

Emerging Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs): Serving Latino Students

Executive Summary

The invention of Hispanic-serving Institutions (HSIs)¹ in the 1980s was grounded in the theory that institutions enrolling a large concentration of Latino students would adapt their institutional practices to serve these students better. Specifically, critical mass theory suggests once a definable group reaches a certain size within an organization, group interactions transform the organization's culture. While the size of the definable group required for organizational change varies, the enrollment size selected to define HSIs in federal legislation is at least 25 percent Hispanic undergraduate full-time equivalent enrollment.

This brief examines Emerging HSIs—institutions that do not yet meet the HSI enrollment threshold of 25 percent, but which are within the critical mass range of 15-24 percent and have the potential to become HSIs in the next few years. The brief integrates national data with data from a web-based survey and four case studies to examine Emerging HSIs' awareness of Latinos as a definable group on their campus, as well as changes in institutional practices to better serve their Latino students. The four Emerging HSIs studied in this brief include: Loyola Marymount University (CA), Palm Beach Community College-Lake Worth (FL), Texas State University-San Marcos (TX), and Metropolitan State College of Denver (CO).

Findings

- In 2006-07, there were 176 Emerging HSIs—institutions with Hispanic undergraduate full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment between 15 and 24 percent.
- Some Emerging HSIs had already adapted their educational practices and policies to better serve their Latino students.
- Emerging HSIs were most knowledgeable about Latino enrollment growth and least aware of Latino student graduation rates, suggesting the importance given to enrollment in contrast to student persistence and degree completion.
- While over 50 percent of Emerging HSIs reported specific practices related to the recruitment of Latino students, just over one-third stated their institution had academic programs or support services specifically focused on Latino students.
- For Emerging HSIs interested in becoming HSIs, the ability to serve more of their community and to access targeted federal resources were primary motivators for increasing Latino enrollment.

Adapting institutional practices. Among the four Emerging HSIs studied in more depth, the following summarizes their efforts to adapt institutional practices to serve more Latino students.

- ***Increased awareness of Latino enrollment resulted in increased efforts to serve them.*** The institutions' increased awareness of the growing Latino population in their service area, and explicit efforts to increase outreach to this community accelerated each institution's commitment to serving Latino students.
- ***Internal data use to profile current students' enrollment, retention, and completion was critical to inform changes to institutional practice.***

¹ 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 (Basic definition of HSIs in Title V of the Higher Education Opportunity Act, as amended in 2008).

- ***Administrators and staff articulated a consistent message.*** Whether interviewing administrators, financial aid directors, admissions staff, students, or faculty, the authors found each institution had a strong, clear and consistent message about serving their students overall—including Latinos.
- ***Presidential leadership to improve institution-wide practices was a key factor.*** The support and engagement of presidents and administrators to serve Latino students (among all students) were explicit and consistent. This resulted in prioritizing limited institutional resources to improve institutional practices.
- ***Experimentation in creating or adopting promising practices was encouraged.*** Each of the institutions was active in creating and evaluating what was working to improve their Latino students' access and retention. This required internal data collection and evaluation. Each campus had varied levels of infrastructure in place to encourage both the implementation of new programs and the evaluation of their success.
- ***There was a broad ownership of student success at all levels.*** Institutional efforts that engaged faculty, students, and administrators and often alumni around a common vision of serving students yielded the most success and long-term investment by those involved.

Suggestions to serve Latino students better. The following are institutional practices and policies suggested by campus leaders and students at Emerging HSIs to serve Latino students.

Recruitment

- Increase resources for recruitment and information to Latino communities; target community and neighborhood organizations as partners.
- Create programs to engage Latino high school students and their families early.
- Provide more need-based financial aid.
- Develop strong partnerships between community colleges and HSIs with formal articulation agreements, transition services, and monitoring of transfer patterns.

Retention and Persistence

- Create, improve, and strengthen the formal relationship between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs; develop the infrastructure for both to become more intrusive in assisting new students to succeed and persist.
- Require basic multicultural training for all new Student Affairs staff.
- Increase resources for student services, advising and mentoring programs that focus on Latino students.
- Have a multicultural center with a variety of diverse programs and events that is available to all students for studying, relaxing, learning, and participating in campus activities.
- Hire more Latino students for part-time jobs on campus.

Faculty

- Increase the cultural competency of faculty to work effectively with Latino students.
- Implement policies that lead to hiring and retention of a more diverse faculty, including more tenured positions.
- Assess and strengthen the presence and status of Latino faculty on campus.

Administration

- Raise the awareness of the community, faculty and staff about the potential benefits of becoming an HSI.