college campus climate and its relationship to retention. First, Tinto's theory of institutional departure from higher education relies on the premise of social integration (1993). According to Tinto, the willingness of a student to remain enrolled in college is influenced by their level of social and intellectual integration in the college community. A related study differentiating students by race (Loo and Rolison, 1986) found that students of each race had different reasons for considering dropping out; for white students, it was based heavily on academic factors, while minority students were as influenced by sociocultural alienation as they were academic factors. Furthermore, each group perceived the university environment differently. The majority of white students considered the university to be supportive of minority students, but only 28% of blacks and Chicanos felt the same.

In a quantitative study of how high-achieving Latino students perceive the receptivity of their colleges to a Latino presence on campus, Hurtado (1994) yields several findings. Among Latinos, native-born first generation college students, students with lower academic self-ratings, and those who attend small-town colleges are more likely to perceive racial tension on campus. Also, Latinos are more likely to perceive campus administrators as open and responsive to student concerns when they perceive low campus racial tension and have fewer experiences of discrimination on campus. Another study by Hurtado (1992) found that Chicano and Black student perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity are associated with perceptions of relatively low racial tension, suggesting that institutions that increase their commitment to diversity may

significantly improve minority student perceptions of the campus racial climate.

Although the improvement of campus climate alone will not dissolve all of the stressors and challenges faced by Latinos and other students of color, a campus environment that is actively supportive and non-discriminatory does contribute to college adjustment, persistence and satisfaction (Swail et al, 2003).

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