

Introduction: The concentration of Latinos'¹ enrollment was first recognized by educators and policymakers in the 1980s and contributed to the invention of a new construct of institutions known as Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs). These institutions were first recognized and defined in federal law in 1992 under the Higher Education Act (HEA) as follows: Hispanic-Serving Institutions are accredited and degree granting, public or private nonprofit institutions of higher education with 25 percent or more total undergraduate Hispanic full-time equivalent student enrollment.² At the time, the HEA included additional criteria for eligibility in a competitive institutional capacity-building grant program under Title III, Part A, section 316.

During the past 28 years, policymakers and institutional leaders have come to accept the HSI classification as socially and academically meaningful as well as a viable funding vehicle to improve the quality of education at institutions enrolling large concentrations of Latino students.

While federal law defines HSIs, the federal government does not designate institutions as HSIs; the U.S. Department of Education designates institutions eligible for the Developing HSIs grant program if they apply and meet the enrollment definition as well as two additional criteria: a high enrollment of needy students and low core expenses. Further, there is no government agency charged with certifying an official list of HSIs. As a result, the field has responded by creating multiple lists of HSIs developed for different purposes using definitions that vary from federal law. These multiple lists complicate efforts to establish a common understanding of HSIs, their strengths and needs, by researchers, policymakers, advocates and students.

This essay provides a common definition and methodology for identifying HSIs that results in more accurate analysis. This essay also promotes agreement between organizations to use a single, clear definition of HSIs. For example, *Excelencia* in Education (*Excelencia*), a not-for-profit organization has conducted research and worked with HSIs since we began and many researchers and others have used the same methodology for developing a list of HSIs to ensure accuracy and consistency in the community and for broader use by other federal agencies, researchers and funders.

Background: HSIs first received federal funding in 1995 through the U.S. Department of Education to support improved capacity and academic quality at the institutions. In 1995, there were 203 institutions that met the HSI definition. In *Excelencia's* most recent analysis, 571 institutions met the definition of HSIs—an increase of 181%. As the number and attention to these institutions continues to grow, it is important to understand how HSIs are identified.

Definition: The HSI list is created with *Excelencia's* analysis applying the criteria for HSIs identified in Title V of the Higher Education Opportunity Act, as amended in 2008. As presented earlier, HSIs are defined in federal law as accredited and degree-granting public or private nonprofit institutions of higher education with 25 percent or more total undergraduate Hispanic full-time equivalent student enrollment.

It is important to note there is additional eligibility to participate in the Title V Developing HSIs grant. An institution must meet the enrollment definition provided and must also have a high enrollment of needy students and low core expenses. Our list does not include this additional program criteria since our HSI list has use beyond the Title V grant.

¹ The terms "Latino" and "Hispanic" are used interchangeably.

² Summary of Title V of the Higher Education Act, as amended in 2008. To be eligible for the "Developing HSIs Program," the law further requires that an HSI have a high enrollment of needy students and low core expenditures.



Creating a List of Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs)

Data source: The data source *Excelencia* in Education uses to develop the annual list of HSIs is data from the National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) maintained by the U.S. Department of Education. These data are self-reported by every institution of higher education participating in Title IV (federal student financial aid programs) and are publicly released with a one-year lag required for data collection. Publicly released IPEDS data can be accessed at <https://nces.ed.gov/>.

Methodology: The process for calculating a list of HSIs using IPEDS requires creating a custom data file using the latest year of institutional characteristics, enrollment, and completions data publicly released for 2 and 4-year public and private, not-for-profit, degree-granting, Title IV participating institutions. Puerto Rico is included in this dataset since HSIs there are eligible to receive both Title IV and Title V funding. Undergraduate fall enrollment data includes both full-time students and part-time students by race/ethnicity.

Once a custom file with these data has been created, undergraduate full time equivalent (FTE) student enrollment is calculated for institutions meeting the above criteria by race/ethnicity. Based on IPEDS policy, the FTE of the institution's part-time enrollment is calculated and then added to the full-time enrollment of the institution to calculate the total FTE. The FTE of part-time enrollment is estimated by multiplying the part-time enrollment by factors that vary by type and control of institution. The following multipliers are used by the NCES to create FTEs from part-time undergraduate enrollment.

Sector	Multiplier
Public 4-year institutions	.403543
Not-for-profit, 4-year institutions	.392857
Public 2-year institutions	.335737
All other sectors	.397058

Once these FTEs are calculated, the total undergraduate Hispanic FTE is divided by the total undergraduate FTE to calculate the percentage undergraduate FTE that is Hispanic. To determine whether an institution meets the enrollment criteria of an HSI, data should then be further filtered on the percentage of undergraduate FTE Hispanic students. Institutions with a minimum 25.0 percent undergraduate FTE Hispanic are included in the HSI list. However, any institution whose program of study is entirely religious based (e.g., seminary/divinity schools) is excluded from the HSI list because institutions with a sole mission to prepare students for religious purpose (ordination to serve as clergy or in Christian ministry) are not deemed eligible institutions. Institutions that have since closed after reporting their data to IPEDS are also excluded from the list, as well as institutions who offer only certificates at the undergraduate level and not an associate's or bachelor's degree.³ Institutions that awarded no undergraduate degrees or only religious degrees are identified through IPEDS completions data.

Conclusion: *Excelencia* in Education has created lists of HSIs since 1994 and will continue to conduct analysis to better understand the strengths and needs of these institutions and their impact on college access, retention, and completion for Latino and other underserved students.

Visit <http://edexcelencia.org/research> for more information on HSIs or contact our staff at research@edexcelencia.org.

Updated: 03/29/23

³ For more information on criteria, please see [PL 110-315 - Higher Education Opportunity Act](#)