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

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Access, Excellence, and Equity in American Higher Education**

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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

higher education.

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 Latinxs, 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 Almanac* 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 positioned 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 Øscar 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

courses.

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 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 RI, 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 HSRIs 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-optation 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 Latinxs 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.

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