

San Diego Chicano/Latino Concilio on Higher Education
Research & Policy Report #2, July 2022

THE STATUS OF SAN DIEGO CHICANOS/LATINOS IN PUBLIC
HIGHER EDUCATION: DECOLONIZING LOCAL COLLEGES AND
UNIVERSITIES

DIRECTIONS FROM SCHOLARLY LITERATURE

This second in a series of research and policy reports by the San Diego Chicano/Latino Concilio on Higher Education provides directions from scholarly research to contextualize data and information on the conditions for Chicano/Latino students found in our local colleges and universities. Additional research directions, particularly the work of Sylvia Hurtado, are found in the SD Concilio's "Brown Paper" published in 2022. We provide a prominent example of recent, national research by Gina Garcia that focuses on Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI's) and their urgent need to provide supportive conditions for Chicano/Latino students. In addition, we provide selected highlights from the 2021 report of the California Campaign for College Opportunity that analyzes the state's California Chicano/Latino experience in higher education, including policy recommendations.

Gina Garcia: Expanded Research and Theoretical Directions on HSI's

The Latina scholar Gina Garcia has built on the work of Hurtado and other scholars on Hispanic Serving Institutions. She emphasizes the considerable percentage of Chicano/Latino students that attend HSI's and the subsequent imperative for those colleges and universities to become truly "serving" institutions rather than merely enrolling a high percentage of our students. Indeed, Garcia states that both the twenty-five percent enrollment level and the federal designation for HSI's are arbitrary, much as categories such as "Hispanic" and "HSI" are subjective and socially constructed (2019). Garcia uses an explicit racial analysis, arguing that HSI's are generally undervalued because they are judged by "white normative standards for postsecondary institutions" (2019, p. 3). This dynamic contributes to the racialization of colleges and universities, a process in which they are assigned value based on the ethnicity of their student enrollment. According to Garcia, such a process ensures that higher education institutions help to perpetuate the racial and ethnic stratification of the U.S. society.

Garcia provides recommendations for higher education institutions that are authentic in their desire to provide supportive conditions for Chicano/Latino students:

- Provide curricula and programs that are grounded in justice and equity.
- Hire faculty, staff, and administrators committed to justice and liberation.
- Value and embrace non-dominant input, process, and outcome variables.
- Reinforce bilingualism and the preservation of the Spanish language.
- Provide high-touch practices for students, including advising and experiential learning.

- Provide students with a diverse financial aid package. (Garcia, 2019, p. 116-120).

The degree to which institutions provide such practices and enact such values largely determines the degree to which they are actually “Chicano/Latino serving” or “simply white institutions that enroll a large percentage of Latino students” (2019, p. 123). Thus, HSI’s are clearly called upon to do more than historically white institutions, as they must achieve a high level of “traditional” outcomes, e.g., retention and graduation, as well as ensure that Chicano/Latino students develop the type of “habits of mind” identified by Hurtado that equip them to become effective change agents for the collective Chicano/Latino community. As Garcia emphasizes, HSI’s cannot operate as “race-neutral” institutions: “HSI’s *must* work toward recognizing the racialized sociohistorical past of their organizational members and that they *must* work toward breaking down the structures that reinforce white supremacy and colonization” (Garcia, 2019, p. 129).

Garcia ends her 2019 text on a positive note:

While institutions of higher education were not designed for Latinx students (or any minoritized populations), I believe we have reached a moment in time when we can disrupt the historical legacy of exclusion and move toward a model of inclusion, or what I have otherwise called a **decolonized institution** . . . HSI’s may very well be the best-equipped institutions for providing a culturally engaging space for Latinx and other minoritized students, leading to a greater sense of belonging and ultimately a greater level of persistence, graduation, and postgraduation career outcomes (Garcia, 2019, p. 137, emphasis added).

Garcia’s most recent work expands on her analysis of HSI’s and their potential to contribute to Chicano/Latino achievement and collective empowerment. Garcia focuses on the degree to which HSI’s provide institutional conditions that constitute authentic “servingness:”

Servingness is conceptualized here as the ability of colleges and universities that meet the 25% Latinx and 50% low-income enrollment threshold to become HSI’s to enroll and educate Latinx students through a culturally enhancing approach that centers Latinx ways of knowing and being, with the goal of providing transformative experiences that lead to both academic (e.g., graduation, post-baccalaureate degree enrollment, job placement) and nonacademic (e.g., community engagement, critical consciousness, racial identity development) outcomes (Garcia, 2020, p. 1-2).

Garcia’s definition of servingness is very much aligned with the long-standing vision of our San Diego Chicano/Latino Concilio on Higher Education. We greatly value “traditional,” “academic” outcomes such as graduation and high grades. However, such outcomes mean little for the collective empowerment of our Chicano/Latino community unless those outcomes are accompanied by an educational process that produces critical thinkers committed to a role as change agents for social justice.

Garcia concludes that the responsibility of HSI’s to achieve servingness to their students should be measured by appropriate assessment. That is, their assessment should not be directed

by “white normative values” instead of more culturally relevant ideologies that reflect the culture and community needs of Chicano/Latino students. Garcia argues that white normative values have not led to effective solutions, i.e., equitable outcomes for Chicano/Latino students and instead simply reinforce the “dominant narrative elitism” (Garcia, 2020, p. 15). Thus, we should reject policy studies that ignore the historic and contemporary racism against the Chicano/Latino community and blame HSI’s for their “failure” to achieve equity.

The California Campaign for College Opportunity

The literature of Gina Garcia and other Chicano/Latino scholars provide an important profile of the issues faced by Chicanos/Latinos in higher education on a national level. Additional scholarly sources have analyzed the status of Chicanos/Latinos on a state level in California’s higher education institutions. One such source is the Campaign for College Opportunity. Their November 2021 report, “The State of Higher Education for Latinx Californians,” provides a valuable analysis of the Chicano/Latino experience in postsecondary institutions throughout the state.

The Campaign’s 2021 report notes that nearly forty percent of California’s population is Chicano/Latino and that by 2060, forty-five percent of California’s residents will be Chicano/Latino. The overwhelming portion of this Chicano/Latino community in California is of Mexican origin. The report concludes that there is both “good news” and “bad news” regarding the status of California’s Chicanos/Latinos in higher education. The good news includes:

- 87 percent of Latinx 19-year-olds in the state have a high school diploma or equivalent credential, compared to 73 percent 10 years ago.⁶
- 44 percent of Latinx high school graduates in 2019-2020 were prepared for college and eligible for university admission.
- Over 1.39 million Latinx were enrolled in college in California; 43 percent of California undergraduates are Latinx.
- More than half of Latinx associate degree-earners are earning Associate Degrees for Transfer – helping them save time and money, while guaranteeing them junior standing when they enroll in the CSU.
- For the first time in history, the CSU entering class of 2019-2020 reflects the diversity of the California high school graduating class.
- Over the past five years, four-year graduation rates for both Latinos and Latinas enrolling in the CSU as full-time freshmen have doubled from 9 percent to 18 percent for Latinos and from 15 percent to 29 percent for Latinas.
- Preliminary admissions data from the UC for fall 2021 shows an 8 percent increase in Latinx admissions from fall 2020 (p. 7).

The bad news is:

- More than half of California’s Latinx high school graduates are not eligible for admission to the state’s public four-year university systems because they were not offered or supported to complete the A-G courses required to apply for university admission to the UC and CSU.
- While 78 percent of Latinx students enroll in a community college seeking to earn a two-year degree and/or transfer to a four-year institution, after six years, fewer

than one-third (32 percent) have been supported to transfer to a four-year college or university.

- At the CSU, fewer than one in five Latino freshmen (18 percent) are supported to graduate in four years, and only 29 percent of Latinas enrolling as full-time freshmen are supported to graduate in four years. These rates are far lower than for white men (36 percent) and white women (52 percent).
- Only 36 percent of Latino transfer students enrolling in the CSU are supported to earn their bachelor's degrees in two years, compared to 41 percent of white men and 50 percent of Latinas.
- At 53 percent, the four-year graduation rate for Latino freshmen is 17 percentage points lower than the four-year graduation rate for white men who enroll in the UC as freshmen. The gap in four-year graduation rates between Latinas and white women enrolling in the UC as freshmen is 14 percentage points.
- Roughly the same percentage (51 percent) of Latino transfer students graduate in two years, compared to 58 percent of white men. A similar gap in two-year graduation rates (7 percentage points) exists between Latina transfer students to the UC and white women who transfer to the UC.
- **The UC student body still does not reflect the diversity of the state, with Latinx Californians woefully underrepresented at 25 percent** (p. 8, emphasis added).

The Campaign emphasizes that less than half of California's Chicano/Latino population has attended college, the lowest college attendance rate of any racial/ethnic group in the state. Thus, Chicanos/Latinos represent an "enormous reservoir of untapped talent" (p. 19). However, in addition to their low college attendance rate, Chicanos/Latinos have a high rate of leaving college without a degree. The Campaign's report also noted that the COVID-19 global pandemic had a large, disproportionate impact on Chicano/Latino student enrollment, including a 17 percent decrease in community college enrollment and a 4 percent decrease in public university enrollment between fall 2019 and fall 2020.

The Campaign's data show that there is a continuing trend in California in which the majority, 72 percent, of Chicano/Latino students in postsecondary institutions are attending a community college, and they make up 45 percent of the California Community College enrollment. Chicano/Latino students comprise 43 percent of all students in the California State University but only 25 percent of University of California students. None of the three "flagship" campuses of the UC, including UC San Diego, have achieved Hispanic Serving Institution status.

The Campaign also provided recommendations for California to better serve its Chicano/Latino students in higher education. Along with recommendations for California high schools, state government, and the federal government, respectively, the report includes specific recommendations for the three levels of public higher education institutions in our state:

- Ensure strong implementation of California Community Colleges and CSU reforms that focus on equitable placement of students into college-level English and math, and support Latinx students to succeed in these courses. Identify strategies for intentionally closing racial/ethnic and gender gaps in enrollment and completion to degree, certificate, and transfer.
- Continue support for strong implementation of the community college

Student-Centered Funding Formula, which provides additional resources to colleges based on enrollment, number of low-income students, number of first-generation students, and success of students who earn a degree, certificate, or complete the transfer requirements.

- Strengthen the CSU Graduation Initiative to improve graduation rates and close racial/ethnic and gender gaps for Latinx students who enroll as first-time freshmen and who transfer to the CSU.
- Strategically identify efforts to make sure the UC increases the number of Latinx students who enroll and successfully graduate, so that its student body and every campus is more reflective of the diversity of California’s high school population.
- College presidents, campus leaders, and governing bodies must commit to identifying, hiring, retaining, and promoting Latinx faculty at California’s public colleges and universities (p. 66-67).

California often sets the tone for U.S. policies and practices in fields such as higher education. California’s Master Plan for Higher Education was once touted as a national model of access for public higher education. California now occupies a position in which it can establish a positive example of ensuring equitable access and success for a large Chicano/Latino population that is increasingly found in other states as well. San Diego has the ability to be part of such a positive effort.

The literature reviewed in this section on both national and state levels provides an informed context through which our San Diego Concilio analyzes the institutional conditions and strategies of our local colleges and universities. As we so often emphasize, we clearly know the conditions and strategies that provide effective support for Chicano/Latino students, support that contributes to the collective empowerment of our community. We need the will of local institutions and elected officials to make it happen.

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